



Incommunities

Housing Association chooses AppGate to protect customer data

Housing Associations | Extranet Security | AppGate



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Andrew Bland
Senior Network
Administrator
Incommunities



Background

Incommunities, previously known as Bradford Community Housing Trust, provides affordable high quality homes across the Bradford district. Currently they manage approximately 22,000 homes, and provide customers with reliable and effective support on all housing related issues. In order to provide fast, efficient services to customers, the housing association needs to hold a lot of personal data on the network about their tenants including names and addresses, bank account details, rent payment records etc. Security of customer data is of paramount importance. However, protecting data has become increasingly challenging as more services are being made available online for tenants, and employees need the flexibility to work remotely or from home.

IT security specialists GSS suggested that the unified access control solution from AppGate Network Security would help address the seemingly conflicting requirements for strong security and ease of access to the network for customers and other users. AppGate’s solution incorporated a wealth of features that the team were not initially looking for, but they quickly realised that it presented the opportunity to take a new approach to network security. Instead of continuing with the traditional route of buying separate point products to address specific security issues, the AppGate solution would meet all their security requirements in one box, and provide the functionality for new remote access services without the need for further investment. “AppGate’s technology inspired us to look at things differently, and think outside the arena of traditional VPN’s”, said Andrew Bland, Senior Network Administrator for Incommunities.

Implementation

In common with other housing associations, Incommunities is providing a number of services online for a wide range of users including members of staff who need to work away from the office (at home or on building works

projects), 3rd party suppliers who provide remote support and servicing for back-office systems, tenants who need to book repairs, and members of the public who wish to find information about housing.

GSS helped Incommunities to integrate two AppGate Ax2 security servers into their existing network infrastructure so that all services for all users, whatever device and whatever location they are working from, are provisioned through the AppGate solution. The servers were configured as a cluster to provide redundancy and ensure high availability of services.

Incommunities also chose the AppGate SSL module so that tenants would be able to use standard web browsers on their PC’s to access online services, and staff would be able to access web applications securely from public PC’s for example in internet cafés.

Solution

Cryptzone’s AppGate solution now provides a single, central point where all security policies are defined and enforced, and as a result the IT team no longer has to check the security policies of all point products on the network. “Putting services online used to be a minefield, having to manage the security of applications from multiple vendors”, said Bland. “The AppGate server now manages the security, providing our first line of defence. Central policy control means I no longer have to worry about the security of other vendor applications.”

AppGate automatically blocks access unless a particular user is authenticated and authorized. Advanced Roles and Rights Management functionality provides granular control for defining precisely which network resources each user can access, and under what circumstances. Central control makes it easy for access rights to be modified. For example, for 3rd party suppliers, access to a specific back-office system can be enabled to allow online maintenance/repair when a fault is

"The potential for what it can do is massive. It's very flexible and easy to use so we can implement very simple and very complex functions. AppGate really is the best possible solution."

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reported, and can be quickly disabled once the ticket has been closed.

Previously, employees who needed to work from different offices had to use Citrix, connecting to the network from laptops with GPRS SIM cards installed. The AppGate server's ability to tunnel any protocol means that employees can now use Microsoft's Remote Desktop application, providing a more secure solution since data remains on the central server and security isn't compromised even if the laptop is stolen. AppGate compresses all traffic so applications run faster and require lower bandwidth, making the service much cheaper to operate.

Now that AppGate provides the security layer, the IT team no longer has to spend as much time developing fully secure applications, and

new online services can be rolled-out more quickly. In addition, the AppGate servers have made a number of point products on the network virtually redundant eg. IPSec VPN products and the Citrix Secure Gateway, generating considerable savings on product upgrades, support and software licenses.

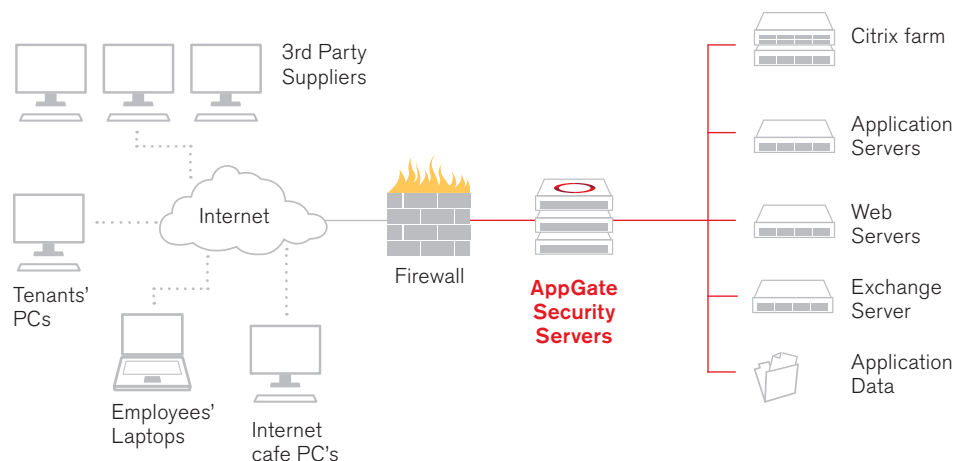
Future

Plans for new services include provision of wireless access. The AppGate solution supports all types of transmission, fixed, mobile and wireless, so the team can implement the new service without having to invest in new infrastructure. "Previously this service would have required the purchase of an additional dedicated wireless solution, but AppGate already supports it so it's saving us a lot of money", said Bland.

Key benefits

For Incommunities, the AppGate solution has delivered a number of important benefits:

- Single, central point of control of security policies and enforcement for all users.
- Granular control over which network resources each user can access, and under what circumstances.
- Cost savings as point products no longer needed.
- Faster, cheaper remote access via Remote Desktop, helping to improve data security.
- New customer services can be developed faster.
- Cost savings on new services such as wireless access since no additional investment needed.



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Cryptzone solutions mitigate information security risks in the key areas of Policy Compliance, Content Security, Secure Access and Endpoint Security.

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