



Watford Borough Council

Flexibility through secure remote access for local government

Government and Defence | Remote Access | AppGate



"I chose the AppGate solution because of its functionality, flexibility and scalability. The technology has delivered exactly what we needed and provided us with the functionality we need to support our business continuity strategy going forward."

Lieven Hermans
Head of BIS
Watford Borough Council



Background

Watford Borough Council is one of ten district and borough councils in Hertfordshire, and is responsible for the provision of a wide range of services to over 80,000 people.

In 2002 the Audit Commission described Watford Borough Council as one of "worst performing and most expensive districts in the country". Lieven Hermans, Head of Business Information Systems, was brought in as part of a team to turn the council around, improve services and make it a more efficient organization. Part of that turn-around process involved improving the IT infrastructure, which was old and not able to support the new applications and technology that would improve the council's performance. Hermans' team planned to bring in much needed new applications such as Lagan's Frontline CRM solutions, and to champion the introduction of flexible working so that employees and councillors could work from home. Watford Borough Council needed a new approach to network security that would not only support the changes being introduced but would also have the flexibility to grow as their needs evolved further.

Requirement

Remote/Mobile Access: Watford Borough Council needed a solution that would integrate into their existing system and enable remote access to a wide range of applications and services including Exchange Servers for email, public sector applications and bespoke, legacy applications which had not originally been designed for remote access.

High Availability and Ease of Use:

The system not only needed to ensure high availability of the network, but also needed to provide a simple user interface so that councillors and council employees would find it easy to use whatever their level of computer skills.

Scalability: The solution needed to provide a platform for extending services and access in the future, at minimal cost, to other areas under the council's responsibility, such as sheltered housing and schools.

Network Security: Security was one of the most important factors for Watford Borough Council. The network would potentially be accessed from a wide range of users working both inside and outside the corporate network. So the solution needed to provide a high level of security for all aspects of the network, including control of network access, protection of the new wireless infrastructure in the Town Hall, and proper security of all end points (laptops and PC's) so they would be 'locked down' and only usable by authorized personnel.

Solution

The network security solution AppGate, from Cryptzone, provided an easy-to-manage system, bringing together all the networking and security elements Watford Borough Council required in one comprehensive solution.

Two A2 AppGate Security Servers were installed alongside the firewall in a cluster to provide redundancy and scalability, and also to ensure users would still have access to the network if there was a fault with the firewall. In addition the wireless access point in the council chambers was connected directly to the AppGate servers. This not only provided a secure, protected connection, but also simplified the system for users, as Councillors would have one consistent interface, whether working from the office or at home.

The AppGate solution also provides Watford Borough Council with more granular control of remote users and application access, enabling the system administrator to decide exactly who can connect, when, and from what device, and what level of access they are permitted. All laptops and PCs were installed with AppGate's Personal Firewall. With AppGate's

"GSS and AppGate have worked closely with us throughout this project. In some cases I have suggested additional functionality to meet our challenging specification. Thanks to the team's flexibility and commitment we have now achieved the result I was looking for."

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Policy Manager, policies can be defined and distributed for all personal firewalls on the network ensuring that acceptable usage policies are maintained when corporate laptops are used at home. The 'Client Check' functionality ensures that remote PCs have (and are running) the latest anti-virus update before any connection is allowed.

GSS, an AppGate partner and expert in IT security, lead the project to implement the system for the Council and worked closely with Hermans' team to resolve the various challenges that arose, for example providing remote access to legacy applications. The teams also worked together to develop new functionality e.g. Active Directory Password changing, enhancing the solution even further.

Future

In a recent report the Audit Commission recognized the improvements made in the district. Watford Borough Council now has a proven system for remote/mobile access to key data and applications, and this solution will play a significant part in the Council's business continuity plans. The team is continuing to develop the system to ensure staff are able to work seamlessly irrespective of their location. So if people are not able to get into the council offices for some reason, the council can be confident that services will continue to operate effectively.

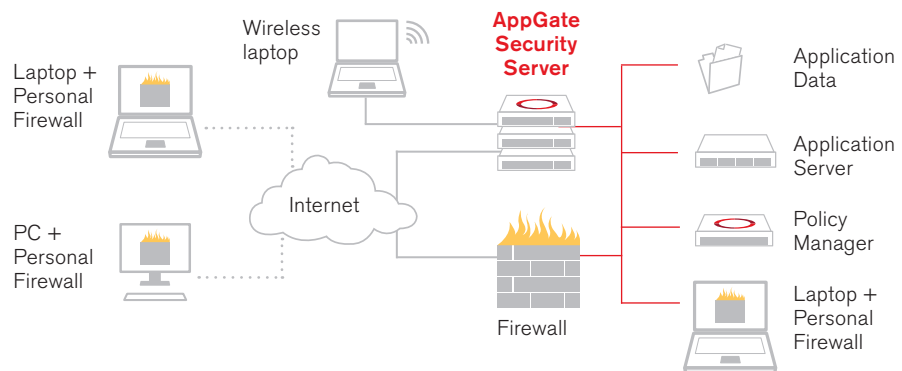
Tips and Tricks

Legacy applications are always the hardest to secure and deploy across the Internet. The AppGate Security Server has two different connectivity mechanisms, which make it easy to achieve secure remote access without any need to develop bespoke software.

Port Forwarding allows a remote PC to send any IP based protocol through a secure tunnel.

The only requirement is that the PC should have a browser.

IP Tunneling adds a virtual network adaptor that the PC applications use instead of the physical network adapter. This gives full bi-directional support for UDP and TCP enabling even the most complex client server protocols to be easily supported.



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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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