

Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust

Revolutionising public health by transforming digital infrastructure

If your NHS trust's entire network is underpinned by outdated technology, how do you transition to a new system without skipping a beat in patient care?

That's the challenge the Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust (NCH&C) came to us with. The team needed a partner that could offer expert advice, a personal service and the flexibility to get the most out of their tech and investments.

With our support, the trust's digital leadership team took the bold decision to move to a cloud-based, SD-WAN (software-defined wide area network)-supported system to help them:

- Improve network performance
- Cut complexity
- Enable cloud-based services
- Reduce network incidents
- Free up clinicians' time
- Boost patient care

“We were already considering what that would look like for us – we decided on cloud adoption and moving away from data centres. This was quite innovative for the NHS, but had been used before in other sectors. It was a big leap of faith for the trust to move towards it.”

Paul Walsh, Infrastructure Consultant for Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust





Outdated systems were holding back progress

The existing infrastructure, which was underpinned by multiprotocol label switching (MPLS) networking technology, could not meet the needs for a large community health trust.

It was inflexible, hard to scale and expensive, with limited capability in return.

And the whole network was averaging a P1 outage – the most serious type of network outage – once or twice a week. This either knocked out traffic on more than 20% of the network or disabled an entire browser type.

Clinicians also told the trust's digital team that the existing infrastructure wasn't allowing them to innovate or do things differently to improve outcomes for their patients.

In their own words, they were in '**desperate need**' of a digital strategy that could support and connect more than **3,000** members of staff, more than **80%** of whom are clinicians working directly with patients, including nurses, doctors, dentists and allied health professionals.

As the first standalone NHS community trust in the UK to achieve an Outstanding rating from the Care Quality Commission (CQC), NCH&C's digital infrastructure needed to support the very highest standard of care.

The trust needed a new connectivity approach

NCH&C's team stood at a fork in the road, with two choices ahead of them.

The lower risk option was to stick with the existing system, despite its flaws, and try to paint over the cracks with upgrades where possible.

But from the start they set their sights on the more ambitious option: **finding something new altogether.**

As part of an appraisal, we worked closely with NCH&C to thoroughly investigate and present all options.

If the trust was to stick with the status quo, it would mean upgrading where possible. But it was still the same network. And it would still be centred around a datacentre, with all the issues associated with that model.

The other option was to go in a completely new direction that would open up many more opportunities and possibilities for tech and connectivity, not just now but in years to come.

It was time to move to the cloud

NCH&C decided on a programme of cloud adoption, moving away from a model that put data centres at the heart of its operation.

Although this was already the norm in other sectors, it represented a bold, innovative step to take within a large NHS trust. It was a huge leap of faith for the team. And a brave decision. But one that ultimately paid off.

The digital team said that the biggest hurdle would be assuring the trust that the system design and architecture would guarantee success. Partnering with us went a long way towards gaining that internal buy-in.

“In partnering with Virgin Media Business, we have been completely reassured. They came with a reputation for excellent support and customer service, not to mention the quality and reliability of their connectivity services. And they have not let us down.”

Paul Walsh, Infrastructure Consultant for Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust

The trust saw immediate results

The shift to a cloud-based SD-WAN approach meant a full digital transformation across the NCH&C system and beyond, including a rollout expansion to the Integrated Care System (ICS) and more than **150** GP surgeries.

It meant moving to a multi-cloud hybrid infrastructure and security system. We would need to repurpose existing connectivity systems to ensure as smooth a transition as possible.

The Covid-19 pandemic meant plans to roll out the new system faced a two-year delay, but it began in earnest in April 2022.



“It’s rare when large-scale infrastructure projects deliver exactly what they promise. But with sufficient planning and groundwork, fortunately this was one of those occasions. We transitioned seamlessly with very little disruption to our end users.”

Paul Walsh, Infrastructure Consultant for Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust

Since then, the new connectivity solution has delivered:



A tenfold improvement in network speed and resilience



Reduced occurrence of P1 outages, from one or two a week to just one a year



Significant cost savings for NCH&C

Want to know how we could achieve the same for you?

With us, you get the power of two great networks with the simplicity of one provider, and the confidence of knowing that one in two UK blue light services already trust us.

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