Case Study
Birmingham Grid for Learning

The Project

We were approached by Entrust, an education services provider, to develop and implement a centralised connectivity solution for 170 schools in Birmingham.

At the time, the schools' connectivity services, including broadband, content filtering, monitoring and firewalls were provided through Birmingham Grid for Learning (BGfL) and managed by Link2ICT (now Entrust), however, Birmingham City Council announced plans to close BGFL.

Entrust were looking for an ISP to replace BGfL's offering with a centrally managed solution that could deliver the same range of services, allowing the schools to transition seamlessly. But, due to the way the schools' connectivity was provided through council hubs, this wasn't a straightforward task.

Our solution

Our Projects team worked with our account manager to devise a plan that could deliver against the size and complexity of the project. It was quickly identified that new fibre would need to be installed, replacing current lines and providing a direct connection to the points of presence.

Due to the magnitude of the project and the unusable condition of the existing infrastructure, the work was undertaken in two phases. Working closely with two major infrastructure providers we defined a clear project managed plan which was communicated and all parties were kept updated on all aspects of the roll out.

Direct leased lines were installed into each school premises for both phases, along with FTTC back-up lines with an autofailover through the router, as requested by Entrust.

We implemented a further level of disaster recovery to add extra resilience, in the form of shadow virtual local area networks (VLAN). This means that if anything ever goes wrong, the traffic will automatically and seamlessly reroute.

To allow Entrust to monitor bandwidth usage, we supplied a bespoke control panel which provides consumption data for all the school sites.

Safeguarding & Security

We introduced our SurfProtect Quantum content filtering, to ensure the schools are compliant with the Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) guidelines and the Prevent Duty.

To deliver the security aspect of the project we included our virtual firewall solution - powered by Fortinet's FortiGate VM firewall. This provides superior protection for the entire school network without the requirement for physical devices on each premises. As a centrally managed service, it also allows affiliated schools to create small Wide Area Networks (WAN) and communicate with one another securely.

The Result

Previously, when Entrust and their schools experienced issues, they were often waiting for long periods for them to be resolved, due to the fact they had many points of contact for their services. Our solution provides a direct route to the managed services - streamlining processes, reducing the administrative burden and ultimately decreasing wait times when requests for changes are made.

The result is an all-encompassing, centrally managed connectivity, e-safeguarding and security solution, that provides a direct line of sight between the client and the provider. We delivered a complex, centrally managed solution that exceeded client expectations, resolved the issues experienced with the previous provider and ensured schools in Birmingham have safe and reliable connectivity.

"The partnership between Exa Networks and Entrust delivered a solution that maintained a set of enterprise-class centralised services at its core, provided more local control, using the SurfProtect platform, and more resilience, via backup connectivity as standard, than was found in the legacy LA offering.

"The Exa and Entrust project teams worked closely and effectively together to overcome the challenge of migrating significant numbers of schools during the pandemic. Exa demonstrated innovation, efficiency and commitment and have become a trusted partner for Entrust and our customers."
Matthew Coleman-Hamilton, Head of Service at Entrust