

## Northern Ireland's Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety consolidates to support business-critical applications

### Overview

#### ■ **Business challenge**

To support new strategic initiatives, such as electronic patient care records, and to improve flexibility to underpin reorganisation of health and social care services.

#### ■ **Solution**

DHSSPS replaced an ageing, distributed server infrastructure that was difficult and costly to manage. IBM Global Technology Services – Integrated Technology Services designed and implemented a simplified, consolidated infrastructure and also developed a systems management framework to help ensure the efficient and robust operation of the infrastructure.

#### ■ **Key benefits**

- High-profile government project delivered on time and within budget
- Transformed a complex IT infrastructure into a flexible IT environment tightly integrated with the organisations it supports
- Sufficiently flexible for new applications and servers to be added easily, to meet future needs
- Easier and less expensive to manage
- Improves performance reporting as data is held centrally
- Patients benefit from improved access to clinical data and greater information security.



The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) provides health and social care services across Northern Ireland in hospitals, GPs' surgeries and the community. It is the province's largest central government department.

Within the DHSSPS, the Directorate of Information Systems (DIS) is responsible for ICT strategy, development and implementation. It was running a distributed server infrastructure spread across the organisation, which was beginning to impact on strategic objectives. For example, ICT strategy includes developing electronic patient records, so that regardless of where patients use health services, staff can access the same information. The DIS knew that such projects would require greater centralisation of data. It was also mindful of the planned reorganisation of health and social care services, plus the fact that some of the servers were reaching the end of their supported life and the

infrastructure was proving increasingly difficult and costly to manage. "With 105 servers running critical systems, such as accident and emergency and pharmacy, it was difficult to arrange downtime with end users if we wanted to make changes," says David Bryce, Head of Infrastructure at the DIS. "For example, if we wanted to patch servers, we had to do it at weekends

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– Garry Williams, Director of Information Systems at the DHSSPS.

across all 105 servers, which was very time-consuming.”

The DIS began looking to replace its existing environment with a resilient, highly available infrastructure that provided flexibility for the future. After concluding that consolidation was the way forward, the DIS ran a competitive procurement, finally awarding the contract to IBM. “IBM offered a more competitive price and was more credible in terms of its server technology offering,” says Bryce.

IBM Global Technology Services designed and installed a new infrastructure, using IBM System p servers, System Storage, access management and back-up/recovery solutions – all housed in two data centres at Belfast City and Royal Hospitals. The data is mirrored at each site, so that if there is an outage at one, it can fail over to the other location and services can be maintained.

Over two years, DIS migrated 240 instances of applications, serving 30,000 users, across to the new environment with support from IBM on back-up and authentication. It also brought a number of distributed data warehouses into a central data warehouse.

“We hadn’t undertaken a project on this scale before,” says Bryce. “We were moving all applications and users to a single sign-on environment and we didn’t have a clear idea of how long it would take to port and test applications. Our original plan was to address one application at a time, but we ended up running migrations in parallel.” The shift to a centralised set-up also involves a radical change for technical staff. Server outages now affect a much larger user population so the IT team needs to be proactive in planning and testing changes to servers rather than reacting to outages as they occur.

The DHSSPS now has a modern, resilient architecture, based on secure, supported software and hardware that is flexible enough to meet future requirements. The new environment can better accommodate change, including the current reorganisation of Health and Social Care under the Reform of Public Administration, which has seen the number of health trusts reduce from nineteen to five.

Moreover it has opened up new capabilities. Having a centralised data warehouse facilitates reporting on performance targets with trusts using the warehouse to pull together real-time information about waiting lists. New applications are being deployed on the consolidated infrastructure, including systems for theatre management and a new patient-centred community information system.

There are significant benefits for patients in Northern Ireland in terms of staff access to information about their treatment, security of information and the availability of critical services.

IBM continues to offer support services for the infrastructure and ongoing strategic advice about its management. “From original conception through implementation and ongoing maintenance, we have received unflinching support from IBM throughout this high-profile project. They have supported us through thick and thin to help us deliver on time and to budget,” concludes Garry Williams, Director of Information Systems at the DHSSPS.

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