

vision and collaboration deliver Office of the 21st century

Highlands and Islands Enterprise not only shares knowledge faster but also makes quicker decisions thanks to office technology for today and tomorrow.

Development agency Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) aims to make its region successful and competitive, encouraging people to live, work, study, and invest across the north and west of Scotland. HIE's focus is on supporting individual companies to grow, developing specific industry sectors, building strong and sustainable communities, and getting conditions right for global competitiveness.

Atos was chosen to deliver an ambitious overhaul of HIE's office systems and processes, and host HIE's network equipment at Atos' secure data centre. The office of the 21st century introduced Microsoft Lync software, enabling all HIE staff including those from outlying areas to join conference calls and share documents. Laptops replaced desktop PCs, and remote access to office files meant staff could work more efficiently offsite. The network infrastructure was updated and legacy equipment replaced, optimising and speeding up daily communication and document exchange so that HIE staff can make faster decisions and provide better service to clients.



Compelling case for change

The Highlands and Islands region comprises more than half of Scotland's land mass, and HIE operates from 13 widely dispersed offices. The number of staff members in those offices ranges from around 100 in Inverness, to small numbers in more remote locations and a handful of individuals working on their own, including a parliamentary liaison service in Edinburgh. With that geographic and staffing diversity, HIE recognises the importance of communicating well and sharing information quickly.

In 2012 HIE became aware that improving its office support technology could generate greater business effectiveness and efficiency, and staff surveys endorsed this view. As HIE's reputation had grown over its 22 years' existence, clients and partners had come to expect a fast response to questions, and early resolution of issues. However, this was hard to achieve if HIE professionals had to travel large distances to meet face-to-face, share documents and exchange views before responding, especially if journeys to meetings were disrupted by bad weather.

HIE decided to explore the potential of new office solutions. As shared services provider for HIE, Skills Development Scotland, and Scottish Enterprise, Atos was selected as the partner in the project, with the group's Enterprise IS (EIS) team operating as the intelligent client. Under the leadership of Finance and Corporate Services Director, Forbes Duthie, the Office of the 21st Century project was launched to oversee an ambitious business improvement plan for the years ahead.

Proven but bespoke solution

The solution agreed between HIE, EIS, and Atos combines future facing communication tools and an overhaul of core equipment, processes and technical infrastructure:

Microsoft Lync

This instant messaging and conferencing system provides HIE staff with a highly effective and easy to use system for interacting with colleagues and sharing documents remotely, regardless of location as long as there is an internet connection. It offers video capability, multiple document editing, diary integration, and free voice calls. Colleagues can be linked online on a one-to-one, or one-to-many basis, and external visitors can be invited to join conferences. HIE now has the ability to offer anyone a telephone number to join a Lync call.

Atos recommended Microsoft Lync, based on its own experience as a corporate user. It is also a shared services project with Scottish Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland.

Laptops and iPads

Key to fast and flexible communications is mobile technology. Atos replaced desktops with laptops for all HIE employees. Remote access tokens were issued so that users can access all their office applications and files just when they need them – from a hotel, at home, or even from a client meeting.

Network rightsizing

To get the best out of the new communication tools and equipment, Atos assessed network performance at all 13 HIE offices. In most cases, the overhaul involved a bandwidth upgrade. In some locations, legacy network infrastructure devices such as switches were replaced. Riverbed technology was installed in all offices and in the Atos data centre to optimise network traffic.

Good for Enterprise

Atos provided the infrastructure for this tool, which HIE uses to enhance effectiveness of mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones. Atos securely manages data and devices, and supports employee productivity with secure email, calendar information, contacts details, browser access, tasks management, and document data, enabling workflow to continue unimpeded even while staff are on the road.

Flexible wifi

Atos implemented wifi facilities in HIE offices to provide staff and visitors with easy and flexible access to emails and the internet, even when using meeting rooms and other common areas.

Data centre hosting

Atos hosts all of HIE's server and storage infrastructure as well as some of its network infrastructure at its secure Scottish data centre. The Atos data centre's location in Scotland was important to the solution as its closeness to operations minimises the risk of latency.

“With our geographic challenges, HIE people need ‘any time anywhere’ communications, and the ability to share information at the touch of a button. It’s the only way to serve our clients effectively. Atos provides us with the expertise to make that empowerment possible and affordable.”

Forbes Duthie, HIE

Finance and Corporate Services Director

Team delivery in a listening environment

Delivering Office of the 21st Century is a roundtable management process, involving HIE, EIS and Atos. "One of the most important aspects of this project is partnership and collaboration, and particularly the willingness of Atos to listen carefully to what we need before providing appropriate solutions," says Forbes Duthie. "It's also reassuring that they can draw on the experience and knowhow of nearly 80,000 people across the globe."

The most significant implementation in each HIE office was Microsoft Lync. The software was carefully tested by the delivery team, and any teething issues were sorted out before roll out. Each site had different challenges and dependencies: some required new equipment first, while others waited for network upgrades, until all were ready for sequential implementation with Atos engineers in support. Atos and Microsoft have been partners for more than 20 years, and Atos is a Microsoft Gold Partner with more than 2,300 certified employees. So HIE could rely on outstanding implementation quality and experience.

Knowledge sharing means faster decisions

HIE believes that the Office of the 21st Century has given it one overarching benefit: a major improvement in employees' ability to share knowledge. "Knowledge is at the centre of what we do," says Forbes Duthie. "By sharing it more effectively, we are able to proactively engage with our clients, develop a shared understanding of their issues, and deliver faster decisions as a result."

"Staff have taken well to the new communications tools," he adds. "They

sense that HIE is investing in their work, and feel much more part of a single multi skilled team. Online meetings and flexibility to access files and applications remotely save individuals long and arduous journeys, and improve work / life balance."

Head of Business Improvement and Internal Audit, Sandra Dunbar says that the ease with which employees can join online meetings means a wider range of skills can be applied to tough decisions, even where input might be required for just a few minutes. Statistics prove her point. In six months the typical number of employees attending a case conference with Microsoft Lync more than doubled the number using the old spider phone system.

The new system also creates valuable new forms of collaboration, Sandra says. "One very good example was when we were examining common challenges faced by businesses across the region such as access to finance. We had an online case conference which brought together dozens of HIE colleagues from Shetland to Argyll, to share information about their experience in dealing with similar situations. Our people could learn quickly from each other's knowledge and apply that learning straight away to help their local clients."

Clear visibility of colleagues' diaries helps staff productivity, as less time is wasted on fruitless phone calls, and on arranging meetings that have to be cancelled because attendees prove unavailable.

Although HIE based its business case for the Office of the 21st Century on service delivery improvements, there are also likely to be significant cost savings in travel and overnight stays, and reductions in carbon use.

"HIE had a clear vision about what it wanted to achieve. I'm delighted that HIE, EIS and Atos have been able to realise their vision of a unified communications strategy to achieve efficiencies and cost savings in close collaboration."

Aiden Honley, Atos

Client Executive, Public and Private Sectors - Scotland

Unified Communication Benefits

Improved collaboration

- Presence for remote workgroups
- Multimedia communication channels
- Easy to use
- Shortened and optimised processes
- Communication with partners, customers and suppliers

Time saving

- Reduction of travel activities
- Use of new technical options
- Choice of adequate communication channels

Cost Savings

- Travel costs
- Operational costs
- Carrier charges

Reaching out to clients

Although external individuals can be invited to attend online meetings, the Office of the 21st Century is mainly concentrated on internal improvements. Now HIE has transformed internal systems and communications, the next challenge will be to help HIE staff reach out to clients, and introduce capabilities for online engagement.

"This aspect is still at an early stage. However, recognising how the DVLA transformed the ability for its customers to acquire licences, HIE has an ambition to similarly transform the way it can reach out through technology to its clients, improve their experience, and eliminate the isolation of distance through technology," says Forbes Duthie.

"With greater connectivity in the region in the years ahead, we want to be able to extend our information sharing and collaboration opportunities to all our stakeholders. We remain committed to continuing the momentum of using technology to help us to maximise opportunities for sharing knowledge, learning, decision making, and general efficiencies".

Next steps

To find out more on how we can help your business with Unified Communications, please call our Sales team on 01506 606315.

About Atos

Atos SE (Societas Europaea) is an international information technology services company with 2013 annual revenue of € 8.6 billion and 76,300 employees in 52 countries. Serving a global client base, it delivers IT services through Consulting & Systems Integration, Managed Operations, and transactional services through Worldline, the European leader and a global player in the payments services industry. With its deep technology expertise and industry knowledge, it works with clients across different business sectors: Manufacturing, Retail & Transportation; Public Sector & Health; Financial Services; Telcos, Media & Utilities.

Atos is focused on business technology that powers progress and helps organizations to create their firm of the future. It is the Worldwide Information Technology Partner for the Olympic & Paralympic Games and is listed on the NYSE Euronext Paris market. Atos operates under the brands Atos, Atos Consulting, Worldline and Atos Worldgrid.

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