schools broadband ™

Case Study

The Good Shepherd Trust

Introduction

The Good Shepherd Trust's Chief Operating Officer Louisa Mason describes her journey to centralise the Trust's broadband services, with Internet Service Provider, Schools Broadband.

Louisa explains why the Trust needed to centralise their broadband operations, what her experience has been and what advice she would give to other trusts planning on centralising online services across their schools.

Who is The Good Shepherd Trust?

The Good Shepherd Trust is a 16-school multi-academy trust within the Diocese of Guildford. With nearly 5000 pupils, their growth plans include an additional four schools in the next 12 months and several further schools over the next three years.

The Trust is part-way through a major connectivity upgrade programme to future-proof all operations.

"Centralising MAT Broadband Services Improves Quality and Efficiency All Round"

Louisa Mason, COO - The Good Shepherd Trust

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Why is centralising broadband services strategically important to the Trust and its Schools?

"The primary reason for centralising operations has been to reduce the amount of time and resource involved in procuring good value, high quality services. We needed to ensure all our schools receive real financial value as well as good quality service levels from their providers.

The Trust is at that point in maturity where we needed to have a single managed service provider across all schools to achieve this. By managing our new provider centrally, we have removed the pain of procurement from our individual schools which has led to increased efficiency and improved service. Before, we had 16 different schools doing 16 different things. If they are all obtaining three quotes from individual broadband and telecoms companies, the nature and size of the projects mean contract values run into several hundreds of £000s. That size of contract needs to be managed at a senior central level."

What is important in choosing a broadband provider?

"As Chief Operating Officer, I'm contacted by a lot of telecoms companies, however for this we knew we needed a specialist schools' provider like Schools Broadband, with experience in working with multi academy trusts and not just individual schools. We also needed an organisation who understands about different connectivity types and Wide Area Networks, as well as safeguarding, web filtering and cybersecurity requirements within schools; a trust of our size can't afford to get this type of contract wrong.

Having recently placed enormous emphasis on our own in-house security with staff training, multiple back-ups, and a move to the cloud, we were looking for a company that would complement our multi-pronged security approach.

We were aware that Schools Broadband prioritise cyber and we now have a "best in breed" connectivity and security solution to stop unwanted access to our schools and Wide Area Network. This includes Anti-DDOS protection as standard which protects our schools from this increasingly common form of cyber-attack.

Schools Broadband already provided service in a couple of our schools, where everything was running well. As our chosen provider would also need to be OJEU compliant, and Schools Broadband is listed on The Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation (YPO) OJEU compliant framework, (one of two frameworks approved by the DfE for Broadband, of which Schools Broadband are on both), it made accessing their service a lot easier. We carried out a Direct Award through YPO."

What advice would you give to other MATs planning on centralising their broadband services?

Collate information about existing school broadband services

"The most challenging aspect in the early project stage was collating technical information about existing broadband services from 16 different schools, who have each done their own thing with their own suppliers for many years.

School Business Managers are incredibly busy people and requesting technical information that they are not necessarily familiar with isn't easy. This took a long time and a lot of chasing.

Schools Broadband provided a spreadsheet requesting the necessary information which was very helpful. But don't assume every school knows whether they have a leased line connection or an FTTC or what broadband speed they are currently receiving. Nor expect them to know whether they have a security service or added anti DDoS for example. They don't. This service uses a whole vocabulary and knowledgebase that few outside of the industry know about.

If you're a medium to large trust planning on centralising your broadband services, you will likely have multiple schools in multiple counties with multiple providers. I would say you would probably need a project owner with admin support to manage this."

Plan further ahead than you might expect

"The initial service change-over phase can be labour-intensive. Be warned, there is a lot of work required to install leased lines. This type of installation is not just dependent on your broadband provider.

A lot depends on the wholesale contractor too, especially if you're installing new leased lines. If lines are already installed, timings aren't an issue, but as The Good Shepherd Trust is upgrading all their schools to leased lines, we underestimated the additional time scales. This caused us a few problems. For example, if other contractors are digging up roads nearby, the council will not let the wholesale broadband contractor operate at the same time. We didn't appreciate that there are other dependencies such as this along the way, therefore the roll-out can take longer than you anticipate.

Whilst Schools Broadband did everything possible to expedite the build, my advice would be to start the install process a minimum of 6 months, ideally more, in advance of service go-live. Schools Broadband put contingency connections in place to cover the period of no service."

What benefits are you experiencing having just one contract for all schools?

"Each school in the trust has its own individual contract end date with their existing broadband supplier. This information was captured in the early stages of the project which has enabled Schools Broadband to schedule works with their Service Delivery Team so as schools come out of contract, they switch over to Schools Broadband. At this stage only four schools are connected; by the end of next summer, most schools should be connected. Having one contract and only one supplier to manage will make a big difference. We now have a trusted go-to, secure broadband solution for our schools, with some of the best filtering and security in the industry. This saves our school staff valuable time in trying to source a best value service as we can now direct schools where to go."

What qualities should you look for in a specialist MAT broadband provider?

1

A provider who understands safeguarding context around broadband

"It's important to choose a provider who understands the safeguarding context around broadband. Schools Broadband provide very good support and training around their web filtering and have organised meetings with our Designated Safeguarding Leads to ensure they understand the filtering and safeguarding reports. Their service provides out of the box reports and Prevent Duty and Safeguarding Alerts, and we know that when all our schools are connected, each one of them will be DfE safeguarding compliant."

2

A provider you can understand

"Choose a provider who is prepared to speak your language and one who is prepared to listen to you. Whilst our broadband installs have generally been very good, our first VoIP install could have been better. This was down to the engineer not communicating with our school in plain English. To Schools Broadband's credit, once I mentioned this to our Account Manager, Charlie soon put things right and Schools Broadband now place great emphasis on all their staff speaking the customer's language."

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3

A provider who is accessible

"Make sure your provider is accessible. We have monthly project meetings with our Account Manager at Schools Broadband to track progress and if I have a question, I can always pick up the phone and know I will get an answer. The Schools Broadband customer service level and quality of service has been excellent which counts for a lot."

4

A provider who will issue a plan

"Ask for a delivery plan. Understand what different stages are involved, what they will look like and what information is needed at each stage. Know who is responsible for what, as part of your project plan."

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