

London Borough of Harrow makes the most of new security technology

ISN helps London Borough of Harrow harness the full potential of its Microsoft 365 E5 license, implementing new advanced security capabilities to protect their people, data and operations from evolving cyber threats.

About London Borough of Harrow

The local authority for the London Borough of Harrow in Greater London, London Borough of Harrow has a workforce of around 2,500 employees serving more than 250,000 residents and thousands of local businesses.

A digital transformation trailblazer, the council utilises Microsoft Azure's flexible cloud computing platform and Microsoft Office 365 services to enable flexible workplace models and ease of information sharing with key stakeholders such as the police.

To counter the rising tide of cyber attacks targeting local councils, Harrow wanted to deepen its defences and prevent hackers from accessing sensitive information. As part of this programme, the council purchased a Microsoft E5 license to bolster its cybersecurity capabilities.

The challenge

Unlocking access to a suite of extended data, endpoint and identity protection capabilities, the Microsoft E5 license would enable Harrow to elevate how it secures its environment, drive a truly cohesive security approach across its organisation, and gain control of spiralling cybersecurity costs.

"Reducing our risk exposure and protecting the data our partners share with us is critical, but this often comes with a hefty price tag," says Ben Goward, IT Director. "The decision to migrate to a Microsoft E5 license is just one aspect of our wider journey to zero trust and represents a key foundation for initiating a 'defence in depth' approach to address ever present cyber threats like phishing, ransomware and trojans."

Featuring a rich suite of integrated security tools covering critical areas like robust identity and access management, endpoint and cloud access security and more, the Microsoft E5 license would enable Harrow to move towards a more consolidated and simplified security posture. Unnecessary

point solutions could be retired, freeing up precious budget, while security teams would be able to work more quickly and efficiently to remediate threats and ensure business continuity.

However, with more advanced features comes more complexity. To get the most out of its E5 subscription, Harrow's IT teams would need help to appropriately configure and tailor tools for specific organisational needs.

"Making the most of E5's capabilities and leveraging its full potential is a significant piece of work and one that benefits from specialist expertise – which is why we turned to ISN," explains Ben.

The solution

To help London Borough of Harrow fully implement the E5 suite, ISN first ran a series of advanced discovery workshops to understand current processes and capabilities and determine which E5 components would best fill technical gaps and match organisational security goals.

Alongside auditing the current tech stack to evaluate current capabilities and avoid duplication, ISN worked closely with the council's IT teams to prepare a detailed implementation roadmap. This included identifying how processes and workflows would need to be evolved to capture desired benefits and how security team roles would be impacted. At the close of these sessions, workstreams and timelines had been defined in preparation for a phased implementation of new Microsoft security tools.

"ISN worked closely with our in-house team, and offered unbiased advice and insights that enabled us to appropriately prepare our environment and identify key business requirements," continues Ben. "Following these initial engagements, we had a definitive plan for moving ahead in a structured and informed way."

Key overarching priorities for the programme of works included boosting cloud security protocols (utilising Azure Active Identity and Privileged Identity Management), preparing the digital environment for zero touch provisioning (including BYOD and multiple vendor platforms/devices), decommissioning redundant security resources, and simplifying how security teams monitor the extended environment.

As part of this process, consideration was given to how to prepare the workforce for the introduction of new information governance and security protocols. Similarly, Microsoft E5 provides a single 'pane of glass' management platform that delivers centralised visibility of all security related events. Security teams would need to understand how they could use this powerful capability to undertake monitoring across the estate and work collaboratively to act on potential threats.

Having defined a change framework, ISN set about implementing selected E5 security tools in a phased manner. Alongside configuring the new security environment in line with zero trust best practices, ISN ensured that each solution was designed with end user accessibility needs in mind.

The aim of the game was to ensure that the implementation of new security features and procedures didn't impact the day-to-day work of users or information exchange with partner organisations.

Building in-house expertise and know-how

As the driving force behind Harrow's 365 Security Project, ISN wasn't just responsible for identifying where security improvements could be made and implementing E5 security components.

Going forward, the council's IT teams would need to administer and manage a number of new security and monitoring tools. Everything from Azure ID protection through to Microsoft Defender for Identity and Cloud apps. In addition to this, IT teams would need to be able to confidently utilise Microsoft E5 to track and monitor access to sensitive data and improve organisational compliance efforts over time.

To enable all this and more, ISN's consultant worked closely with individual teams to ensure they can keep E5 services up to date and optimised, reduce identity-based risks, secure sensitive data using encryption and access controls, enforce multi-factor and conditional access policies, and respond to advanced threats.

"This knowledge transfer was essential for ensuring the smooth adoption of new security features and enabling the application of Microsoft recommended zero trust best practices," continues Ben.



ISN solution

- Plan and execute a strategic E5 security implementation
- Appropriately configure security solutions in line with usage needs
- Specialist knowledge transfer and staff development
- Microsoft security and best practice recommendations
- Specialist support for change and migration workstreams

Benefits

- Enhance zero trust architectures across the estate
- Maximise ROI from E5 Licence investment
- Realise new advanced security and compliance capabilities without impacting the productivity of users
- Security teams can confidently manage and utilise new security features

The outcomes

Having completed phase 1 of its Microsoft 365 Security Project, Harrow is now reaping a number of anticipated gains.

"In addition to efficiency savings that relate to how we administrate and manage the security of our environment we have retired a number of redundant security solutions, including a legacy monitoring product that cost £40K per annum," says Ben. "Plus, with ISN's help we've been able to initiate a more flexible and secure workplace without damaging the user experience."

New active identity and privileged identity management tools mean users can now invoke just-in-time privileges. Something that significantly boosts data protection without compromising the productivity of users.

"ISN has proved a trusted partner who's helping us build out our zero trust journey with a particular focus on our M365 posture. Highly knowledgeable, they understand the issues we face and provide pragmatic deployment insights that are tailored to our unique business operations. All of which has enabled us to accelerate our Microsoft E5 deployment, identify cost saving opportunities, and elevate how we protect our digital assets," concludes Ben.