

# Dorset Council's Digital Transformation: How a Rapid SD-WAN Deployment with Versa Delivered £1M in Savings Along with Future-Ready Connectivity



## Overview

Dorset Council is the local authority for the non-metropolitan county of Dorset in England. It is a unitary authority, being a district council which also performs the functions of a county council. The non-metropolitan county is smaller than the ceremonial county of Dorset, which also includes Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole. The council was created in 2019 when local government across Dorset was reorganised.

Dorset Council is responsible for delivering a wide range of public services typically divided between county and district councils elsewhere in the UK. Its core responsibilities include education, social care, transport, housing, waste management, planning, public health, libraries, and economic development. This means it oversees everything from maintaining roads and collecting recycling to safeguarding vulnerable children and supporting local businesses. Compared to other areas in the UK that still operate under a two-tier system, Dorset offers a more streamlined governance model, allowing for potentially more coordinated decision-making and service delivery across its largely rural and coastal region.

## Uncovering New Solutions to Solve Legacy Challenges

Infrastructure Analyst Paul Samways plays a key role at Dorset Council as the lead responsible for running and managing the council's extensive network infrastructure. Operating primarily out of two main data centers, Samways and his team of three support connectivity across approximately 180 WAN sites—making the stability and efficiency of the network a critical priority. Motivated by a need for greater cost-effectiveness and agility, Samways led the council's evaluation of multiple SD-WAN vendors. This process culminated in a successful trial of Versa Secure SD-WAN, which proved to be a strong candidate for replacing the legacy MPLS setup while ensuring continuity across all sites.

"A lot of products claimed to be SD-WAN, but once we looked under the hood and did a fair amount of research, it was clear they were just legacy tools with features bolted on or not fully realised. What we needed was an SD-WAN solution built from the ground up—and Versa stood out as the most complete and capable option out there," says Paul Samways, Infrastructure Analyst at Dorset Council.

## Industry

Government

## Challenges

- ✓ **Network Efficiency and Connectivity, with a Focus on Remote Work Connectivity:**  
Ensuring seamless and secure network performance for remote employees, with consistent speed, reliability, and security across distributed locations
- ✓ **Driving Cost Efficiency and Reducing Expenditure Across Council Operations:**  
Balancing the need to reduce operational costs while maintaining service quality, with increased pressure to optimise spending in resource-constrained environments
- ✓ **Strategic Transition from MPLS to More Cost-Effective Network Solutions:**  
Overcoming the complexity of migrating from legacy MPLS systems to more flexible, cost-effective solutions like SD-WAN, without disrupting service or performance



After selecting Versa Secure SD-WAN, the council had the immediate opportunity to put the solution to the test. “Oddly enough, the timing worked in our favor—when COVID hit and most staff shifted to working from home, it actually made rolling out the Versa platform a bit smoother. It gave us the space to begin replacing MPLS and move fully to Versa, all while planning for a better user experience when everyone returned to the office,” explains Samways.

## Cutting Costs, Not Corners: The Digital Overhaul That Paid Off

Dorset Council’s IT Services team, comprising around 100 staff across multiple departments, faced ongoing budget pressures due to regular central government funding cuts. With annual savings targets to meet, the team needed to think creatively to deliver efficiencies. By transforming their network infrastructure with Versa, they were able to achieve significant cost reductions—freeing up budget not only to meet required savings, but also to reinvest in previously underfunded areas or offset overspending elsewhere.

Deploying Versa SD-WAN across Dorset Council’s extensive network of sites proved to be a smooth and efficient process. Thanks to pre-configured equipment and a highly repeatable setup, the team was able to roll out the solution quickly, even across locations without technically focused staff or located in more remote areas. The simplicity of the installation meant that once devices were prepared, support teams could be dispatched to sites with clear instructions, plug in the equipment, and complete the migration from MPLS to SD-WAN with minimal disruption. As a result, the council was able to accelerate deployment across its many locations without requiring complex on-site configurations or extended downtime. Some sites were deployed in a matter of minutes.

“We don’t always handle the physical installs ourselves, but once we’ve pre-configured the equipment, our support team can take it from there with ease. They know exactly where the WAN and LAN ports go—it’s that straightforward. A lot of the sites we support don’t have technically focused users, so having a simple, repeatable setup means we can just send someone out with the gear, install it, and migrate the site from MPLS to SD-WAN with minimal disruption. It has been that easy for us. Versa has made deployment simple and repeatable,” explains Samways.

Over the years, Dorset Council has only seen the Versa SD-WAN solution improve, evolving in step with both their growing network demands and the broader shifts in technology. The platform has scaled seamlessly to meet the council’s needs, while continuing to offer the control and flexibility required to manage a large, distributed environment. Versa’s continuous innovation has ensured the council stays ahead—without ever losing visibility or control over their infrastructure.

## Results

- ✔ **Seamless Deployment Across 180+ Sites:** Enabled rapid, centralised rollout of SD-WAN, with some locations going live in just minutes, streamlining operations and reducing IT overhead
- ✔ **Over £1 Million in Savings Over 5 Years:** Delivered substantial long-term ROI by consolidating infrastructure and reducing operational costs through Versa’s cost-efficient platform
- ✔ **50%+ Reduction in Connectivity Costs:** Migrating from legacy MPLS to Versa SD-WAN significantly lowered circuit expenses while boosting performance and agility
- ✔ **Resilient, High-Performance Connectivity:** Maintained business continuity and uptime even during a sudden shift to remote work, ensuring secure, reliable access for a distributed workforce
- ✔ **Scalable, Future-Ready Infrastructure:** Provided the flexibility to adapt to changing business needs and user demand without major reinvestment or delays

"From an engineering perspective, the visibility we get with SD-WAN compared to an MPLS provider is like chalk and cheese. We now have complete control—there's so much we can do ourselves. Before, any change meant going back to the provider, but with Versa, we manage everything directly," shares Samways. Taking it a step further, Samways and his team clearly see the value of utilising Versa SD-WAN. He says, "Before, submitting a request for a change could take days or even weeks, depending on what it was. Now, we can do it ourselves—and it's instant. The flexibility and speed at which we can make changes with Versa is a game changer."

*"When we crunched the numbers—factoring in equipment and all associated costs over five years and beginning with this Versa journey—we were looking at close to a million pounds in savings. It's a significant amount, and it really underscored the value of moving to Versa."*

Paul Samways, Infrastructure Analyst, Dorset Council

Looking back, Samways recognises that it was the support of the council and from senior management which set the groundwork to move forward with their digital transformation. Adds Samways, "We've had strong backing from senior management at Dorset Council. When we present fully costed plans, they look at the figures and say, 'This is a complete no-brainer.' That support has been key in driving our success with Versa."

The results have been a resounding success as well – the cost savings since migrating from MPLS speak for themselves. "When we crunched the numbers—factoring in equipment and all associated costs over five years and beginning with this Versa journey—we were looking at close to a million pounds in savings. It's a significant amount, and it really underscored the value of moving to Versa," says Samways.

Looking ahead, Paul Samways is optimistic about the future and the continued digital evolution of Dorset Council's network infrastructure. Their milestone-driven approach has not only streamlined operations internally but also positioned the council as a reference point for others navigating similar transformations. Dorset's network trajectory has become a model for cost-effective, scalable solutions across the public sector. Modest about their leadership, Samways says, "The team and I are happy to help others and give advice based on our lessons learned. There's so much we've done with Versa, and we know other councils can easily do the same."

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## About Versa

Versa, a global leader in SASE, enables organizations to create self-protecting networks that radically simplify and automate their network and security infrastructure. Powered by AI, the VersaONE Universal SASE Platform delivers converged SSE, SD-WAN, and SD-LAN solutions that protect data and defend against cyberthreats while delivering a superior digital experience. Thousands of customers globally, with hundreds of thousands of sites and millions of users, trust Versa with their mission critical networks and security. Versa is privately held and funded by investors such as Sequoia Capital, Mayfield, and BlackRock. For more information, visit <https://www.versa-networks.com> and follow Versa on [LinkedIn](#) and X (Twitter) [@versanetworks](#).



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