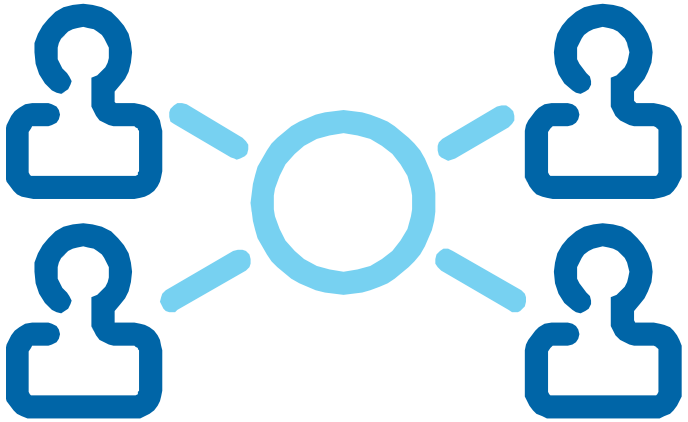
Setting the Security Policies on a Windows 2012 Standard Server

June 13, 2013

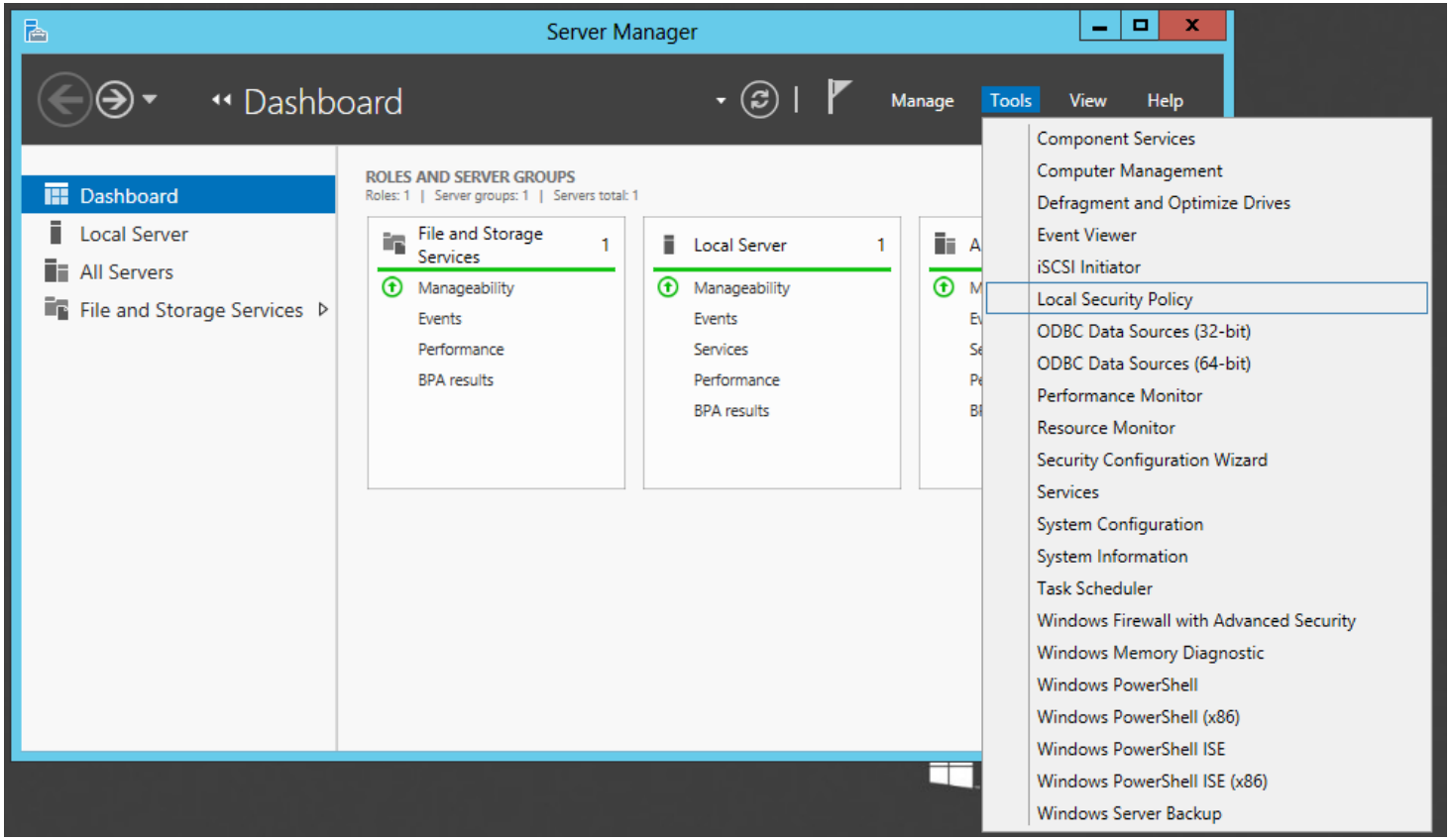
Security for Administrators

While larger companies have their servers secured in secluded and well protected areas, in a small business, servers can be in rooms around other employees. We want to have password security somewhat more complex than what we see on the Internet. We need to set the password policy after loading the computer, the Service Packs and Windows Updates and prior to adding our administrator accounts.



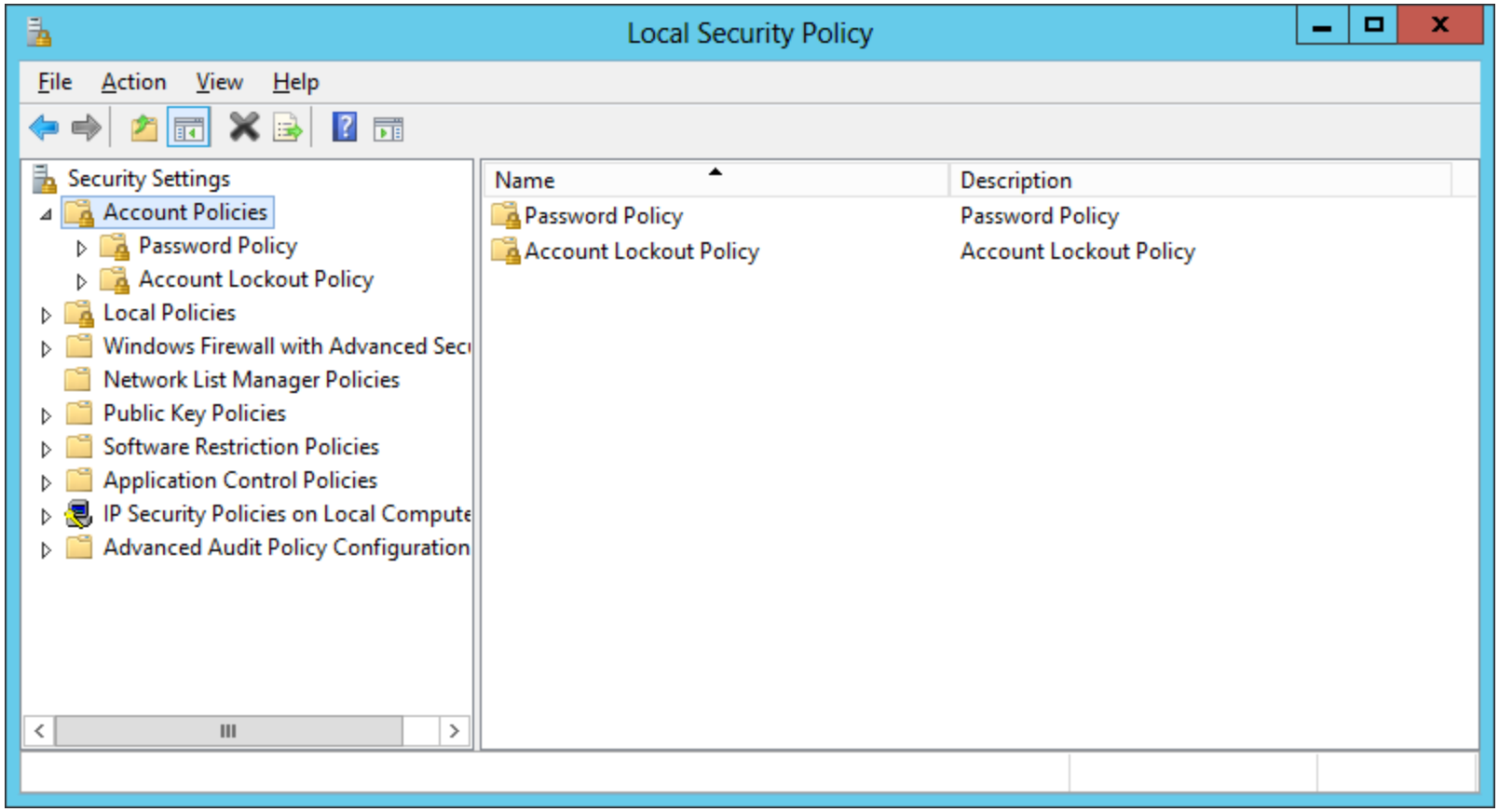
Setup Security Policies

To set the security polices for the Windows 2012 Standard Server, we select the Server Manager button and select Tools. From the list we choose Local Security Policies.



Local Security Policies

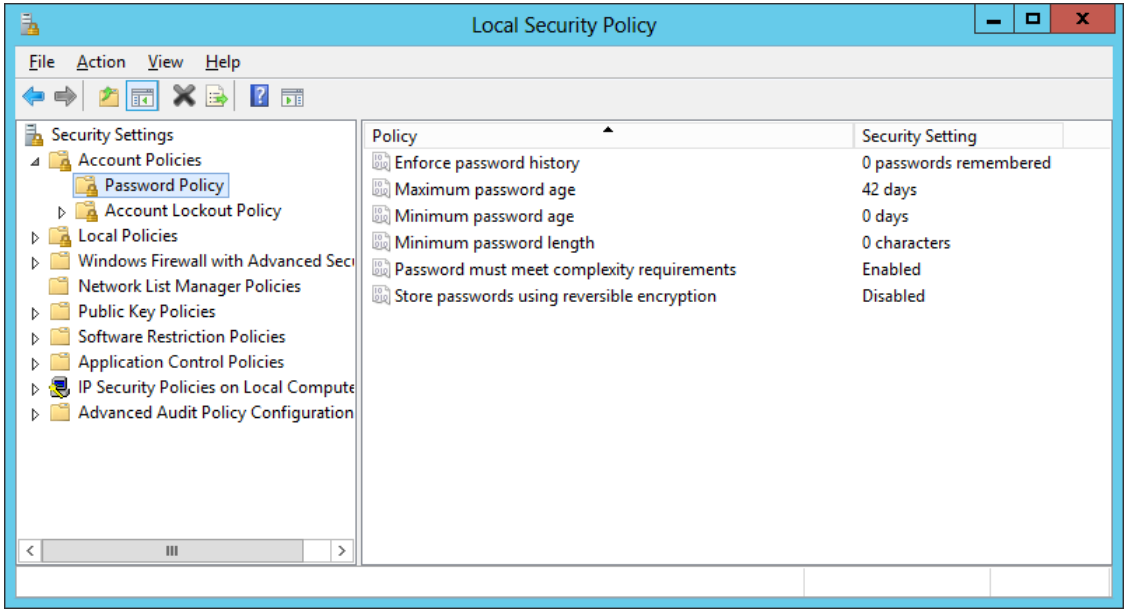
The Local Security Policies window will open. In the left pane, we select Account Policies and then Password Policies. A list of Password Policies will appear in the right pane.



The Password Policy

There are six polices under the Password Policy heading.

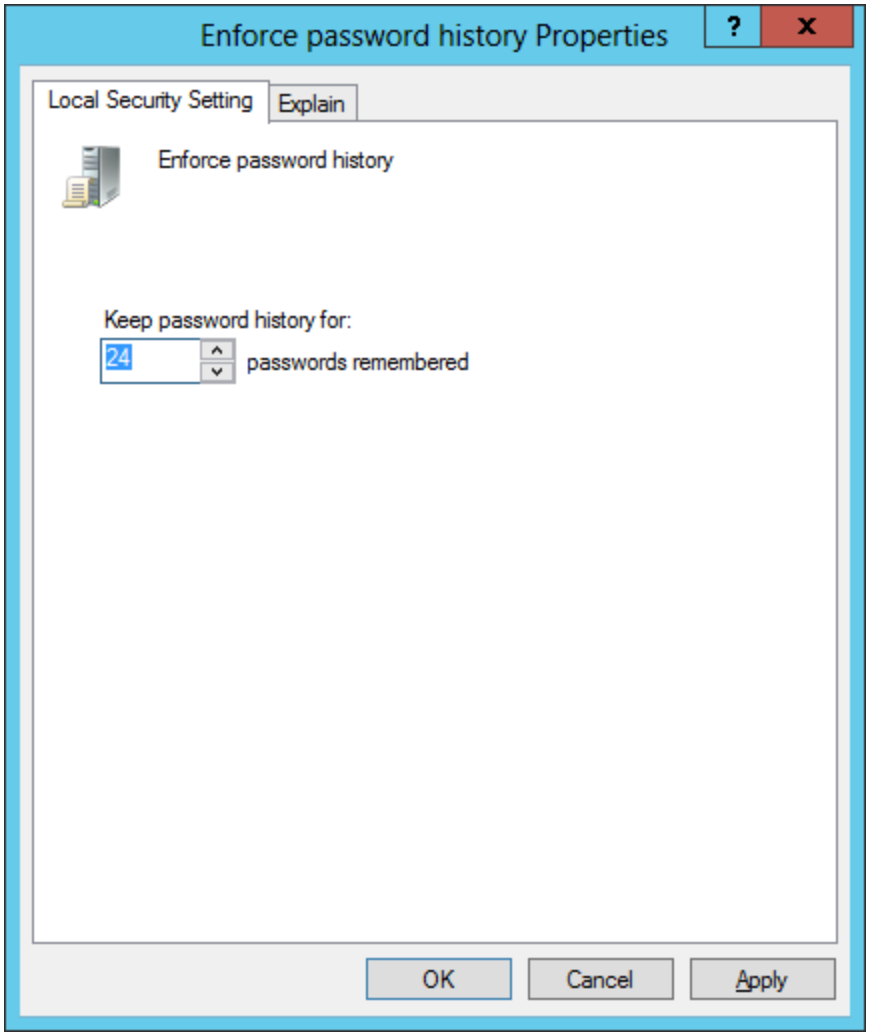
- Enforce password history
- Maximum password age
- Minimum password age
- Minimum password length
- Password must meet complexity requirement
- Store passwords using reversible encryption



Enforce Password History

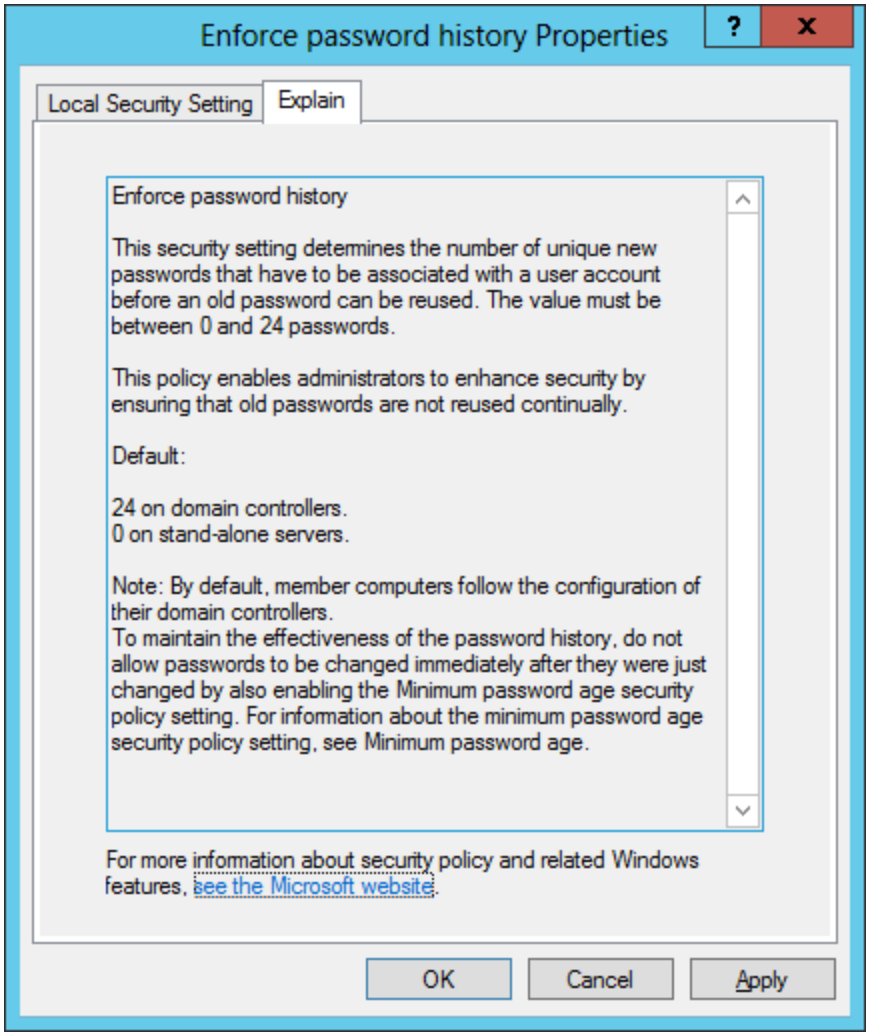
Password history is a policy that keeps individuals from toggling with just a handful or two different passwords. Many people juggle between two or three passwords to fool the poorly setup server. For example, the first password can be R1PVanWinkle and the second secret phrase is St0ryB0ard21. If we do not enforce the password remembered variable, they can just toggle between the two every 30 days.

The default for password history is 0, however we will change the number to the maximum of 24.



Explanation of the Policy

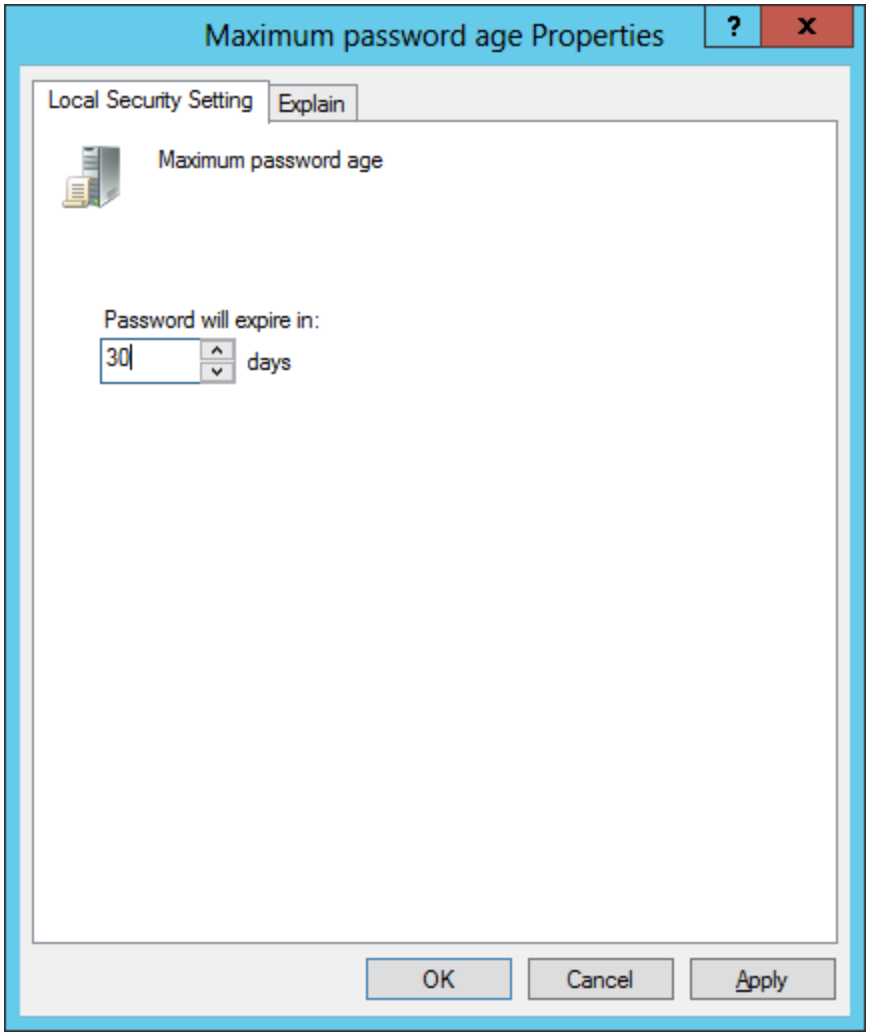
For most policies dialogue boxes in a Windows Server, we can opt to choose the Explain tab and read about the default setting and what the policy will do. For new server managers, it is a good idea to take the time and read about the policy in full and not to just follow a checklist made by others. That way when we need to alter our standard server settings or respond to a security issue, we know where to look on the server and what policy setting can affect the users.



Maximum Password Age

Maximum password age can range between 1 to 999 days. One day is extreme and nearly a thousand days, we might as well keep the password permanent. Many professionals believe that 15 to 30 days range is appropriate.

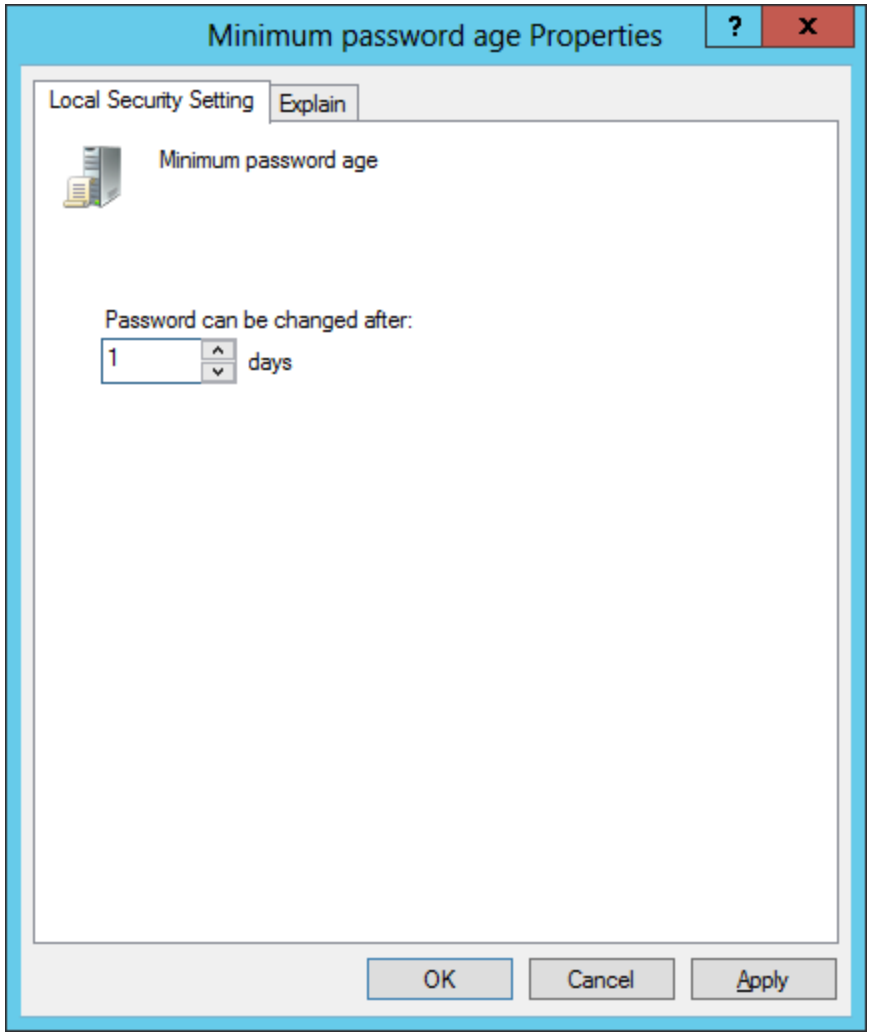
The system default is 42 days, however, we will require the staff to change their password every 30 days.



Minimum Password Age

Minimum password age can range between 1 to 998 days. By increasing the number of days, we can help enforce the time until the computer user return to their favorite password. If this is a problem in your department, we can increase the number of days to 29, one below the maximum days we set.

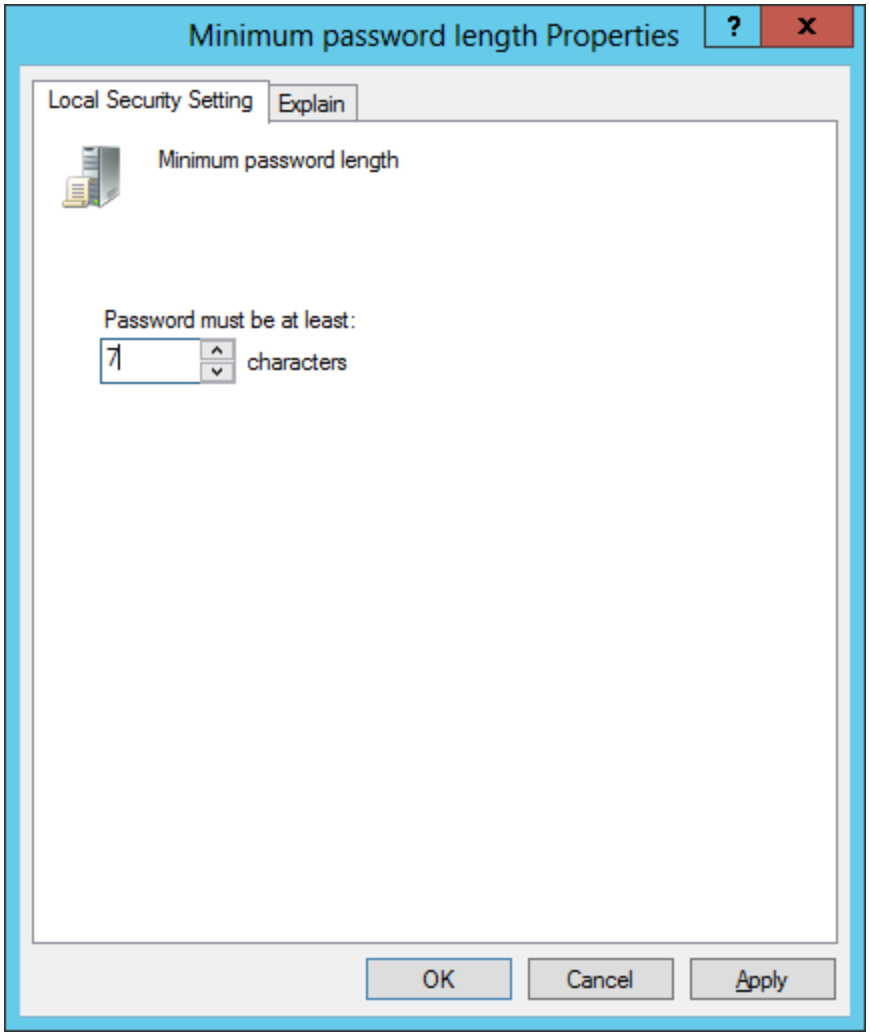
The system default is 1 day, and we will keep the personnel from changing their password for one day.



Minimum Password Length

Minimum password length is one of the two policies that help us create a smart password criteria. We need at least 6 characters and then we want those symbols to be upper case, lower case letters, numbers and special characters.

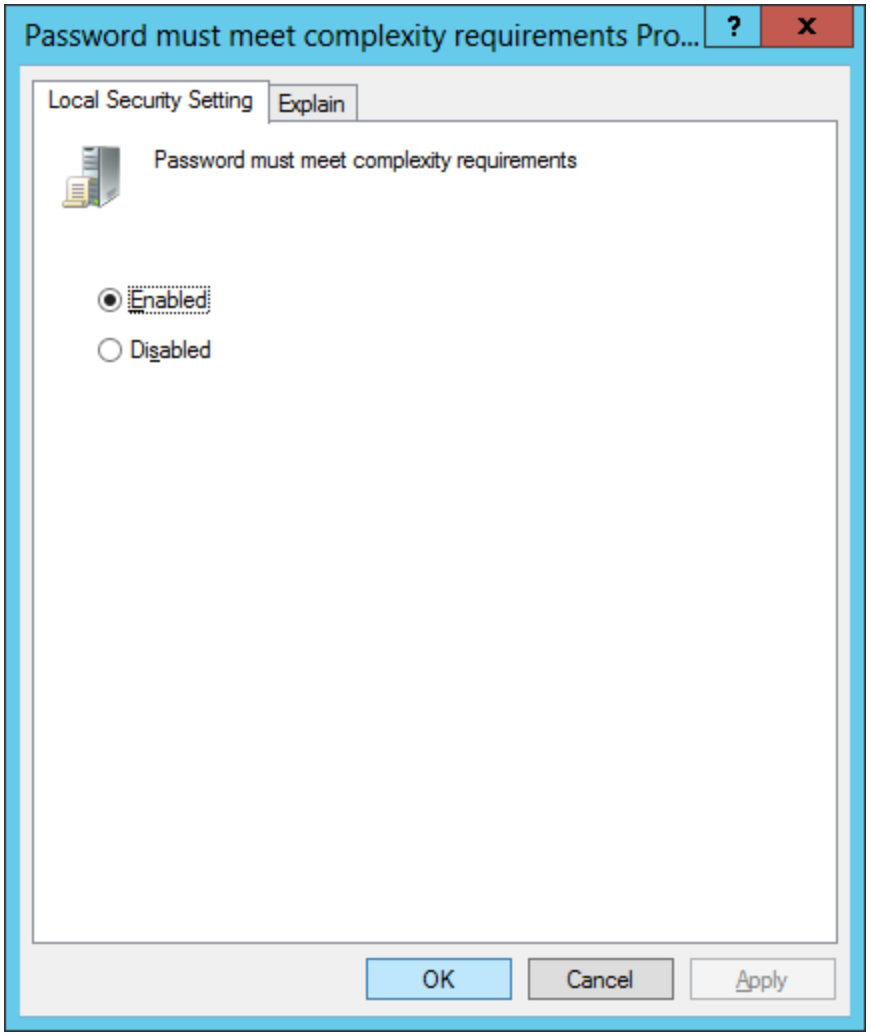
We will set the password to 7 characters which also happens to be the default setting for Domain Controllers.



Password Must Meet Complexity Requirement

Password must meet complexity requirement is the second of the two policies that help us create a smart password. We need to enable the regulation and then we will have to have three of the four criteria which are upper case, lower case letters, numbers and special characters in the password.

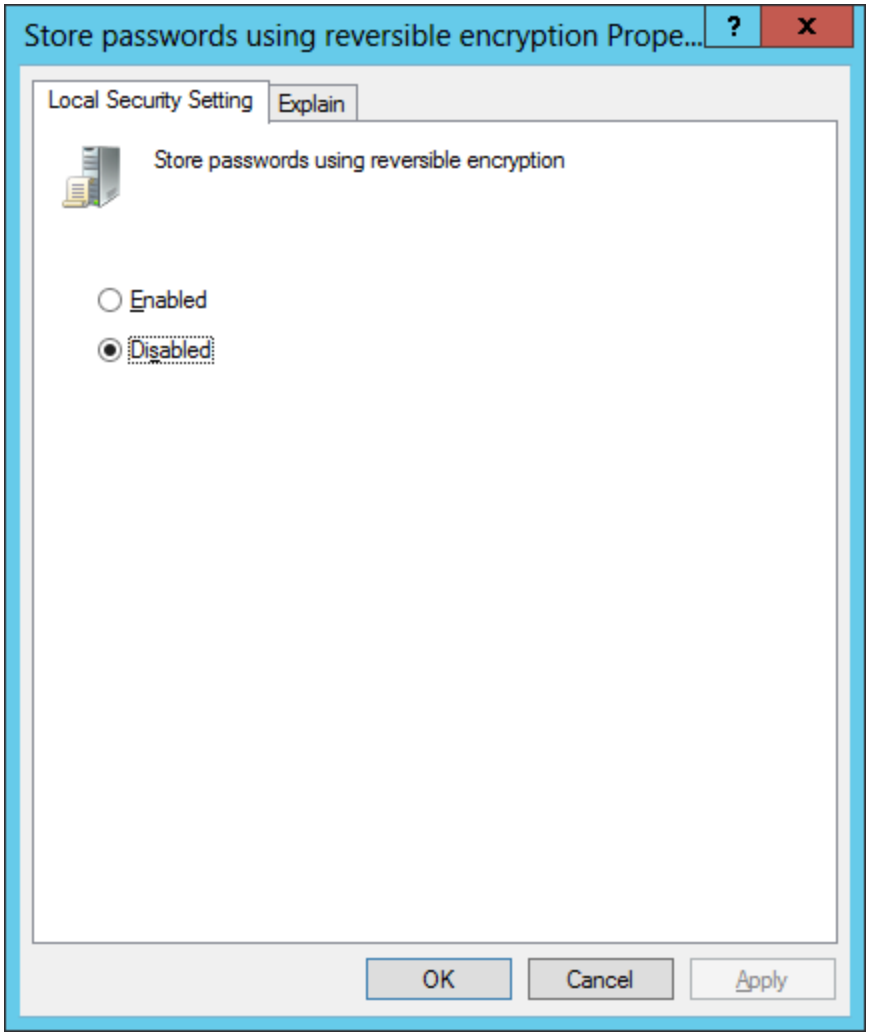
We will enable the rule.



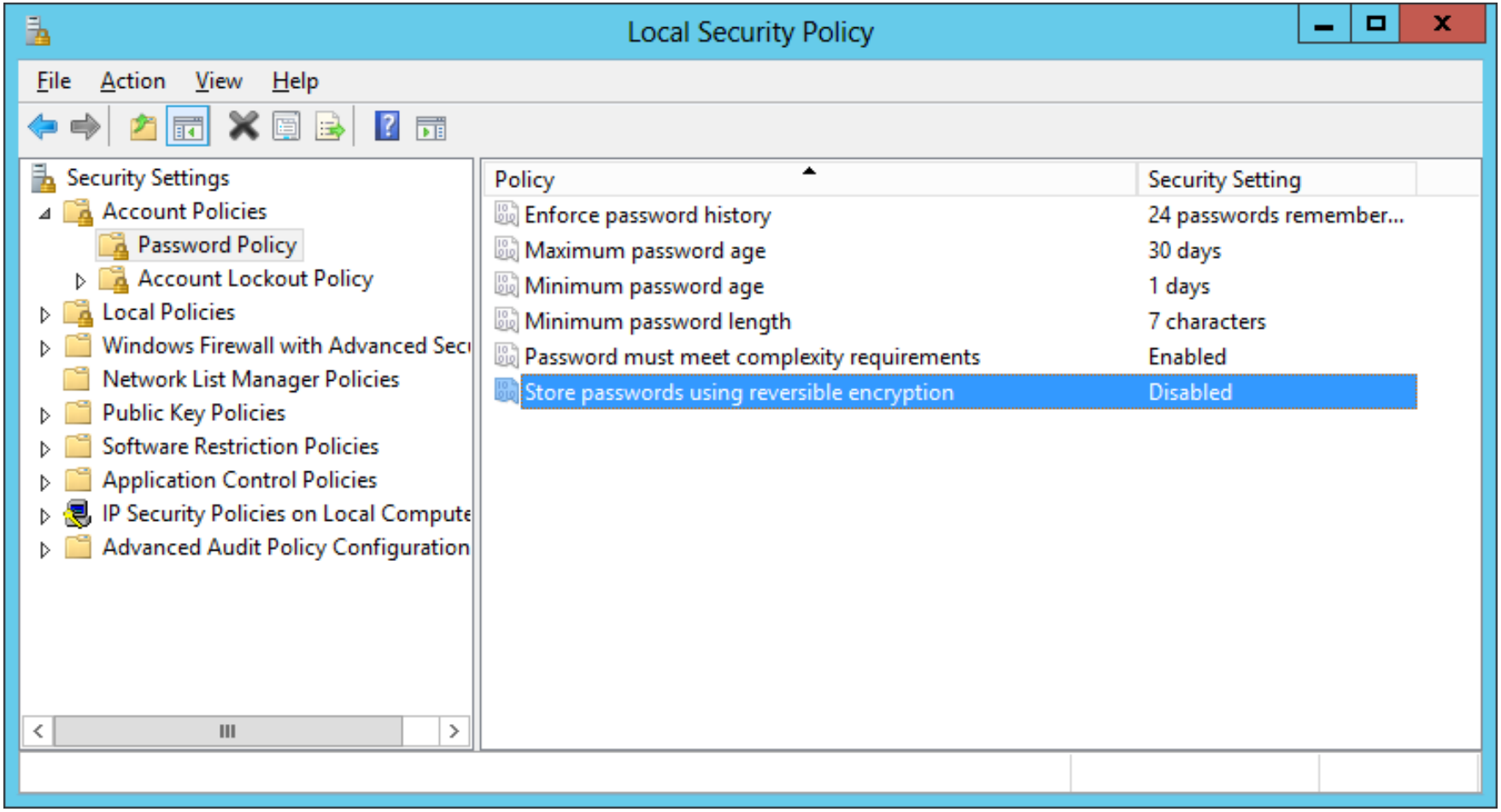
Store Passwords Using Reversible Encryption

Only used in cases where applications need knowledge of user's passwords. We should leave the policy disabled unless required by a server application.

Default setting is disabled and we will keep it that way.

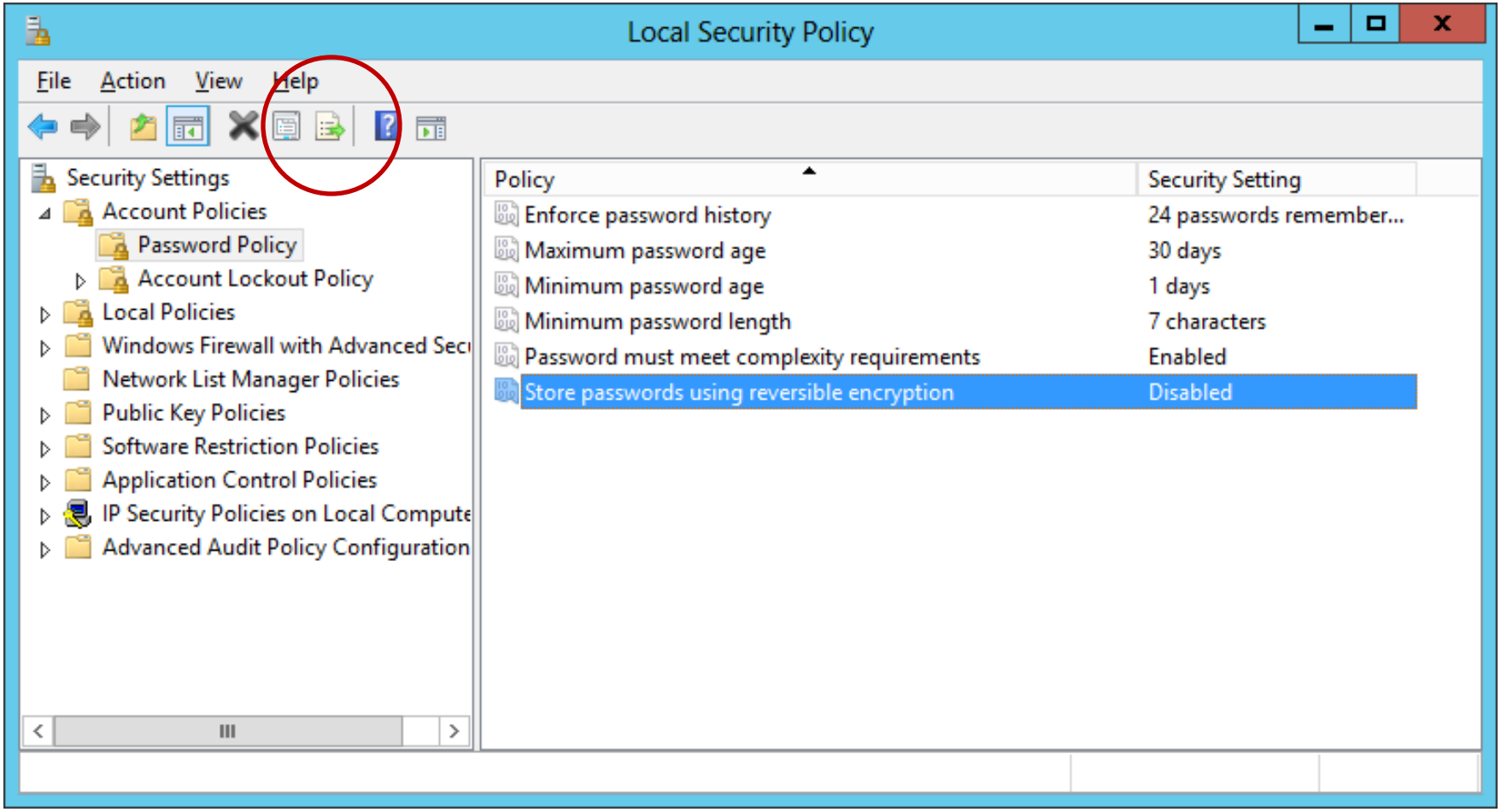


The Local Security Password Settings



We can observe all of our password security changes in the right pane.

Export the Local Security Policy Password Settings



To export the settings to a text file, we push the Export icon at the top of the window.

Export List

We save the file to the Server's My Documents folder. We can open the text file and we can put the information in our Disaster Recovery Plan (DRP) folder or procedure file so that we can have the data on hand if we need to setup the server again.