

From: Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance,
Corporate and Traded Services

Rebecca Spore, Director of Infrastructure

To: Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, 9th November 2021

Subject: Kent Connects Partnership Update

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Electoral Division: All electoral divisions

Summary: Kent Connects is a Partnership of public sector bodies in Kent, focussing on IT and digital technology to support the delivery of their services to the county. It delivers a range of services including infrastructure, through the Kent Public Services Network (KPSN) Partnership, collaborative projects, training and development, networking and knowledge sharing through specialist groups and business transformation events.

Recommendation(s):

The **Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee** is asked **to note** progress to date and the development of the Partnership.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Kent Connects is a Partnership of public sector bodies in Kent that seeks to leverage technology and digital services to support the county's objectives to grow the economy, tackle disadvantage and put citizens in control. The Partnership was established in 2001 as part of the government's e-gov programme.
- 1.2 The seventeen partners include; Kent County Council (KCC), Medway Council, all twelve districts Councils, Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue, and all three Kent universities.
- 1.3 By bringing together the knowledge and expertise of local councils, blue light organisations and universities, Kent Connects provides a framework to connect and support public service delivery across the county of Kent. This includes a range of services from infrastructure through the KPSN Partnership, collaborative projects, training and development, networking and knowledge sharing through specialist groups and business transformation events.

- 1.4 Annual business transformation events are held either face to face or remotely and are free to attend for all partners.

2. Governance and Funding

- 2.1 The Partnership is directed through the Kent Connects Leadership Group, with all partners paying a subscription to join the group. Nine of the seventeen partners pay a higher subscription.
- 2.2 Part of the annual subscription goes into a development fund, which is used to support Partnership Projects. Business Cases for funding requests are presented to the Leadership Board for assessment with successful projects feeding back to the Leadership Group with project outcomes and shared learning.

3. Kent Connects Groups

- 3.1 The Partnership holds quarterly meetings for the following specialist groups: Leadership Group, Information Security, Digital Accessibility, GIS and Smart Kent and Medway Projects. Apart from the Leadership Group, these are open to all partners.
- 3.2 Leadership Group: this manages the direction of the Partnership, awards funding to collaborative projects that are identified and delivered through the specialist groups.
- 3.3 The Information Security Group has regular reports from the National Cyber Security Centre and shares knowledge and good practice. The group is currently running Cyber Security workshops for partners focussing on the combined work of IT and Emergency Planning Officers.
- 3.4 The Digital Accessibility Group is developing guidance to promote a Kent Digital Accessibility standard. There is also a project with the University of Kent and Smarter Digital Services to produce a range of e-learning materials which will be available to all partners to load on their e-learning systems or access from a shared e-learning system.
- 3.5 The GIS group has a focus on data sharing opportunities across the Partnership and has previously conducted a data drill to test the maturity of the data sharing across multiple organisations.
- 3.6 The Smart Kent and Medway Projects group builds on conversations between partners that started at the Smart Kent business transformation event held by Kent Connects. Its role is to identify and take forward projects with an environmental focus.

4. Kent Connects Projects

- 4.1 Kent Connects' funding is used to implement projects that will benefit the majority of the Partnership. Examples below show a range of projects that have received funding:
 - 4.1.1 GovRoam was funded through Kent Connects to allow this to be rolled out to the whole county.
 - 4.1.2 Four e-learning courses on Cyber Security were developed jointly by the partners and funding was used to put content into the right format for partners to load onto their own e-learning systems.

4.1.3 During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Leadership Group approved funding for two projects identified by the multi-agency Financial Hardship Group.

4.2 Current projects include:

4.2.1 An e-learning approach for the Partnership, which will deliver courses and provide regular updates to the content. The first modules will focus on Digital Accessibility available through an e-learning system which partners can access directly and also as packages to be loaded into individual organisation's e-learning systems.

4.2.2 Funding for a booking system and IT support for the Shared Workplace Programme, allowing partners to book desks and collaboration spaces at each other's offices.

4.2.3 Kent Connects working with the KPSN Partnership to develop sensor projects looking at data ranging from temperature levels and usage of buildings to pollution and traffic levels across the county.

5. Events

5.1 Kent Connects provide regular business transformation events for partners. The events take a strategic view with speakers from other public sector organisations, private sector, voluntary organisations and think tanks to inform and engage senior managers across the Partnership. Past events have focussed on Smart Cities and Counties, Cyber Security, Digital Accessibility and Data Sharing in an emergency.

5.2 The next event will focus on Future Workplaces and presenters will discuss different workstyles, explore culture change as we move towards more hybrid working solutions and provide an update on our Partnership Shared Workspaces programme.

6. Equalities implications

6.1 None

7. Other corporate implications

7.1 The Kent Connects Project Management Office are managed within KCC's Infrastructure Division and work closely with the ICT Team.

8. Conclusions

8.1 The Kent Connects Partnership continues to work together successfully to deliver projects and knowledge sharing groups and events. Working together as a Partnership has strengthened links between public sector organisations in Kent.

9. Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s):

The **Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee** is asked to **note** progress to date and the development of the Partnership.

10. Background Documents

10.1 None

11. Contact Details

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