

**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 – 24 May 2023**

**Subject: Kent Connects Partnership Update**

**Classification: Unrestricted**

**Electoral Division: All electoral divisions**

**Summary:** The External Partnerships Team in the Infrastructure division supports two multi-agency partnerships.

Kent Estates Partnership is part of the One Public Estate (OPE) Programme and works closely with Kent partners across the public sector, to ensure funding and collaborative opportunities are identified and that benefits are maximised.

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. Kent Connects delivers a range of services including collaborative projects, training and development, networking and knowledge sharing.

**Recommendations:**

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

**1. Introduction**

1.1 Kent Connects and Kent Estates partnerships bring together representatives from public sector organisations in Kent to deliver collaborative projects and share best practice.

1.2 The two partnerships have a similar membership, and both include Kent County Council (KCC), the twelve district councils, Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue, and all three Kent universities. Kent Connects also includes Medway Council, while Kent Estates includes Health, Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) and South East Coast Ambulance Service (SECAMB). There is also a close working relationship with Medway Estates Partnership.

**2. Kent Estates Partnership (KEP)**

2.1 One Public Estate (OPE) is an established national programme delivered in partnership by the Cabinet Office Government Property Unit (GPU) and the Local Government Association (LGA). It provides practical and technical support and

funding to Local Authorities to deliver ambitious property-focused programmes in collaboration with central government and other public sector partners.

- 2.2 The core objectives of OPE are local growth (homes and jobs), integrated services and efficiencies. The programme acts as a catalyst for driving forward better asset management to support the provision of local services and save taxpayer money.
- 2.3 KCC has been a part of the OPE programme since the beginning of the initiative in 2013. The Kent Estates Partnership Board was formed in 2016 for the Phase 4 bid.
- 2.4 KEP has submitted four successful OPE funding bids, with additional funding awarded to develop a project pipeline. A total of £1,319,000 OPE funding has been received for eleven projects and the creation of a Project Management Office (PMO) to support the development of the partnership.
- 2.5 The successful projects to receive OPE funding are.
  - 2.5.1 Dover Discovery Centre
  - 2.5.2 Ebbsfleet Grove Road
  - 2.5.3 Maidstone Civic Centre
  - 2.5.4 Dartford Town Centre
  - 2.5.5 Sittingbourne Civic Quarter
  - 2.5.6 West Kent Partnership
  - 2.5.7 Paddock Wood Community Hub
  - 2.5.8 West Kent Blue Light Hub
  - 2.5.9 Ebbsfleet Integration of Healthy Living and Preventative Services
  - 2.5.10 Repton Housing and Health Hub
  - 2.5.11 Whitfield Public Sector Office Hub
  - 2.5.12 KEP Shared Workspaces
  - 2.5.13 KEP Programme Management Office
  - 2.5.14 OPE Opportunities Development Fund
- 2.6 The PMO has received funding in two rounds which has supplied one FTE and other resources have been provided by KCC.
- 2.7 A new round of OPE funding is expected in autumn 2023.
- 2.8 There have been four rounds of Land Release Fund (LRF) and Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF) and KEP has submitted ten successful funding bids and has been awarded £871,000 for LRF projects and £5,485,000 for BLRF.
- 2.9 The successful projects to receive LRF and BLRF funding are:
  - 2.9.1 Brunswick Street and Union Street, (Maidstone Borough Council)
  - 2.9.2 King Street carpark, (Maidstone Borough Council)
  - 2.9.3 Heather House & Pavilion (Maidstone Borough Council)
  - 2.9.4 Biggins Wood (Folkestone & Hythe District Council)
  - 2.9.5 Princes Parade (Folkestone & Hythe District Council)
  - 2.9.6 Beach St (Canterbury City Council)

- 2.9.7 Self-Build Plots 1 & 2 (Dover District Council)
- 2.9.8 Highview (Folkestone & Hythe District Council)
- 2.9.9 Farmstead Drive (Sevenoaks District Council)
- 2.9.10 White Oaks Residential (Sevenoaks District Council)

2.10 In March 2023 KEP submitted a bid for funding for eleven projects in Round 2 of the current BLRF programme, with a request for £10,874,000. The decision on successful projects is due to be announced summer 2023.

2.11 A third round of BLRF funding is scheduled for January 2024.

2.12 In addition to bidding for OPE and BLRF funding, KEP has piloted the Shared Workspaces project which has set up dedicated hot-desking spaces in council offices across the county. Staff can work in locations closer to home avoiding travel or work in multi-agency teams without special arrangements being set up.

### 2.13 Offices with Shared Workspaces

- 2.13.1 Gun Wharf, Medway
- 2.13.2 Invicta House, Maidstone
- 2.13.3 Brook House, Whitstable
- 2.13.4 St Peters House, Broadstairs
- 2.13.5 Sevenoaks District Office
- 2.13.6 Folkestone and Hythe District Office
- 2.13.7 Gravesham Borough Council
- 2.13.8 Canterbury City Council

2.14 The Shared Workspace project was nominated for three categories in the Smarter Working Awards 2023.

## 3. Kent Connects Partnership

3.1 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.

3.2 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 the Infrastructure division provided through the Kent Public Service Network (KPSN) Partnership, to collaborative projects, training and development, networking and knowledge sharing through specialist groups and business transformation events.

3.3 Kent Connects projects include GovRoam, which offers secure Wi-Fi to partners working in each other's offices. This was funded by Kent Connects and delivered by the KPSN Partnership.

- 3.4 The GovRoam system made it possible for KEP to deliver the Shared Workspaces project. Kent Connects has also funded a desk booking system to allow each partner organisation to manage their own desk allocation.
- 3.5 The next version of GovRoam is being planned which will make the system more robust and easier to support.
- 3.6 Kent Connects provides training to partners, which includes regular workshops for Senior Information Risk Officers (SIRO), and e-learning which can be deployed for all staff.
- 3.7 The SIRO training combines an update on cyber security risks and a training exercise which allows the delegates to engage with decision making for an imaginary organisation. The scenario allows participants to discuss the options as a group and see the outcomes of their decisions after each round of the game.
- 3.8 The e-learning suite of courses can be accessed through a dedicated e-learning system or loaded on to an organisation's existing e-learning system. All the training is funded through the Kent Connects subscription, so there is no extra cost to partners.
- 3.9 A Digital Accessibility course is live and available to all partners, for KCC this is available via Delta.
- 3.10 A Cyber Security course is in development, and this will update the Cyber Security training previously provided by the Kent Connects Partnership.
- 3.11 Kent Connects Partnership works very closely with the three universities: University of Kent, University of Greenwich and Canterbury Christ Church University. The Kent IT Alliance (KITA) was established to manage this collaboration and to support student placement in partnership organisations.
- 3.12 The KITA placements provide a 1-year paid placement for students, which is partly subsidised by Kent Connects. This arrangement brings new skills into the partner organisations and allows the students to develop meaningful knowledge of the workplace before graduating.
- 3.13 Kent Connects has managed the KITA Partnership for nine years, employing forty-four students across the partnership, with four returning to work in KCC after graduation and two returning to Gravesham Borough Council.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 KEP – Successful OPE funding is transferred to the External Partnerships PMO who check that spending matches the activities on the project bid before releasing funds to the project lead.
- 4.2 Kent Connects Partnership – The Partnership is funded through partnership subscriptions. Kent Connects Leadership Group decides on funding allocation and the External Partnerships PMO administers this.

## **5. Legal implications**

- 5.1 KEP – All partners who receive funding through OPE must sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with KCC confirming they will meet all OPE criteria. LRF funding is paid directly to the successful project lead.
- 5.2 Kent Connects Partnership – All partners have signed a partnership agreement which states the terms of reference for the partnership.

## **6. Equalities implications**

- 6.1 None

## **7. Other corporate implications**

- 7.1. The External Partnerships Team are managed within KCC's Infrastructure division and work closely with the Property teams and the Technology division.

## **8. Governance**

### **8.1 Kent Estates Partnership (KEP)**

- 8.1.1 KCC is the Accountable Body for the partnership and the S.151 officer is responsible for the sign-off of each funding bid.
- 8.1.2 As the Accountable Body, KCC is responsible for transferring funding to projects on submission of the appropriate invoices. KCC through the PMO is also responsible for providing regular monitoring reports to OPE.

### **8.2 Kent Connects Partnership**

- 8.2.1 The Partnership is directed through the Kent Connects Leadership Group, with all partners paying a subscription to join the group.
- 8.2.2 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.

## **9. Conclusions**

- 9.1 The KEP has made four successful bids for OPE funding and ten successful bids for LRF and BLRF funding with another bid under consideration currently.
- 9.2 The Kent Connects Partnership has funded the delivery of GovRoam which allows public sector staff to work in partner buildings across the county. It has delivered e-learning courses to partners and supported internal recruitment through the KITA programme.

9.3 Working together in partnership has strengthened links between public sector organisations in Kent. This partnership working has led from collaborations between small groups of partners to the countywide shared workspace project which has strong support from the whole partnership.

## 10. Recommendation(s)

### Recommendation(s):

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

## 11. Background Documents

11.1 Appendix A – External Partnerships slide deck to accompany report.

## 12. Contact Details

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