

Kent Connects - A Partnership Success Story

Case Study: Partnership Working Made Easy

At A Glance:

Project

Information Sharing Portal

Implementation Partners

Kent County Council (KCC)

Key Challenges

To develop an online tool to enable partnerships to work virtually but with limited resources for development and maintenance. Later, managing demand once the prototype was made available to others.

Solution and Services

A portal offering a range of services which can be self-administered. The portal was built for Kent Connects by KCC and attracted grant funding from the Kent Improvement Partnership. We charged partnerships £500 each for signing up.

Implementation Highlights

KCC used open-source software to minimise development costs and avoid licence fees. Since the portal went live, up to 40 portals have been provided for nearly 3000 registered users.

Key Benefits

- Simple, easy-to-use tool to support day-to-day partnership working
- Minimal cost
- 'Portal of portals' collates meeting dates from all portals into a single overview calendar

"When we developed the Kent Connects' Information Sharing Portal in 2007/8 it was purely to find a solution to our own needs. This innovative online tool proved to fill a gap in the market, however, and we have been happy to share it with others at minimal cost. The project sums up what Kent Connects is about – using technology to help partners join up and share services and benefits."

Angela Waite, Strategic Board Member, Kent Connects, and Assistant Director, Corporate Services, EK Services

The Need to Stay in Touch

Like many other partnerships, Kent Connects' partners work for different organisations in different locations. Our Board members also have busy 'day jobs' in their own organisations with limited time to get together. We realised we needed an online solution to streamline day-to-day working and, in October 2006, one of our partners, Kent County Council (KCC), took up the challenge to help.

The Solution:

KCC developed the information - sharing portal on our behalf, thereby removing initial development costs. It did this using open-source software which also avoided the longer term costs of annual licence fees. By January 2007 we were ready to go live with the portal, offering:

- a searchable calendar with meetings, agendas, minutes and related documents
- discussion forums and news items
- email alerts to registered users, highlighting additions as they happen
- document folders and 'self-publishing', enabling members to add, amend and share latest documents and developments
- password protection.

Instant Success

Partners instantly loved the portal: it was the definitive source of all the Kent Connects paperwork, it was simple to keep track of news and events, and it was easy to discuss issues with colleagues or ask for their help and advice. One described it as "free consultancy support on tap" and others valued the reduced need to travel to meetings. The question soon arose: "if the portal has been so successful for us, might others find it useful?" Indeed they would.

Roll-out

We were soon asked to replicate the model for other partnerships who wanted an information-sharing portal for themselves. Nearly 40 public sector partnerships have commissioned portals, with over 3000 registered users. The Kent and Medway Improvement Partnership, a regional government agency, supported the initiative, meeting the £500 set-up costs for some of the earliest adopters. Our Partnership Office provides administration training and support to an officer in each partnership to keep their portal up to date.

The Portal of Portals

The portals share a common design and are part of a single shared infrastructure. This means that the public domain information from each portal – such as events, diary dates, meeting papers – can be viewed from a shared area. An at-a-glance calendar provides an overview of all the meetings taking place, helping the co-ordination of future activities and events. The shared areas also provide registered users with a gateway to any individual portal.

Future Initiatives

In 2008 the portal was runner-up in the Government Computing Innovation Awards. However, the pace of technological change is fast and in 2012 we will review the latest innovations to support virtual partnership working. In the meantime, partnerships are continuing to put the portals to good use to support a range of services and initiatives. A list of the current portals can be viewed at www.kentconnects.gov.uk and includes Kent Climate Change Network, Kent Finance Officers Association, East Kent Engineering Partnership and Broadband Delivery UK.



Kent Connects is an award-winning partnership of all the Kent and Medway authorities, Kent Fire & Rescue Service and Kent Police, a powerful alliance of public service providers. Together we tackle the technological barriers to the joining up and sharing of public services. We do this through co-ordinated research and development, commissioning and procurement and networking and training events. We also provide a number of partnership services.

Further Information:

for further information, please visit www.kentconnects.gov.uk or email the Kent Connects Partnership Office at enquire@kentconnects.gov.uk.