



# THE KENT CONNECTS NEWSLETTER

Spring 2026

## Meet the Chair: William Benson

I thought it would be useful to introduce myself as Chair of Kent Connects. I am the Chief Executive of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, and I also chair the group of Chief Executives within Kent that represent the various public sector.

I couldn't be prouder to have been asked to Chair the Kent Connects Group. I have always been passionate about the transformational potential of technology and the scope it offers to connect communities, service users and the public sector.



This is both a challenging and an exciting time for the public sector: councils in Kent are going through a process that will see the two-tier system of local government being replaced by a single (unitary) tier of councils; all public sector bodies are grappling with the challenges and opportunities. At the same time, the threats facing us in terms of cyber security have never been more acute.

Against this backdrop, Kent Connects has reviewed its operating model and is sharpening its focus to address some of the key issues facing us. I firmly believe that these changes will stand us in good stead to address the challenges and potential that the next few years look set to present.

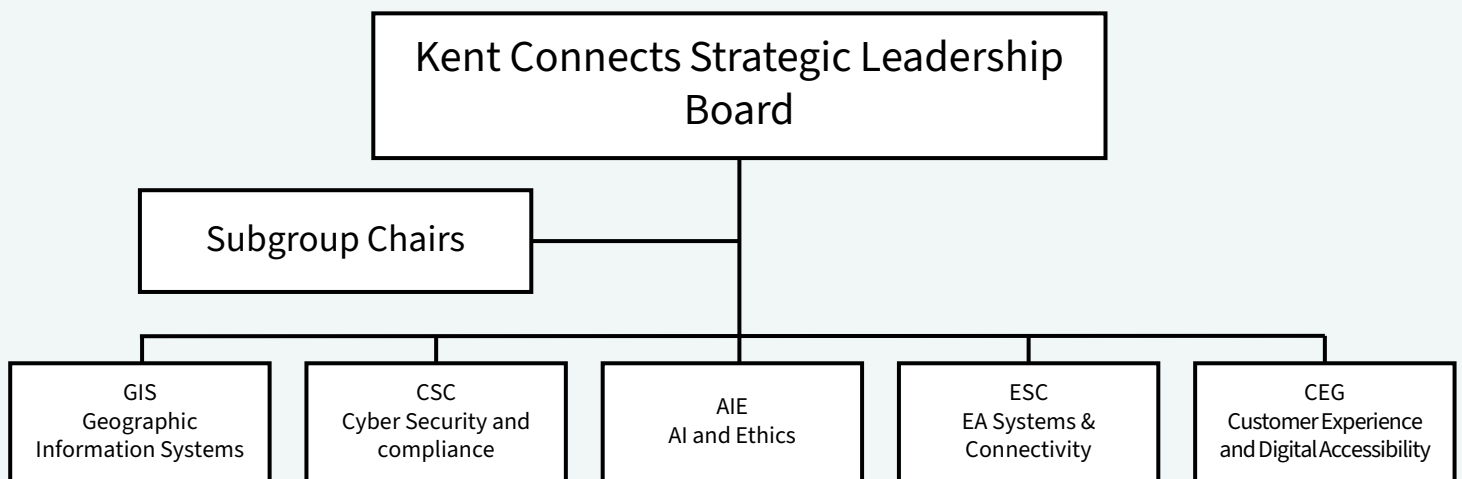
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# Kent Connects confirms new subgroups

Kent Connects has completed a review of its partnership structure to ensure it remains aligned with shared priorities and the evolving digital landscape across Kent and Medway. As part of this work, the Kent Connects Strategic Leadership Board has approved the introduction of several new specialist subgroups, each designed to deepen collaboration, strengthen expertise and provide clearer spaces for members to develop solutions together.

The updated structure is illustrated in the diagram below:



## Subgroup Overviews:

✓ **GIS – Geographic Information Systems** - Supports shared mapping, geospatial data, and location-based intelligence across Kent and Medway, enabling consistent planning, insight and service delivery.

✓ **CSC – Cyber Security and Compliance** formerly known as Information Security Group (ISG) - This group operates as the Kent WARP (Warning Advice and Reporting Point). Focuses on collective cyber resilience, threat awareness, incident response, and alignment with national standards - including CAF - across all partner organisations.

✓ **AIE – AI and Ethics** - Explores responsible and ethical adoption of AI technologies, supporting partners with governance, emerging risks, standards, and opportunities for safe innovation.

✓ **ESC – EA Systems & Connectivity** - Covers systems architecture, network services, connectivity challenges and interoperability to help align technical environments and address shared digital foundations.

✓ **CEG – Customer Experience and Digital Accessibility** - Promotes inclusive, user-centred design and digital accessibility standards to improve public-facing services and ensure accessible experiences for all residents.

# Launch of the CAF Peer Support Group

Kent Connects has established a new Cyber Assessment Framework Peer Support Group, designed to bring colleagues together to share learning, strengthen organisational resilience and support collective progress with CAF implementation. The group held its first meeting on 14 April and will act as a central hub for discussing incident response, maturity assessments, governance challenges and opportunities for shared development. The next meeting will be Friday 12th June at 10am.

This initiative sits alongside wider CAF related work across the partnership, including the development of an updated cyber Incident Response Plan, supported by MHCLG. The work will be shared across Kent Connects to support consistent and robust cyber preparedness.

If you are interested in finding out more, please contact [enquire.kentconnects@kent.gov.uk](mailto:enquire.kentconnects@kent.gov.uk).

## Kent Public Service Network & Kent Connects Expo 2026



Registration is now open for the KPSN & Kent Connects Expo 2026, taking place on **Thursday 4 June 2026** at the Ashford International Hotel & Spa.

This year's event will feature an expanded programme of Tech Talks, supplier demonstrations, solution showcases and dedicated networking opportunities, with a strong line up of confirmed suppliers including Khipu Networks, Softworx, Capita, Pangea, Trustmarque, Cisco, Gamma, Matrix Booking, Palo Alto Networks and others.

Attendees will also have the chance to explore service developments, strategic initiatives and collaborative priorities, with Pilgrims Hospice joining as the 2026 charity partner. Spaces are limited, and colleagues are encouraged to **register early via Eventbrite**.

# Partnership Excellence Recognised at the iNetwork Innovation Awards



On Thursday 26 March, the iNetwork Innovation Awards 2025/26 took place, celebrating innovation and collaboration across the public sector.

Kent Connects was proud to present the Partnership Excellence Award, which recognises outstanding partnership working and celebrates organisations that demonstrate collaboration, innovation and a strong commitment to shared outcomes.

The Partnership Excellence Award was presented to Our Future Coast, recognising their exemplary partnership approach and the impact achieved through effective joint working.

Kent Connects' involvement reflects its commitment to supporting, championing and sharing effective partnership approaches that can be adopted and built upon by others across the sector.





## Kent Connects Presents at the REKM Away Day

Kent Connects recently presented at the Research, Enterprise, Knowledge Mobilisation Away Day at Christchurch University, contributing to regional discussions on safety, economic resilience, coastal community needs and the increasing role of digitalisation and AI in public services.

The presentation provided an overview of the Kent Connects partnership, highlighting shared digital challenges and opportunities across Kent and Medway. It also showcased work underway to develop several specialist groups, including the newly proposed AI & Ethics Group.

Kent Connects also explored opportunities to build closer collaboration with academic partners. Strengthening links with universities will help develop research, analysis and insight to support evidence based decision making for all member organisations.



## GOETEC26: Shaping Tomorrow Together

This event takes place on **1 July 2026** at the Universities at Medway Campus, bringing together colleagues from HE, FE and the wider public sector for a full day of expert talks, sector insights and collaborative networking.

This year's programme features a keynote panel on Data Conversations with leaders from Jisc and York St John University, alongside specialist sessions including a deep dive into ransomware group dynamics, a shared service approach to data from the HEAT Service, and a panel exploring AI and digitally enhanced learning.

Delegates will also take part in a roundtable discussing strategic pathways for education and local government, with further member case studies and sponsor sessions throughout the day.

**Registration is now open** for what promises to be an energising and forward looking event.