

## **Government Connect pledges £2.25m local authority support package**

1. **Monday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2008.**
2. The Government Connect programme has today announced a £2.25m package of support to assist and encourage implementation by local authorities of the Government Connect Secure eXtranet (GCSx). The system allows secure exchange of personal information between councils and central government where this is needed to provide effective services to the public.
3. The announcement coincides with news that all councils across England and Wales have committed to taking a Government Connect connection. Philip Littleavon, Government Connect Programme Director, says, "The programme has achieved a huge milestone. All Councils have now signed up to connect to the system which means we can now concentrate our efforts on implementation and benefits realisation. Securing council connection on competitive terms has generated the savings to enable this previously unplanned investment. I am certain this money will help local government improve its information security capability and to improve public services to citizens."
4. Details of the new funding package are as follows:
  - a) £250k has been earmarked for the provision of advice and guidance to local authorities in achieving compliance with the programme's Code of Connection and LGA's Data Handling Guidelines for local government. The Government Connect Code of Connection is based on the international standard for Information Assurance, ISO 27001. Each local authority must achieve compliance with the Code of Connection before their connection can be activated.

Stephen Jones Director of Finance and Performance at the LGA welcomes the announcement; he says, "In the wake of recent data loss incidents and concerns that the public are loosing their trust in governments' ability to secure personal information, the LGA will be publishing Data Handling Guidelines to help councils meet their responsibilities. The guidelines complement and support the role that Government Connect can play in this. Councils will welcome the availability of expert help and advice and the opportunity to learn from others so this investment is most welcome".

Richard Steel, president of the Society of Information Technology Management (Socitm) explains, "The need for local authorities to have access to independent

advice and guidance on data handling was identified during our recent review of Government Connect. We are delighted that Government Connect has accepted our findings and enabled this much needed service to be established. Socitm will be key partners with Government Connect and LGA in delivering this service and will continue in its role of challenging and critical friend role through this process.” The earmarked funding will enable help and assistance to local authorities directed by a panel with membership from Socitm, LGA and other experts”

- b) Government Connect has created a £1.5m benefits realisation fund to be managed by IDeA. John Hayes IDeA's Director of Services says, “This fund will provide for approximately sixty (60) £25k award packages. We are also looking at collective bids from partnerships or shared service initiatives which may attract a larger award. This fund will directly enable LAs to get financial support for their work to realise the benefits of being connected to GCSx as well as help the sector overall. The objective is to encourage the beneficial implementation of Government Connect across the sector and the sharing of learning and experience”. Awards will be made to authorities demonstrably committed to establishing and sharing new best business practise based on the availability of Government Connect. The scope of qualifying projects is virtually unlimited and includes both technical and business process projects. Examples of qualifying technical projects might include converting to GCSx e-mail accounts, implementing secure mobile solutions or making cash savings by decommissioning infrastructure made redundant by channelling services through GCSx. Qualifying business process projects might include reforming council services such as; Youth Offending Teams, Trading Standards, Registrar services, Parking and Benefits. John continues, “I hope we will receive applications covering a broad range of business benefits. Applications from authorities working in partnerships, demonstrably committed to promulgating best practise and enabling re-use will be most welcome”. Applications are invited from any authority in England and Wales”. Details of the fund can be found at [www.govconnect.gov.uk](http://www.govconnect.gov.uk).
- c) £500k has been allocated to support the technical implementation of Government Connect. Anna Smith, Government Connect Implementation Manager explains, “Our experience of initial implementations is that, no matter how good the documentation, there is no substitute for expert hands on advice when activating a circuit. We have worked with early adopting local authorities to develop an on site implementation support service that will now be made available to every authority. This service means that authorities will be able to more confidently and efficiently transition to the use of secure Government Connect services”.

5. Janet Callender, Chief Executive at Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council and Chair of both Government Connect and the Local Government Delivery Council says, "Recent developments in Government Connect represent immense progress and evidence that local government understands the value of Government Connect. This is very good news for public services". Janet adds, "This new package of funding is particularly pleasing because it demonstrates an effective partnership between central government and local government. By working together we have created a positive force for change".

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**7. About Government Connect:**

8. Government Connect is an IT programme jointly funded by the Departments for Communities and Local Government, Children Schools and Families and Work and Pensions. Leadership of the programme transferred from DCLG to DWP on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. The programme is governed by a board chaired by Janet Callender, Chief Executive of Tameside and represented by the three funding central departments plus the Local Government Association, IDeA and Socitm.
9. The objective of Government Connect is to implement a variant of the Government Secure Intranet (GSI) to all local authorities in England and Wales. This network is accredited by Government security specialists at GCHQ to carry data classified as RESTRICTED and will enable secure data sharing between central and local government and between local authorities. Government Connect is key to protecting

personal data collected by government and is a prerequisite to many planned improvements to public services.

10. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 the three funding departments announced a £33m funding package to deliver Government Connect to all local authorities in England and Wales and operate it through to March 2011. The announcement on 1<sup>st</sup> April designated the Government Connect secure network as the preferred method of secure data sharing between these departments and local authorities. Most local authorities rely on the exchange of sensitive personal data with DWP in order to deliver Housing and Council Tax Benefits and to prevent fraud. A further announcement by the Department for Work and Pensions on 7 July 2008 stated that it would on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 cease the exchange of DWP RESTRICTED data with English and Welsh local authorities through means other than the Government Connect. Authorities not able to comply in the required timescales may apply for up to a six month exemption from this policy. A similar secure network has already been implemented in Scotland.
11. More details about Government Connect can be found at [www.govconnect.gov.uk](http://www.govconnect.gov.uk).
12. **About the Local Government Association :**
13. LGA is a cross policy organisation representing more than 400 councils in England and Wales. Based in Westminster, close to the Houses of Parliament and Whitehall, the LGA is a voluntary lobbying organisation, acting as the voice of the local government sector, and an authoritative and effective advocate on its behalf.
14. In fulfilling this role the LGA targets its efforts on the issues that matter most to councils, working with and on behalf of our membership to deliver our shared vision of an independent and confident local government sector, where local priorities drive public service improvement in every city, town and village and every councillor acts as a champion for their ward and for the people they represent.
15. For more details go to [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)
16. **About the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA)**
17. The IDeA works for local government improvement so councils can serve people and places better. Our offer is built around the real issues for local people, focusing on partnership working, place shaping and tackling cross-cutting issues. We use experienced councillors and senior officers, known as peers, who support and challenge councils to improve themselves. We enable councils to share good practice through the national Beacon Scheme and regional local government networks. The best ideas are put on this website.
18. Our Leadership Academy programmes help councillors become better leaders so they can balance the diverse demands of people living in the same community.

19. Working with our national, regional and local partners, we help councils work through local partnerships to tackle local priorities such as health, children's services and promoting economic prosperity. We advise councils on improving customer service and value for money. We also promote the development of local government's workforce.
20. The IDeA is owned by the Local Government Association (LGA) and belongs to local government. Together we lead local government improvement.
21. For more details go to [www.idea.gov.uk](http://www.idea.gov.uk)
22. **About the Society of Information Technology Management (Socitm)**
23. The Society of Information Technology Management was founded in 1986 as the professional association for ICT managers working in and for the public sector.
24. Members are drawn primarily from local authorities but also from the police and fire services, housing authorities and other locally delivered public service.
25. Managers or consultants from organisations supplying ICT products and services to the public sector, or which support public services in other ways, may also join the Society.
26. With over 1900 members from 550 different organisations including 98% of all UK local authorities, Socitm provides a widely respected forum for the promotion, use and development of ICT best practice. It also plays a leading role in the implementation of local e-government in the UK.
27. The Society is a significant provider of advice and guidance on ICT and e-government to local authorities. Socitm offers a growing range of services including publications, conferences, events, training, research and consultancy.
28. For more details go to [www.socitm.gov.uk](http://www.socitm.gov.uk)