



front office shared services
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e@sy connects

e-services for south yorkshire

The e@SY Connects partnership offers citizens and businesses from across South Yorkshire access to services from a broad range of agencies over the web, digital TV and mobile telephones. Partners include four local authorities, the local PCTs, the emergency services and the voluntary sector. Customers can book an appointment with a GP, schedule a call with Job Centre Plus, pay Council Tax or check local transport information.

The aim of the e@SY Connects programme is to ensure that access to public information and interactive services is made as easy and convenient as possible for all, particularly for those in greatest need. The two principal media or brands of the programme are e@SY Connects Online (Internet, including on mobile phones, and touch screen kiosks) and e@SY Connects TV (Digital TV).

As well as achieving cashable savings, one of the major benefits of the project has been the development of partnership working. As Councillor Alan Schofield explains: 'The biggest benefit is the quality of partnership working itself – the positive atmosphere spreads to other day-to-day work.'



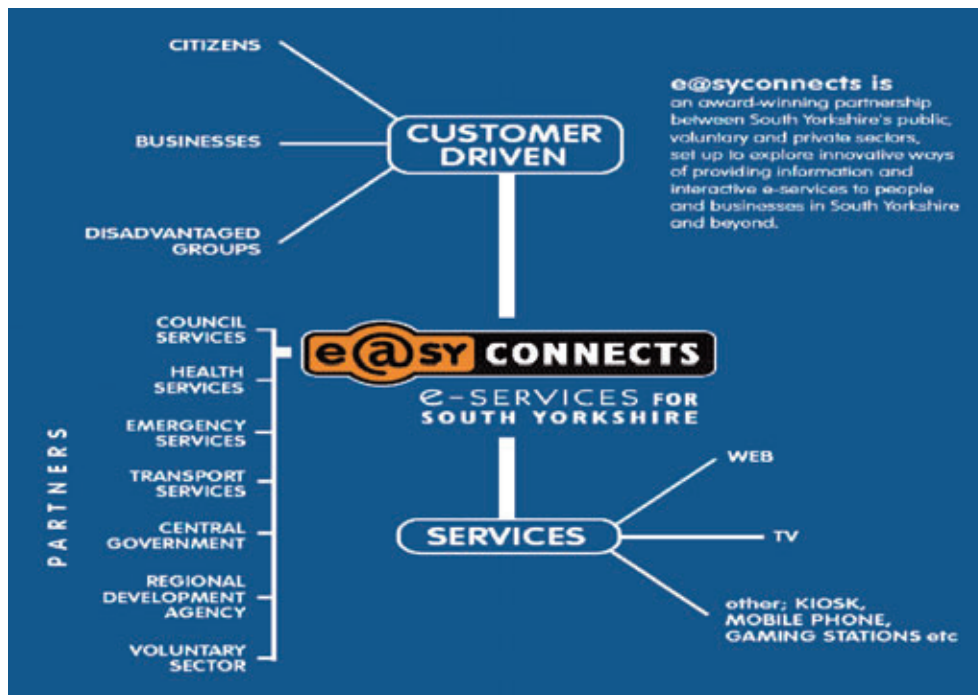
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overview

The e@SY Connects partnership:

- provides convenient access to public services for citizens and businesses across the entire South Yorkshire area
- has brought together, and embedded **partnership working** across an extremely broad range of public agencies and the voluntary sector:
 - the four local authorities
 - the PCTs
 - the emergency services
 - public transport
 - the RDA
 - the voluntary sector
- helps bridge the digital divide and tackle social exclusion through a channel strategy which matches people's communication preferences and information requirements
- promotes innovation, enabling the partners to spread and share the risk of exploring new ways to make services and information easily available to people and businesses
- enables and drives efficiencies through joint planning and joint action
- provides a replicable and sustainable model for other public service partnerships.



background

The roots of e@SY Connects lie in the decline of the traditional coal and steel industries of South Yorkshire. EC Objective 1 and 2 funds were available to support regeneration, and necessitated a partnership approach based on joint working and planning on a sub-regional basis.

One initiative to emerge from this was the South Yorkshire Public Sector e-forum which, in 2000, established the South Yorkshire Coalfields Online Project (SYCOP) funded for two years by the Treasury's 'Invest to Save' budget. SYCOP became e@SY Connects and it is now sustained by partner contributions and project-specific funding streams.

e@SY Connects now sits within the regional and sub-regional partnership infrastructure represented by the South Yorkshire partnership and the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Assembly. It is managed and coordinated by a small team which is operationally independent of the partners but in close and frequent contact with them.

The partnership has been fully engaged in national e-government programmes and its position at the forefront of innovation in public access to services has been recognised in a number of awards, including:

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The range of services available from the partners and the range of channels by which to access them make the e@SY model a powerful and flexible one, and a number of authorities and partnerships in the UK and elsewhere in Europe have followed it and implemented similar initiatives.

customer experience

e@SY Connects provides the citizens and businesses of the South Yorkshire sub-region with a well-branded, convenient means of access, through a range of channels, to the services of a wide range of public agencies.



'I am disabled and found this site really useful.'

User feedback
















channel strategy: promoting social inclusion and bridging the digital divide

The range of channels offered by e@SY Connects is particularly significant because the area has a lower rate of internet take-up than the rest of the country, but a higher rate of take-up of digital interactive TV and pay-as-you-go mobile phones. So e@SY is designed to be responsive to the communication, information and service preferences of local people, as well as being

available everywhere to support face-to-face transactions. A recent survey by MORI for the Cabinet Office showed that 83% of people regularly use a mobile phone, while digital TV use at 60% has overtaken internet at 58%.

It is designed around life events and will bring users to the right part of the right agency's website to provide the information, guidance or contact details they are seeking.

	Looking for work?		Further education?
	Report a crime?		Health information?
	Money problems?		Carers?
	School information?		Doctors appointments online?
	Going into hospital?		Medical emergency?
	Jobs hotline?		Travel information?
 Have your say!			

e@SY Connects services

Currently services include:

- the ability to book, check and change GP appointments and request repeat prescriptions (at participating practices) online/via TV or mobile 'phone any time of the day
there has been a 44% increase in e-bookings since the service started; a much higher percentage of appointments attended; and the time saved at the surgeries enables better service to be given to patients in person and over the 'phone
- Jobs Hotline where users enter their name, telephone number and requested time/date for call-back. The information is then auto-forwarded to the local Job Centre Plus, where staff save time by scheduling calls rather than having to deal with them ad hoc
- online and text messaging for schools, students and parents which enables, for example, parents to be notified quickly if children expected at school do not arrive
- payment of council tax and other charges
- information / form request for Housing Benefit
- help in cases of domestic violence and bullying. Statistics have led to valuable insights into the increased incidence of domestic violence around, for example, major sporting events
- access to environmental services such as refuse collection queries and reporting abandoned cars
- public transport information
- sources of advice and support on health issues. For example, young people look for advice on sexual health much more readily through the privacy of a mobile 'phone screen than on the family TV or computer
- information about debt management
- a facility for e-petitions addressed to the partner authorities
- air quality readings.

'Every night, I check on the TV that there are appointments available in case I need one suddenly – it gives me peace of mind.'

Elderly resident

'I can make an appointment as soon as I feel I need one – Sunday night, even on holiday.'

'I get home after the surgery closes and used to rely on my wife to make my appointment.'

'If I forget when my appointment is for, it is easy to check without troubling the staff at the surgery.'

Feedback from other service users

'I've got a lot on my plate trying to get to lessons on time, so its really useful that they've got this new business timetable on the interactive TV cause it means I don't have to wait in the bus stops in the rain anymore, and I am always on time for my lessons.'

Student

The e@SY Connects platform continues to develop and to support service improvements in partner organisations, becoming increasingly embedded in the information infrastructure. Examples include:

- a procurement hub, or information exchange linking SMEs and their various systems securely to a range of public and private sector purchasers
- Barnsley MBC piloted an e-mentoring scheme and a logon2careers website for young people, each benefiting from the inclusive range of channels available.

e@SY Connects gets its customer / community intelligence through being rooted in the locality, knowing its people, and operating close to the ground. Information is gathered and disseminated by:

- surveys and focus groups/citizens' panels
- roadshows
- work with young people and digitally disadvantaged groups
- involving the voluntary sector around the partnership table.

'I find the e@SY Connects channel really useful. Instead of trawling through the newspaper, looking for jobs and trying to get to the Job Centre during specific hours I was able to use 24 hour-a-day access, pick up the remote, bring up the e@SY Connects channel, find the Job Centre bit, and basically get the information that I wanted.'

Job Seeker

partnership working

The partnership benefits from:

- the close identification of each partner with the economic and cultural background of the South Yorkshire sub-region
- their agreement about the importance of digital and knowledge based industries and services to regeneration
- the high degree of co-terminosity of the partners' operational boundaries.

'The biggest benefit is the quality of partnership working itself – the positive atmosphere spreads to other day-to-day work.'

Cllr Alan Schofield,
Barnsley MBC cabinet Spokesman for Corporate Services

the e@SY Connects team and the partners

The team and its activities are funded by partner contributions and project-specific revenue streams. In such arrangements, because of the perennial pressures on partners' own budgets, there is always the potential danger that the team will be insufficiently funded and will lack capacity to achieve the partners' intentions. On the other hand, if it were to secure significant funding on its own account, the danger might be that it became a 'player' itself with its own agenda, separate from that agreed by the partners.

e@SY Connects seems to have got the balance right. It provides a vehicle for the partners to agree on initiatives which would not otherwise come about, and a driving, coordinating mechanism which, according to Dr. Bridgette Wessels of Sheffield University, enables them to: '...assemble small bits of support to configure and pilot a service...the partnership model provides a flexibility and innovative capacity that a bureaucracy could not'.

The partners benefit not only in the shape of e@SY Connects initiatives and services, but by one authority leading on an innovation (using the specialist skills of its ICT staff, for example) from which they all gain valuable knowledge and insight.

'We wanted to make progress with DiTV, but we didn't have the internal capacity or resources to pursue it alone, so e@SY's role was vital for us and now DiTV is absolutely critical to our channel strategy.'

Ken Bellamy and Peter Bradbrook,
Sheffield City Council

local and national factors

Another inevitable feature of local partnerships is that individual partners (whether local by definition – councils, health trusts, police – or local representatives of national agencies or departments – JobCentre Plus, Pension Service, LSC) will from time to time be driven in different directions by national policy thrusts. The NHS national IT strategy does not currently have online access for patients to GP surgeries as a priority, so there is no NHS financial support for the e@SY Connects GP appointments service, but it has gone ahead because the partnership agrees it is beneficial to local people. It has also been adopted by practices elsewhere in the country.

embedding partnership and securing sustainability

Our interviewees (from a range of public service and academic backgrounds) shared the view that the partnership model exemplified by e@SY Connects had now become a familiar way of working.

The more e@SY Connects develops links into partner (and other) websites, and the more its infrastructure is used to initiate service developments and improvements, the more sustainable it becomes.

'Partnership has become embedded now and there is a body of knowledge about partnership working – it's becoming a system that will survive the individuals.'

Dr Jack Hobbs,
Digital Region

public value of investment

methodology

Until 2004/05, Doncaster acted as the authority responsible for e@SY Connects' accounts. That role has now passed to Barnsley. For the purpose of this brief study, we have confined our analysis to figures provided by Barnsley or by e@SY Connects' current partners.

As a partner-funded entity, which secures some additional income from specific projects, e@SY Connects has a budget which closely matches its expenditure. In order to understand the public value of its work, it is appropriate to see e@SY Connects as an innovative new business which is successfully investigating new approaches to service access and delivery, and which needs to continue to grow and develop to realise its potential.

investment

Initial funding for SYCOP, the predecessor of e@SY Connects, was provided in 2000 from the Treasury's Invest to Save Budget, specifically in order to support research and innovation in electronic access to services using the concept of key life events.

capital costs

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	Total
Hardware/software	0	46,250	36,692	0	82,942
Total cost	0	46,250	36,692	0	82,942

revenue costs

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	Total
Staffing costs	159,370	167,440	170,640	178,750	676,200
Travel & Sub	3,960	3,460	6,500	6,500	20,420
Office costs	7,490	8,780	9,550	11,580	37,400
Systems maintenance	6,470	6,460	6,240	6,240	25,410
Total cost	177,290	186,140	192,930	203,070	759,430

financial value

cashable savings: joint procurement search engine

For their own business reasons, both the e@SY Connects Programme Manager and one of the lead partners were looking into the purchase of a new search engine. The existence of the e@SY Connects partnership vehicle enabled this requirement to be shared so that ultimately, e@SY Connects itself and four partners purchased a search engine at a combined cost of £175,000 against a total quoted price for individual purchase of £310,000, representing a saving to the public sector partners of £135,000.

DiTV licences

As we have said earlier in this case study, DiTV is a very significant channel in South Yorkshire because of comparatively low internet take-up and comparatively high subscription to digital TV. It therefore made perfect business sense for e@SY Connects to invest and, again, the existence of the partnership vehicle enabled the local authority partners to join in the licence procurement and share the costs, risks, resource and skill requirements of accessing and developing the DiTV channel as part of their own strategies.

Through the DiTV National Project, e@SY Connects negotiated a price of £60,000 against an estimated £250,000 for individual purchases, saving £190,000.

non-cashable savings: examples of e@SY services generating efficiencies

access to service

Steadily growing usage figures show that e@SY Connects is successfully and efficiently providing people with the information and service they need. The partners see these transactions as additional and entirely complementary to their own website traffic because e@SY Connects provides access through life events (and, of course through additional channels), and takes people to the appropriate web page of the partner site. It offers a different and complementary route to their services.

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07 (est)
Online and kiosks	43,000	55,000	60,000+
DiTV and mobile	13,000	31,000	57,000+

The partners see these transactions as representing 'new' customers, gaining access to their services by new and innovative routes.

Recent research by the North West e-Government Group into transaction costs found that average transaction over the web costs councils £0.17 if processed over fully integrated systems, compared to an average of £5.05 for transactions facilitated over the telephone. Based on these averages, if only one-in-five visits to e@SY Connects resulted in an online transaction of this kind – rather than a telephone call – the partnership has helped to avoid over £250,000 in transaction costs since 2004.

GP appointments

- Reduction in missed appointments
Statistics gathered at one surgery in Sheffield show a reduction in missed appointments from 13% to less than 0.5% after the introduction of the service. This represents a very significant saving of extremely valuable NHS resources. A survey by Developing Patient Partnerships in 2005 put the average cost of a missed appointment at £18, so in a practice handling, say, 40,000 appointments per year, wasted cost would be reduced from £93,000 to less than £3,600.
- Administration/time savings
Booking through e@SY Connects saves administrative time in surgeries and reduces telephone traffic, enabling the whole administration of the surgery to run more efficiently and reducing frustration for patients listening to an engaged tone. Figures are not available to quantify or estimate these savings because we do not have data for the staff cost of arranging appointments or the proportion of appointments booked through e@SY Connects.
- Repeat prescriptions
This recently launched service promises similar advantages for patients and efficiencies for surgeries. If 25% of repeat prescriptions were ordered through e@SY Connects at a surgery handling 40,000 per year, the cost would reduce from an estimated £53,600 to £46,900.

customer value

e@SY Connects provides a significant bridge over the digital divide by promoting access to service through channels which local people are comfortable using. The very idea of the digital divide is that many people do not have access to the internet or the navigation skills to find what they need, but e@SY Connects provides all the same services through DiTV and over mobile phones.

organisational value

e@SY Connects has enabled the partners to maximise their own skills and resources by enabling them to share the burden and risk of experiment and innovation, and to make the resultant benefits available across the whole of South Yorkshire.

It also emerged clearly during the study that e@SY Connects has been extremely influential in embedding and extending the practice of partnership in the sub-region, enabling other developments such as Digital Region to flourish in a climate of well-established partnership.

political value

The partnership directly addresses the well-being of local people by looking at their service and information needs in a holistic way, related to life events, and providing answers through channels that local people are happy to use.

It also underlines the fact that, although local authorities themselves cannot and do not directly provide every public service, they can collaborate with each other and take the lead in convening arrangements with local partners to meet people's service requirements irrespective of which agency provides the service.

capacity

marketing and promotion

A number of interviewees agreed that where increasing access to service is the aim, there is a significant need to market and promote the access channels and the services available through them. Not only is this the key to overcoming barriers to public use of digital channels, but for local authorities and other partners it is essential in order to realise the benefits of reduced cost of contact.

The direct experience of Gary Simpson, the e@SY Connects Programme Manager, is that the most effective promotional initiative he has undertaken or experienced, in terms of demonstrable increase in take-up, was an advertisement in the local free newspaper.

engagement of the voluntary sector

e@SY Connects has been successful to some extent in engaging the voluntary sector, but recognises the benefits to be gained by still more effective and comprehensive engagement. Voluntary sector organisations can occupy the role of trusted intermediaries between public services and large numbers of people who need services but are not skilled in accessing them, particularly through new digital channels. They can therefore be important contributors to improving service access and service design, for example through supporting greater personalisation of service in close consultation with service users, as well as service delivery. On the other hand, they are frequently under-resourced, over-stretched and themselves lacking in capacity to engage with partners.

These pressures have been amongst the reasons why e@SY Connects has been unable to do more, but it is also in a better position than many to build on what is in place. Some form of additional capacity or support would be helpful to enable authorities, partnerships and the very disparate voluntary sector to engage in dialogue about how the potential of voluntary effort can be realised and maximised.

sector learning

There is a lot to be learned from e@SY Connects about the optimal size and role of the team which operates as the partnership on a day-to-day basis, initiating ideas, following them up, bringing in the resources of the partners where required, and where practicable, and representing the partnership to the outside world.

The role requires a great deal of commitment and vision, networking ability and entrepreneurial skills. e@SY Connects has managed to secure these skills and maintain a partnership vehicle which is recognised as being a 'tight ship' by the partners, and to avoid the scenario in which e@SY itself has the resources, separate from the partners, that would make it a local player in its own right, with its own agenda.

'I'd advise others to start with non-controversial, common objectives and build momentum towards the more difficult and controversial issues.'

Tim Rivett, Chair,
e@SY Connects

'Expectation management is important – it's a long haul to reap the benefits, but now we get lots of positive feedback.'

CLLr Alan Schofield,
Barnsley MBC cabinet Spokesman for Corporate Services

There is an excellent balance, built on well-earned trust and mutual respect, between operational independence to get on and drive the concept forward, and the understanding that e@SY exists purely as an expression of agreed policy between the partners.

risk taking, risk sharing and innovation

Having established a very effective partnership culture and infrastructure, e@SY has the capacity to share the risk of initiatives which might be too great for any individual partner but which, when implemented, break new ground for local people and businesses. The partnership enables this innovative work to be conceived and developed, and provides a framework for managing the risk. This fulfils the original purpose of its predecessor, SYCOP, which was established to research and experiment in the area of electronic access to services.

'Our potential is even greater than what we've achieved to date.'

Phil Coppard,
Chief Executive, Barnsley MBC

next steps

e@SY Connects continues to identify new services and fresh opportunities to innovate. At the end of our study, Gary Simpson was enthusing about a 'Dial-a-Ride' service for people with disabilities, enabling them to be picked up from home in a specially adapted bus, go shopping using a special wheelchair/scooter, and have their purchases taken back to the bus before being taken home. Tim Rivett, the chairman, told us he was keen to strengthen e@SY Connects' links with the voluntary sector and with the education and skills sector, and the partners are also beginning discussions on how e@SY Connects can increase its capacity and self-sustainability. Clearly, the appetite for innovation and ever-increasing local impact is as sharp as ever.

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