

REQUEST FOR DIRECTOR DECISION – DD2710

Extending the funding of sub-regional digital connectivity leads

Executive summary:

In 2019, an approval was granted to have sub-regional digital connectivity posts in place for two years, to support the delivery of full fibre in London, through the GLA's Strategic Investment Fund. In 2022, the Mayor approved extending the funding to the sub-regional partnerships to keep these posts for another 12 months; and delegated authority to the Executive Director of Good Growth to approve the making of further grant agreements to extend these posts in the future.

The sub-regional officers have been in their positions for three years. In this time, they have successfully delivered projects aligned with the London Digital Access for All mission. The London boroughs are achieving positive outcomes. To date, 25 boroughs now have social housing wayleave agreements, and over 350 public sector sites have been connected. Full fibre coverage has also increased significantly due to the presence of sub-regional officers who work with the boroughs in managing relationships and to acquire funding for mobile and broadband infrastructure. To continue benefiting boroughs and Londoners, this decision requests approval to extend funding for sub-regional partnerships, for these posts, for up to four years.

Decision:

That the Executive Director of Good Growth approves:

- expenditure of up to £500,000 per year in additional grant funding, as a contribution to recipient boroughs' ongoing costs of sub-regional digital connectivity posts for up to four years (2024-28), subject to the annual budgetary process
- the related variation of the GLA's current funding agreements with the recipient boroughs.

AUTHORISING DIRECTOR

I have reviewed the request and am satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

It has my approval.

Name: Philip Graham

Position: Executive Director for Good Growth

Signature:



Date:

27/08/2024

PART I – NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. In October 2019, the Mayor approved (through Mayoral Decision (MD) 2530) the allocation of £1m from the GLA's Strategic Investment Fund (SIF), to give boroughs resources to maximise investment in connectivity in their respective areas. To ensure a regional approach, the Connected London team collaborated with London Councils and boroughs to define the roles and responsibilities of new postholders in sub-regional partnerships. The appointments were made in 2020. The appointed individuals assist boroughs in planning and coordinating digital connectivity deployment. They also support boroughs to encourage full-fibre deployment and to stimulate further investment in London.
- 1.2. In 2022, through MD3011, the Mayor approved: the extension of the funding for the sub-regional posts for a further year; and a delegation of authority to the Executive Director of Good Growth to approve the making of further grants, and to authorise any further extension of these posts.
- 1.3. Their activities have also supported the delivery of key elements of the Digital Access for All mission. This states that every Londoner should have access to good connectivity, basic skills, and the devices or support they need to be online by 2025.
- 1.4. These roles have played a fundamental part in promoting strong and effective relationships between boroughs and providers. They have established groups that facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experiences, while encouraging the development of strategies that enhance digital connectivity. They have also helped manage relationships with boroughs in receipt of funding to connect public-sector sites, and to continue their work in building better connectivity within their respective areas.
- 1.5. Significant improvements have been delivered in London's digital connectivity, including:
 - fibre coverage – significant rise in fibre-to-the-premises coverage in London, with connectivity now standing at 68 per cent (up from 4.7 per cent in 2017)
 - wayleaves – 25 of the 29 boroughs with social housing now have wayleaves in place
 - sites connected – circa 350 public-sector sites have already been upgraded to full fibre
 - Get Online London – 936 hubs registered across London, helping Londoners access a device, data and digital skills training.
- 1.6. To ensure continuous positive impacts across London, additional GLA funding is key, to enable the boroughs to extend these posts for a further four years.
- 1.7. To finalise the extension of the posts, a grant agreement will be prepared to cover a four-year period. The agreement will include a yearly break clause to evaluate ongoing funding support for these roles; agree on new governance; and include key performance indicators to measure the success of sub-regional officers.
- 1.8. Within MD3011 it was planned that the sub-regions would continue seeking other sources of funding to replace GLA funding over time. As there is currently budget provision within the GLA budget for 2024-25 and within the indicative plans for 2025-26 and 2026-27 to continue the current GLA contribution it is expected that the sub-regions continue to seek additional funding to fund additional work over that which can be funded by the GLA but also to build in resilience should the GLA need to amend contributions in future years.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

- 2.1. The roles of sub-regional digital connectivity leads are in line with the objectives of the Mayor's Connected London programme. These roles aim to improve digital connectivity in under-served areas; facilitate coordination of digital connectivity work across London boroughs, including digital inclusion efforts; support boroughs in their digital strategies; and promote better collaboration between the industry and boroughs to encourage full-fibre and mobile connectivity roll-out.
- 2.2. The sub-regions are responsible for developing further programmes and projects to drive investment into boroughs and remove barriers to rolling out connectivity. They will deliver outcomes such as targeted investment in digital infrastructure by: engaging with industry; sharing boroughs' economic development plans; identifying and promoting the positive impact of connectivity for boroughs and residents; and helping boroughs implement new ways of working that make it quicker and easier for operators to deploy new mobile infrastructure. These new ways of working will also help deliver the roll-out of mobile connectivity into to high streets and areas of high footfall.
- 2.3. The sub-regional officers will continue coordinating projects to upgrade public-sector sites. They will also aim to reduce the number of digitally excluded Londoners, by supporting boroughs to include social value in wayleaves and procurement agreements. The Connected London team is collaborating with London & Partners on an open Wi-Fi project that aims to improve non-UK visitors' access to the internet while in London. This project is a crucial component of London's Visitor Experience Strategy. Currently, a discovery brief is being developed; once ready, the findings and agreed next steps will be shared with the leads.
- 2.4. The work of the sub-regions will support the Connected London team in coordinating borough approaches on key programmes. One such programme relates to the copper switch-off, and aims at ensuring vulnerable Londoners do not lose access to essential services in the switch-off. The postholders will help to coordinate their boroughs, ensuring that crucial information is shared with the right people; and that each borough has a plan in place to tackle the change.

3. Equality comments

- 3.1. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, as public authorities, the GLA and London boroughs must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between people who have a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 3.2. Improving access to services, and narrowing social, economic and health inequalities, are key to supporting London's communities and reducing digital exclusion.
- 3.3. The sub-regional officers will assist boroughs in using grant funding to provide digital services to community centres, sheltered accommodations and CCTV sites. This will improve accessibility and reduce the costs of digital inclusion.
- 3.4. Through sub-regional meetings, the postholders will bring together their respective boroughs to understand the impact of the copper switch-off on Londoners, especially those classed as vulnerable. They will share best practices, and help boroughs understand how to minimise the impact of this programme on Londoners. Each project developed in this programme will undergo individual assessments to ensure compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. Mitigations will be considered and put in place for any potential negative equalities impacts.

4. Other considerations

- 4.1. There are no conflicts of interest to declare for anyone involved in either the drafting or clearance of this decision.

- 4.2. The Mayor's commitments for London's connectivity include: upgrading CCTV to improve its effectiveness; enhancing mobile connectivity in busy London areas; and directing investment towards the growing areas of outer London. These initiatives will require input from sub-regional postholders to collaborate with the Connected London team, their respective boroughs, and other stakeholders to coordinate initiatives in fulfilling the Mayor's commitments. This collaboration will be vital in developing a plan and helping boroughs deliver on those plans. The key risks are set out in the table below.

Risk	Impact	Mitigation	Post-mitigation RAG rating
Boroughs do not engage with the sub-regional postholders to develop further programmes and projects.	Boroughs that have limited engagement with postholders may not see the same opportunities for improvement as other boroughs.	<p>GLA will assist postholders in engaging with boroughs.</p> <p>Sub-regional postholders will develop aligning programmes and projects for the region, by understanding boroughs' needs; and creating plans that boroughs can review and approve.</p> <p>Sub-regional postholders have working groups focused on digital connectivity, allowing them to better understand the needs of boroughs.</p>	Green
Sub-regional postholders lack the necessary understanding of key programmes, such as that concerning the copper switch-off.	Boroughs may not receive adequate support to engage with the right departments, so the switch-off could have a negative impact.	<p>The GLA will closely collaborate with key contacts regarding this programme, to provide sub-regional postholders with appropriate information for distribution to their boroughs.</p> <p>Communication providers work closely with sub-regional postholders to ensure accurate information is communicated.</p> <p>This programme is currently an agenda item on the sub-region's digital connectivity working group. Any concerns or issues raised are being filtered through to the Connected London team, who will ensure that the correct information is sent across to the postholders. This will help them to be well informed when speaking with their boroughs.</p>	Green

5. Financial comments

- 5.1. Approval is requested for expenditure of £500,000 per year on the extension of the sub-regional digital connectivity posts for 2024-28.
- 5.2. This expenditure will be in the form of grant funding totalling £125,000 per year for each of the four regional partnerships, totalling £500,000 per year. This will be delivered via an extended grant

agreement, which will have an annual break clause, and be reviewed against performance and agreed milestones.

2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	Total
£500,000	£500,000	£500,000	£500,000	£2,000,000

- 5.3. This expenditure will be funded from the sub-regional roles budget within the Connectivity, Air Quality, Connectivity and Infrastructure Unit for 2024-25. There is budget included within the Mayor's indicative budget for 2025-26 and 2026-27 to fund this. However, break clauses will be included within each agreement; these can be executed if there is insufficient funding following the conclusion of the Mayor's budget-setting process in each year. Funding for 2027-28 will need to be included within future budget rounds for the Mayor's consideration.

6. Legal comments

- 6.1. The foregoing sections of this report indicate that:

- the decisions requested of the Director (pursuant to the Mayor's delegation of authority) concern the exercise of the GLA's general powers, falling within the GLA's statutory powers to do such things considered to further, or that are facilitative of, or conducive or incidental to, the promotion of economic development and wealth creation in Greater London
- in formulating the proposals in respect of which a decision is sought, officers have complied with the GLA's related statutory duties to:
 - pay due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people
 - consider how the proposals will promote the improvement of health of persons, health inequalities between persons and to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom
 - consult with appropriate bodies.

- 6.2. In taking the decisions requested, the Director must have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty – namely the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010; and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (race, disability, gender reassignment, age, sex, sexual orientation, religion, marriage or civil partnership status, and pregnancy and maternity) and persons who do not (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). To this end, the Director should have particular regard to section 3 (above) of this report.

- 6.3. Officers have indicated that, where the expenditure for which approval is sought concerns the award of grant funding, it should be distributed fairly, transparently, in manner that affords value for money, and in accordance with the requirements of the GLA's Contracts and Funding Code; and the relevant grant-funding agreements in place must be varied in accordance with their provisions before any commitment to provide the additional funding is made.

7. Planned delivery approach and next steps

- 7.1. The table below sets out the proposed timeline.

Activity	Timeline
Director Decision signed	August 2024
Submit a change request to extend the sub-regional roles	August 2024

Change request approved	September 2024
Confirm extension of post with sub-regions	September 2024
Transfer funds to each sub-region	September/October2024

Appendices and supporting papers:

None.

Public access to information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and will be made available on the GLA website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** This form (Part 1) will be published either within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 – Deferral

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under the FoIA should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION:

Drafting officer to
confirm the
following (✓)

Drafting officer:

Smitha Sujith has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

✓

Assistant Director/Head of Service:

Elliot Treharne has reviewed the documentation and is satisfied for it to be referred to the Sponsoring Director for approval.

✓

Financial and Legal advice:

The Finance and Legal teams have commented on this proposal, and this decision reflects their comments.

✓

Mayoral Delivery Board

A summary of this decision was reviewed by the Mayoral Delivery Board on 27 August 2024.

✓

INTERIM CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER:

I confirm that financial and legal implications have been appropriately considered in the preparation of this report.

Signature:

Anna Casbolt

Date:

27/08/2024

PP Anna Casbolt on behalf of Enver Enver