



MAYOR OF LONDON
OFFICE FOR POLICING AND CRIME

Project Alpha Social Media Hub Home Office Grant 2024-2027

MOPAC Investment Advisory & Monitoring meeting 2nd July 2024

Report by DCI Neil Reynolds on behalf of the Chief of Corporate Services

Part 1 – This section of the report will be published by MOPAC. It is classified as OFFICIAL – PUBLIC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper is to seek approval for continued Home Office funding for the NPCC sponsored Social Media Hub (SMH) in tackling serious youth violence, exploitation and organised criminality across the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS).

This paper requests approval to enter into a 1-year Home Office grant agreement for 2024/25 supporting 30 funded posts. The funding covers all costs regarding pay, overtime, plus training and operational equipment specific to the role.

Home Office funding for this function has previously been approved by MOPAC under PCD references 545, 867, 914, 960, 1047 and 1215.

Recommendations

The Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, via the Investment Advisory and Monitoring meeting (IAM), is asked to:

- 1. Approve acceptance of a Home Office grant of £2,755,000 to fund the Project Alpha Social Media Hub (SMH) in 2024/25.**

Time sensitivity

A decision is required from the Deputy Mayor by 31st July 2024. This is because the SMH is contingent on the availability of funding to meet expenditure costs for the project within the MPS. Continuation of the SMH has already taken place “at risk” since April 2024 due to the timescales involved in the confirmation of the funding being issued and the need to ensure operational delivery in-year.

Non-confidential facts and advice to the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime

Introduction and background

1. As traditional communication data fragments with the introduction of new technology and communication providers, social media is becoming an ever-increasing key element within organised criminality and associated serious violence. This is relevant throughout London and across the UK.
2. With the proliferation of social media as a method of communication, there is a clear business need to develop new solutions to meet increasing demands.
3. The scale of the current complex risks posed by urban street gangs in relation to

the exposure of young people and the vulnerable to violence, criminal and sexual exploitation is extensive and affects every police force area.

4. There is a need for increased collaboration within law enforcement and with industry providers to deliver a better understanding of scale and risks and develop solutions collaboratively.
5. The SMH was implemented in June 2019, fully funded by the Home Office. It is an MPS intelligence function supporting operational teams across the MPS. The aim of the SMH is to effectively tackle the threat posed by Organised Criminal Groups/Urban Street Gangs from their use of social media to generate violence and support criminal activity.
6. The grant funding will enable the continuation of the SMH, as well as enabling further development and innovation to ensure it remains relevant and effective in tackling county line offending.

Issues for consideration

7. The proposal set out in the restricted section of the report will see the continuation of the SMH as a dedicated team in tackling serious youth violence, organised criminality and exploitation in support of operational teams across the MPS.
8. The Home Office have confirmed 1 year of funding of £2,755,000 for 2024-2025. This represents a reduction in funding of £138,450 compared to 2023-2024. Cost recovery will reflect actual expenditure incurred in terms of pay, overtime, support costs plus training and operational equipment specific to the role.
9. The impact of the reduced funding combined with increased costs due to the Police Pay Award in 2023 will be a reduction in officers/staff from 35 in 2023/24 to 30 officers. This will impact the capabilities of the SMH in meeting an increasing demand for its support from across the MPS and inhibit innovation in utilising social media to reduce crime.
10. This funding is separate and in addition to a Home Office grant for the continuation of the related project, the County Lines Social Media Intelligence Network, which was developed to enhance the online capabilities in tackling County Lines (PCD1532 refers).
11. The pursuance of intelligence and evidence-based methodology to tackle serious youth violence and organised criminality in London presents major benefits to the MPS and Londoners. The funds sought will boost MPS output in combatting violence and organised criminality.

Contributes to the New Met for London (NMfL) Plan and / or MOPAC Police & Crime Plan 2022-25¹

12. The work of the SMH will directly impact upon serious violence and organised criminality. It will also contribute to keeping children, young people and vulnerable individuals safe by reducing opportunity for criminal and sexual exploitation facilitated by the online activity of gangs.
13. The project aligns with the objectives outlined in the New Met for London Plan,

¹ [Police and crime plan: a safer city for all Londoners | London City Hall](#)

particularly in its commitment to fostering trust and reducing crime in the city. Through its innovative approach, the SMH targets online exploitation of young people, working in collaboration with partners to steer youth away from criminal activities. By providing a nuanced understanding of online social media dynamics and their real-world implications, the initiative addresses the root causes of serious violence, such as cross-border drug supply. Moreover, the project aims to maintain high standards by establishing a center of excellence in social media intelligence and investigations. This center not only supports policing efforts within the MPS but also shares insights and best practices with law enforcement agencies across the UK, thus informing national policies regarding the use of social media in combating criminality. To ensure its effectiveness, the project employs a comprehensive outreach approach, actively engaging with minority communities to challenge perceptions and garner their support for the initiative's vital work.

Financial, Commercial and Procurement Comments

14. The unit will be funded by the Home Office grant of £2,755,000 for 2024/25. The conditions on which the Home Office has made the grant relate to direct pay costs with the addition of overtime, MPS support costs, plus training and equipment specific to the role.
15. The grant agreement will provide authority for expenditure against the delivery plan submitted to the Home Office for the project. All purchases of equipment or training will be via MOPAC approved and compliant procurement routes.
16. There are no ongoing financial commitments to the MPS should additional funding not be forthcoming for 2025/26. Staff will be redeployed across Frontline Policing in this event, taking with them skills and experience that can be deployed elsewhere in the organisation in tackling MPS priorities.
17. Arrangements will be formalised with a grant agreement provided by the HO which will be completed, overseen by the MPS Grants Manager within Finance Services to ensure it is consistent with accepted standard HO grant funding terms and conditions.

Legal Comments

18. Under paragraph 4.8 of the MOPAC Scheme of Consent and Delegation the DMPC has delegated authority to approve “Bids for grant funding made and all offers made of grant funding; and/or where appropriate a strategy for grant giving”.
19. The acceptance and provision of Grant Agreements to support this function are legal under Schedule 3, The acceptance and provision of Grant Agreements to support this function are legal under Schedule 3, Paragraph 7 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 which provides that:

7(1) The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime may do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the exercise of the functions of the Office.

(2) That includes— entering into contracts and other agreements (whether legally binding or not);
20. MOPAC has an obligation to publish a grant agreement pursuant to Schedule 1, Paragraph 3(g) of the Elected Local Policing Bodies (Specified Information)

(Amendment) Order 2012.

Equality Comments

21. The intention of this document is to seek additional funding for an existing function, therefore there is no real organisational change. The Social Media Hub (SMH) falls within the scope of being assessed in compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty under Section 149, Equality Act for Project Alpha. Due regard and consideration has been taken to assess equality impact caused by the proposed business change including effective engagement and analysing relevant equality information. As a result, an action plan has been implemented to address potential negative impact to any individual through the use of an Equality Impact Assessment.
22. The project will contribute towards the London Anchor Institutions Charter, in particular the objectives to Narrow Social, Health and Economic Inequalities, Help Young People to Flourish and Support Our Communities. The supply of drugs and associated violence is known to disproportionately impact on deprived sections of society, with Class A addiction being significantly more prevalent in areas with high levels of social deprivation, and lack of opportunity in these areas can result in young people being drawn into a life of crime and exploitation. The focus of the SMH is disrupting organised criminality and preventing the exploitation of young persons, these have a direct impact on the lives of young people and the communities in which they live.

Privacy Comments

23. The MPS is subject to the requirements and conditions placed on it as a 'State' body to comply with the European Convention of Human Rights and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018. Both legislative requirements place an obligation on the MPS to process personal data fairly and lawfully in order to safeguard the rights and freedoms of individuals.
24. Under Article 35 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Section 57 of the DPA 2018, Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) become mandatory for organisations with technologies and processes that are likely to result in a high risk to the rights of the data subjects.
25. A DPIA has been completed in respect of the Social Media Hub. The DPIA is currently subject to an annual review and update and there had been no significant change to the data processing since the last review. The project will ensure a privacy by design approach, which will allow the MPS to find and fix problems at the early stages of any project, ensuring compliance with GDPR. DPIA's support the accountability principle, as they will ensure the MPS complies with the requirements of GDPR and they demonstrate that appropriate measures have been taken to ensure compliance. The DPIA concluded the risk of a data breach occurring was low based on current practices. Recommendations regarding data storage and retention have been followed with the use of the MPS approved BOX data storage solution and an updated data retention policy. Ongoing consultation with the Information Assurance and Information Rights units within MPS will be completed to ensure the project continues to meet its compliance requirements

Real Estate Implications

26. There are no real estate implications of note. Property Services are engaged with the Project and suitable accommodation has been provided.

Environmental Implications

27. There are no additional environmental implications identified for the organisation and no identifiable benefits to the London Environment Strategy.

Background/supporting papers

28. This information is contained in the restricted section of the report.

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Part 2 – This section refers to the details of the Part 2 business case which is NOT SUITABLE for MOPAC Publication.

The Government Security Classification marking for Part 2 is:
OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE [OPERATIONAL]

Part 2 of Project Alpha Social Media Hub Home Office Grant 2024-2025 is exempt from publication for the following reasons:

- Contains police tactics and other issues for consideration of an operational nature that if published would hinder the criminal justice process and effectiveness of the unit.
- Contains geographic information that may reveal the location of the unit.

Sec 31 Law enforcement

(1) Information which is not exempt information by virtue of section 30 is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice—

- (a) The prevention or detection of crime,
- (b) The apprehension or prosecution of offenders,
- (c) The administration of justice.

The paper will be exempt after 01/04/2030 in accordance with MPS policy pending review.