

DMPC Decision – PCD 1726**Title: Difference Matters Programme FY 24-28****Executive Summary:**

The Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) prioritises working in education. All of the VRU's education investments, research and policy work promotes healthy relationships and inclusive practices to reduce disengagement and tackle all forms of exclusions, including suspensions, managed moves, and the rising levels of absenteeism.

As part of the wider Education Matters Programme (PCD 1366), consisting of Talk Matters and Difference Matters, £1.000m was designated for the Difference Matters programme for delivery of a programme in primary schools enabling school leaders to be aware and equipped to work with children and young people with neurodiversity across FY 24/25 and 25/26.

During April – August 2024, the VRU carried out in depth scoping, research and consultation to guide the form this new initiative should take. The research and consultation exercise for Difference Matters is now complete, concluding that the programme should be targeted in mainstream secondary schools, where the challenges experienced by neurodivergent children are most acute putting them at significantly higher risk of suspensions, exclusion and absenteeism. And that the programme should be piloted over at least 2 academic years, with an external evaluation, to ensure impact can be reliably demonstrated and learnings to other schools be disseminated.

After consultations with neurodivergent young people, their parents, schools, education professionals and local authorities the VRU is seeking approval to modify the duration, spend and commissioning of the programme (as approved in PCD 1366), including allocating funds to evaluate the work.

Recommendation:

The Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime is recommended to:

1. Approve an uplift in the allocation of spend for Difference Matters (PCD 1366), across a further 17 months (from March 2026 to August 2027). Note this will increase the total allocation for Difference Matters from £1.000m, to £1.050m across FY 2024 /25– 2027/2028, with the additional £0.050m expenditure funded from existing Mayoral funded budgets.
2. Approve a request to go out to tender via a competitive process to contract an organisation to deliver the provision of specialist training, consultancy and facilitate peer networks for school

leaders as part of Difference Matters with an estimated contract value of £0.050m. The anticipated contract duration is from May 2025 – August 2027.

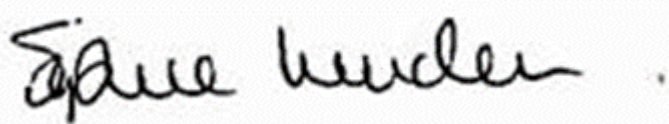
3. Approve a request to go out to tender via a competitive process to contract an organisation to deliver external facilitation and support for neurodivergent young people across all schools in the pilot to develop student action groups as part of Difference Matters with an estimated total contract value of £0.180m. The anticipated contract duration will be from May 2025- August 2027.
4. Approve the allocation of the remaining £0.820m funding through 7 grants to local authorities via an invitation to apply process, and 1 contract (with an estimated contract value of £0.085m) to a Multi-Academy Trust through an invitation to quote process, to deliver Difference Matters in mainstream secondary schools from February 2025 – August 2027.
5. Approve a request to go out to tender via a competitive process to contract an evaluation partner for Difference Matters from May 2025 – December 2027 with an estimated total contract value of £0.100m.
6. Delegate the final award decisions for all the above to the Director of the VRU and the CFO, following the completion of the tender exercises.

Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime

I confirm I have considered whether or not I have any personal or prejudicial interest in this matter and take the proposed decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct. Any such interests are recorded below.

The above request has my approval.

Signature



Date 17/10/2024

PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE TO THE DMPC

1. Introduction and background –

1.1 London's Inclusion Charter

We know that children and young people are safer in school. Yet, London has experienced rising suspension rates of 14% in schools. In the post-Covid landscape, persistent absenteeism is also on the rise, with rates more than doubling since 2018/19. That is why driving up attendance and tackling forms of exclusion like suspensions is at the heart of the London Violence Reduction Unit's (VRU) prevention work. London's Inclusion Charter is a partnership approach. It's built on the voice of young people and informed by parents and carers, schools, education specialists and local authorities.

- 1.2 We want to see all London schools creating more inclusive, safer environments for London's children, and are investing in London's Inclusion Charter, a partnership, evidence-driven approach, to create more inclusive schools. Underpinning the Inclusion Charter is commissioned research that evidences what practices and key principles ensure that children feel safe and a sense of belonging in schools, both fundamental to inclusion.

- 1.3 One of the fundamental foundations of the Charter is recognition that schools cannot do this work alone, that learning partnerships are key. The Difference Matters Programme is one such example of a programme that will support improvements in inclusion, in particular of neurodivergent young people, and increase their feelings of safety and belonging in schools.

1.4 Difference Matters

Difference Matters is an important new initiative that will support neurodivergent young people in mainstream secondary schools. By championing asset-based approaches, empowering young people, raising awareness and making schools more neuro-inclusive environments, Difference Matters will improve neurodivergent young people's experiences of school, reducing absenteeism, suspensions or exclusions. The programme is set to be piloted in 7 boroughs, where the VRU has established a clear need and built strong relationships through the provision of Talk Matters (PCD 1366): Bexley, Havering, Southwark, Sutton, Waltham Forest, Lewisham and Lambeth.

- 1.5 The initiative was developed by London's Violence Reduction Unit and Young People's Action Group in partnership with neurodivergent young people, those who care about them and professional experts, through a research, consultation and co-development exercise conducted from April-August 2024. It was crucial that young people were at the heart of this process, and that schools and local authorities were also involved in the development of the programme, so that it is effective, engaging and feasible to deliver in schools.

- 1.6 We worked with a lived experience partner (Resources for Autism), a research consultant (ECORYS) and an Advisory Group of experts by experience and profession to ensure that this ground-breaking initiative is carefully designed and developed with the stakeholders that will be most impacted by it. 78 young people and 50-70 professionals took part in the consultation, helping to shape the model. The VRU is now in a position to commission the

programme for delivery in schools centred over two academic years from September 2025 – August 2027, with a set-up period before this (February to August 2025).

- 1.7 Findings clearly highlighted the importance of targeting Difference Matters in mainstream secondary schools, where neurodivergent young people tell us they experience the most acute challenges. E.g. 49% reported not having any friends at school, 60% reported finding lunchtimes, transitioning between lessons, break times, the start and end of the school day overwhelming and 57% reported that they missed most (34%) or a few days (23%) at school. Education professionals told us that primary schools tended to be more neuroinclusive environments, e.g. due to greater flexibility in behaviour and uniform policies, better links with parents and carers, and a more static routine where children are largely taught in one class by one teacher. This is a departure from our original proposal to deliver Difference Matters in primary school but critical to addressing the concerns highlighted by young people and their parents.

2. Issues for consideration

2.1. Difference Matters Commissioning

The VRU is seeking permission to commission Difference Matters via: 7 grants to local authorities: Bexley, Havering, Southwark, Sutton, Waltham Forest, Lewisham and Lambeth (as set out in PCD 1366) plus 1 contract to a Multi-Academy Trust ('MAT'). The VRU is proposing to allocate the bulk of the funding through grants to the 7 identified local authorities but also to offer a contract to 1 major Multi-Academy Trust, which will have presence in these local authorities and wider reach through a network of schools across London. Bringing a MAT into the pilot will help share inclusive practice across their school network, amplifying the strategic impact of the programme in promoting inclusion. We anticipate the grants and the contract will span February 2025-August 2027.

- 2.2. Each of the 8 grant and contract holders will identify two secondary schools and will reference them when applying for the grant/contract. The MAT will be chosen through an Invitation to Quote process and will need to demonstrate a presence within the 7 boroughs identified plus an expansive network of schools across the city and a commitment to sharing inclusive practice through this network.

- 2.3. The VRU is also seeking permission to procure provision of specialist training, consultancy and to facilitate peer networks for education professionals, alongside a specialist provision of support for neurodivergent young people which will enable student voice through facilitated student action groups for all schools involved in the pilot across two contracts, anticipated to span May 2025-August 2027, and held centrally in order to maximise value for money and strategic impact across the boroughs and MAT network.

2.4. Difference Matters Additional Spend Allocation

The VRU aims to conduct a robust impact and process evaluation of the pilot Difference Matters programme and is therefore requesting permission to allocate a further £0.100m (c.10% of the overall programme budget) to procure an evaluator to deliver this service. This will enable the VRU to test the efficacy of Difference Matters in line with our commitment to

interrogating what works and investing in evidence-based approaches.

- 2.5. This will need to start at the commencement of delivery of Difference Matters and continue after it in order to allow time for the collection of data following the programme's completion, therefore spanning FY 25/26, 26/27 and 27/28. Therefore we anticipate the contract for the evaluator will span May 2025-December 2027.
- 2.6. The VRU is also seeking permission to allocate an additional £0.050m to the Difference Matters programme budget to contribute to the cost of high-quality neurodiversity training for education professionals, and the establishment of pan-borough/MAT clusters in each of the 7 local authority areas and MAT, for the purpose of sharing good practice and learning developed through the pilot. This will support the VRU's aims to promote inclusive practice under London's Inclusion Charter.

3. Financial Comment

- 3.1. The VRU currently have approval to allocate £1.000m in grants through Difference Matters from 2024/2025-2025/2026 (PCD 1366), the expenditure for the £1.000m is now expected to be incurred from 2024/25 to 2026/27 as shown in the table below.
- 3.2. The table below aligns to the latest 2024/25 forecast and draft 2025/26 budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)
- 3.3. This decision is seeking approval for two additional items:
- uplift the Difference Matters Programme by an additional £0.050m from Mayoral funding in 2027/28 for draft for neurodiversity training for education professionals and local clusters for sharing good practice
 - £0.100m for the Difference Matters evaluation

	2024/2025 £m	2025/2026 £m	2026/2027 £m	2027/2028 £m	Total £m	Funding Source
Difference Matters	0.200	0.400	0.400	0.000	1.000	PCD 1366 (Mayoral Funding)
Difference Matters uplift	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.050	0.050	Mayoral funding
Difference Matters Evaluation	0.000	0.040	0.040	0.020	0.100	Mayoral funding
Total	0.200	0.440	0.440	0.070	1.150	

4. Legal Comments

- 4.1. MOPAC's general powers are set out in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 (the 2011 Act). Section 3(6) of the 2011 Act provides that MOPAC must "secure the maintenance of the Metropolitan Police Service and secure that the Metropolitan Police Service is efficient and effective." This is a broad power, and the initiatives appear to be part of a number of proposals which are aimed at supporting victims of crime to enable the efficiency and effectiveness of the police service. In addition, under Schedule 3, paragraph 7 MOPAC has

wide incidental powers to “do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the exercise of the functions of the Office.” Paragraph 7(2) (a) provides that this includes entering into contracts and other agreements.

4.2. Paragraph 4.8 (8) and 4.13 (1), (2) of the MOPAC Scheme of Delegation and Consent provides that the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime (DMPC) has delegated authority to:

- Approve bids for grant/contract funding made and all offers made of grant/contract funding; and/or where appropriate a strategy for grant giving /procurement .
- Approve the strategy for the award of individual grants/contracts and/ or the award of all individual grants/contracts whether to secure or contribute to securing crime reduction in London or for other purposes.

4.3. Officers can confirm that the DMPC has the legal authority to agree this decision.

5. Commercial Issues

5.1. This decision is seeking approval to provide grants to 7 local authorities via an invitation to apply process. This decision is also seeking approval to provide a contract to 1 MAT via a competitive quote process inviting a minimum of 3 MAT's to submit a proposal. This is to ensure we are achieving value for money and approaching MAT's who meet the minimum criteria (including footprint in the 7 local authorities, network of schools across London and commitment to sharing inclusive practice).

5.2. We can confirm that MOPAC has the legal powers to issue these grants and contracts as demonstrated in the legal comments. The Local Authorities will be asked to submit costs to deliver the outcomes they have outlined in their application. Programme managers assess the full application including the costs to ensure that the VRU is obtaining value for money.

5.3. The specialist provision of training for education professionals at a contract value of £0.050m will be procured via an invitation to quote inviting a minimum of 3 providers to submit a response ensuring there is sufficient competition.

5.4. The specialist provision of support for neurodivergent young people at a contract value of £0.180m will be procured via a below-threshold open tender to ensure the opportunity is accessible to a wide market base increasing competition as the marketplace is quite specialist.

5.5. With an estimated total contract value of £0.100m, the evaluation partner will be brought to market via a competitive below-threshold open tendering process to obtain a quality service and ensure value for money.

6. Public Health Approach

6.1. The spend plan takes a public health approach to tackling violence, which means looking at violence not as isolated incidents or solely a police enforcement problem. Instead, this

approach looks at violence as a preventable consequence of a range of factors, such as adverse early-life experiences, or harmful social or community experiences and influences.

- 6.2. Difference Matters has been developed and set up in a way that ensures fidelity to the VRU's public health approach to violence reduction. In scoping and developing the programme hearing from young people and communities, as well as families, and professionals in the education system was emphasised to understand what is important, what can be improved, and how. This is in line with the VRU's public health approach to violence reduction focusing on tackling the causes of violence to enable effective early intervention and prevention.
- 6.3. By recognising the link between exclusion, absenteeism, violence and exploitation, the VRU's education work aims to inform future policy and investment in preventing forms of educational exclusion at an early stage, improving access quality education and positive opportunities for all young people.

7. GDPR and Data Privacy

- 7.1. MOPAC will adhere to the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and ensure that any organisations who are commissioned to do work with or on behalf of MOPAC are fully compliant with the policy and understand their GDPR responsibilities. Suppliers will be asked to provide a Data Protection Impact Assessment.
- 7.2. All contracts will include clear provisions relating to compliance in this area, and in relation to the processing of personal data. These terms will be drafted following consultation with MOPAC's GDPR Project Manager.

8. Equality Comments

- 8.1. MOPAC is required to comply with the public sector equality duty set out in section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010. This requires MOPAC to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations by reference to people with protected characteristics. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 8.2. The VRU are committed to promoting equality and participation in all their activities, whether this is related to the work we do with our external stakeholders or whether this is related to our responsibilities as an employer. As public authorities we are also required to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations when making decisions and developing policies. To do this, it is necessary to understand the potential impacts of the range of internal and external activities on different groups of people.
- 8.3. An equality impact assessment will be undertaken for the programme to ensure that all protected characteristics are considered in the commissioning and delivery of this work.

8.4. This work will pay particular attention to the stark disproportionalities seen in school exclusion and focus on equitable practices in education looking at areas such as behavioural policies, the design of school environments and adaptive teaching practices.

9. Background/supporting papers.

PCD 1366 - Education Matters – ‘Talk Matters’ & ‘Difference Matters’ Primary School Programmes

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 MOPAC website following approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision, it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.

Part 1 Deferral:

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

If yes, for what reason:

Until what date: N/A

Part 2 Confidentiality: Only the facts or advice considered as likely to be exempt from disclosure under the FOIA should be in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a **Part 2** form – No

ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION	<i>Tick to confirm statement (ü)</i>
Financial Advice The Strategic Finance and Resource Management Team has been consulted on this proposal.	√
Legal Advice Legal advice is not required.	√
Equalities Advice: Equality and diversity issues are covered in the body of the report. The Workforce Development Officer has been consulted on the equalities and diversity issues within this report.	√
Public Health Approach Due diligence has been given to determine whether the programme sits within the Violence Reduction Unit's public approach to reducing violence.	√
Commercial Issues The Contract Management Team has been consulted on the commercial issues within this report. The proposal is in keeping with the GLA Group Responsible Procurement Policy.	√
GDPR/Data Privacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A DPIA is not required. 	√
Drafting Officer Coralyn Burge has drafted this report in accordance with MOPAC procedures.	√
Director/Head of Service The Director of VRU has reviewed the request and is satisfied it is correct and consistent with the MOPAC's plans and priorities.	√

Chief Executive Officer

I have been consulted about the proposal and confirm that financial, legal and equalities advice has been taken into account in the preparation of this report. I am satisfied that this is an appropriate request to be submitted to the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime.

Signature
_____**Date 15/10/2024**