

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

REQUEST FOR MAYORAL DECISION – MD3355

Extension of the Mayor's Get Online London programme

Executive summary:

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) is seeking to support projects that deliver against digital inclusion outcomes with funding of up to £300,000, so long as this funding can be spent by 31 March 2025.

To deliver on his ambitions for digital inclusion, the Mayor has piloted and supported the Get Online London service, in partnership with the London Office of Technology and Innovation, and Good Things Foundation. This programme has supported 123,928 people to date and established a network of 1,106 trusted community spaces where digital inclusion support can be accessed. The Get Online London service is funded until June 2025, after which it will become rolled into the UK-wide National Digital Inclusion network. Londoners will still be able to access the service; but it will no longer provide the same level of support or be set up to respond directly to the capital's needs in the same way.

Using this existing programme, the Mayor is recommended to use the DSIT funding to extend Get Online London as a specific London-targeted service by a further 18 months, to support an estimated 108,000 more Londoners.

Decision:

That the Mayor approves the receipt of £300,000 from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, and expenditure of the same, to extend the Get Online London programme by 18 months to December 2026.

Mayor of London

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

Signature:



Date:

18/3/25

PART I – NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE TO THE MAYOR

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. Digital exclusion is a major issue in London, impacting people's health, education and work outcomes. It can prevent people from fully participating in society, as many essential services, economic opportunities, and methods of communication and social interaction are now exclusively via online platforms. There are a significant number of Londoners that do not have the connectivity they need to access essential services. Data from Good Things Foundation shows that around two million residents across the capital still have very limited digital engagement – lacking their own device, or facing difficulties with online services. According to data from the Lloyds Consumer Index, over 270,000 Londoners are estimated to be completely offline, with no internet access at all.¹ Those lacking digital skills, connectivity or access to a suitable device cannot use online services, learn, or work from home.
- 1.2. The London Recovery Board, chaired jointly by the Mayor of London and the Chair of London Councils, identified Digital Access for All as one of its nine recovery missions. This included the strategic objective that every Londoner should have access to good connectivity, basic digital skills and the device or support they need to be online by 2025.
- 1.3. The Mayor provided funding to London Councils' London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI) as a contribution to its costs of delivering a Digital Inclusion Innovation Programme. Through research undertaken as part of this programme, as well as trials and tests, LOTI identified that – due to the complex and varied nature of digital exclusion – a service was required that would tackle three main challenges: access to devices; access to mobile data; and digital skills. (See Mayoral Decision (MD) [MD2809](#).)
- 1.4. To address this gap, grant funding was provided to help LOTI establish the Get Online London service as a pilot programme. This was the UK's first digital inclusion service, delivered by Good Things Foundation. The aim of the pilot phase was to create a service that provide digitally excluded Londoners with a device, data, and the skills training they needed. The funding also provided for sustainability research that would ensure the service could continue beyond June 2025, without additional GLA funding. (See [MD3077](#).)
- 1.5. To date, the following funding has been provided to support the Digital Inclusion Innovation Programme (see paragraph 1.3, above) and Get Online London (paragraph 1.4), as part of the Devices and Data programme budget:

Digital inclusion activities (Digital Inclusion Innovation Programme) and Get Online London spend	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Q1				£527,000
Q2	£214,150	£836,831.07		
Q3		£30,972.66	£573,000	
Q4	£137,706.61	£142,339.66	£50,000	£50,000
Total	£351,856.61	£1,010,143.39	£623,000	£577,000

¹ LOTI (2021), [Digital Inclusion in London](#)

- 1.6. The digital inclusion service, Get Online London, has been successfully established and achieved the following:
- approximately 125,000 Londoners supported directly or indirectly
 - over 7,000 devices refurbished and put into the hands of digitally excluded Londoners
 - almost 90,000 data packages distributed to community hubs, with half issued to those most in need
 - 11,000 people using Learn My Way, a digital skills platform
 - over 1,100 active Digital Inclusion hubs (community hubs), from a baseline of 90 in July 2022.
- 1.7. The funding to support Get Online London ensured that London was the first region to receive a service of this kind and delivered rapid growth in the support available in London including the recruitment of digital inclusion hubs. Get Online London has already exceeded its targets and funding continues until June 2025. After that date, however, the service provided in London will be rolled into the national service that has since been established by Good Things Foundation. This will use the existing hubs that have been established in London, but will result in lower recruitment of new hubs, new devices secured for the device bank will not be ringfenced for London, and comparatively fewer Londoners supported compared to the dedicated London service.
- 1.8. While there is a strong desire to continue Get Online London and the additional support this provides to Londoners, GLA funding constraints mean this has not been possible beyond the current contract, and therefore without additional funding digital inclusion in London would be provided at the same level as national provision. The Mayor remains committed to tackling digital exclusion – as demonstrated by his recent donation of over 700 devices from the GLA Group, and his ask of businesses to make similar donations.
- 1.9. In February 2025, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) launched the Digital Inclusion Action Plan, which closely aligns with the Mayor's objectives around digital inclusion. The Plan has four key areas of focus:
- to open up opportunities through skills
 - tackle data and device poverty
 - break down barriers to digital services
 - build confidence.
- 1.10. As part of the government's digital inclusion work and available funding, DSIT is seeking to support a GLA project with funding of up to £300,000. The criteria for the funding states that this funding must be spent on revenue-funded activities that are expected to be delivered by 31 March 2025; and must support digital-inclusion outcomes.
- 1.11. In a proposal developed with Good Things Foundation (see appendix 1), it is estimated that an 18-month extension to the Get Online London contract would support an extra 108,000 digitally excluded Londoners; and deliver a comprehensive evaluation of the service.
- 1.12. To meet DSIT's spending deadline of 31 March 2025, if this MD is approved, the GLA will execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with DSIT. Simultaneously, we would begin a variation to our existing grant agreement with LOTI, who will in turn invoice the GLA for the full funding amount. Lastly, through its own grant agreement with Good Things Foundation, LOTI will transfer the full funding amount to fund the extension of Get Online London.
- 1.13. Good Things Foundation has proposed to financially restructure the GLA/LOTI-funded Get Online London delivery by transferring £300,000 from the current GLA/LOTI budget into future periods; and

replacing it with the available DSIT underspend. This restructuring will extend the programme delivery by 18 months, enhancing its impact for digitally excluded Londoners. It also enables a comprehensive evaluation approach. This is an approach that has been agreed with DSIT.

- 1.14. With respect to digital skills initiatives, a 2022 study by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr)² estimated that, for every £1 invested in training people to become more digitally able, there is a total benefit of almost £9.48. This benefit-cost ratio (BCR) represents 'very good' value for money (VfM), when compared to VfM categories in other parts of the public sector.³ The figure takes into account benefits to individual finances – such as savings through being able to access lower prices, and benefits to the public purse through people's ability to work or earn more as a result of learning basic digital skills. The specific categories of benefit identified by Cebr, and captured in the BCR, were:
- individuals – time savings from completing transactions online (e.g., banking and government); financial savings from online shopping; increased access to employment; and increased earnings potential
 - government – efficiency savings via the use of government transactional services, rather than in-person, paper-based or phone calls; and additional tax revenues from increased employment and earning power of beneficiaries
 - businesses – increased productivity by addressing skills shortages and being able to fill vacancies.
- 1.15. Channelling the funding through the existing service means the option is deliverable and offers good VfM, with a marginal cost per Londoner supported of just £7.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

- 2.1. Digital exclusion remains a key challenge in London, preventing those most in need from accessing services, financial savings and economic opportunities available online. There is both a social equity and a market failure rationale for public intervention to promote digital inclusion.
- 2.2. The Get Online London service is up and running, and has built momentum. This means the extra funding leads to additional outputs that directly benefit digitally excluded Londoners. Supporting the Get Online London service supports delivery against the government's areas of focus. It also sits within the guiding principle of delivering in partnership with local authorities; national and devolved governments; and private and third sectors.⁴
- 2.3. The funding extends the service for 18 months, and leads to the following net additional impacts:
- 44,000 Londoners supported directly,⁵ and a further 64,000 Londoners supported indirectly – totalling 108,000 Londoners⁶
 - 400 VCSE Network hubs – organisations that can provide digital devices, data and skills to Londoners
 - 10,000 beneficiaries using Learn My Way, an online platform that helps people gain basic digital skills and build confidence in using the internet
 - 2000 devices distributed, including refurbished laptops, mobile phones and tablets

² Cebr (2022), [The Economic Impact of Digital Inclusion](#)

³ See, for example, [DfT's](#) and [MHCLG's](#) VfM categories, where a BCR greater than 4 is considered to offer very high VfM.

⁴ DSIT (2025), [Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps](#)

⁵ Direct support refers to individuals who directly use one of the following services: data, device or Learn My Way.

⁶ Indirect support refers to the broader benefits experienced by friends and family members who gain access to devices and data through sharing.

- 19,000 mobile SIM cards data packages issued.

3. Equality comments

- 3.1. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, as a public authority, the Mayor of London must have 'due regard' of 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. Protected characteristics under the Equality Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, and marriage or civil partnership status (the duty in respect of this last characteristic is to eliminate unlawful discrimination only).
- 3.2. Reducing digital exclusion is a foundational step in supporting London's communities; improving access to services; and narrowing social, economic and health inequalities. Other important factors include older age; disabilities; learning difficulties; ethnic origin; location; culture and language; and low income. Research suggests that digital-inclusion initiatives are highly effective, supporting people across multiple aspects of their lives, including access to essential public and commercial services; employment; education; financial resilience; and reduced isolation.
- 3.3. The rationale for public intervention in this area is predominantly one of social equity: the Mayor believes that all Londoners should have equal access to the opportunities and services that are available online. For example, access to lower energy and food prices is vital for digitally excluded households living in poverty. Beyond this core rationale, digital inclusion also indirectly addresses a market failure, that of imperfect information.⁷ Helping people to get online means more consumers will have better price information (e.g. via price comparison websites) and access to online-exclusive deals, thereby helping to create a more competitive and efficient market.
- 3.4. The funding referenced in this decision will help to tackle the inequalities experienced among Londoners most affected by digital exclusion. According to Digital Nation UK 2024,⁸ a report published by Good Things Foundation, 37 per cent of those over 65 lack basic digital skills. For those with a disability or health condition, the proportion is 25 per cent. Across the UK, 2.4m households can't afford their mobile phone contract, and 0.6m young people lack home internet or a suitable device. It is estimated that around 270,000 Londoners face digital exclusion.

4. Other considerations

Links to Mayoral strategies and priorities

- 4.1. The Mayor made a manifesto pledge⁹ to "continue to support Londoners to get online, with free basic digital skills courses, refurbished laptops and smart devices donated by businesses and the public sector".
- 4.2. The Mayor's Upgrading London's Infrastructure mandate concerns access for Londoners to utility networks including digital connectivity. Delivery of this project would support the mandate's commitment to address structural inequalities and ensure equal access for all.
- 4.3. There are no conflicts of interest to declare for anyone involved in either drafting or clearance of this decision form.

Subsidy consideration

⁷ See HM Treasury (2022), [The Green Book](#), p.28-29

⁸ Good Things Foundation (2024), [Digital Nation | The UK's Digital Divide | Good Things Foundation](#)

⁹ Sadiq Khan, [A fairer, safer, greener London for everyone: 2024 Mayoral manifesto](#), p.56

- 4.4. GLA officers have carried out an analysis of the proposal against the Statutory Guidance for the UK Subsidy Control Regime. They have assessed that the Subsidy Control Regime is non-applicable in these circumstances because the proposed financial assistance does not constitute a subsidy.
- 4.5. In particular the proposed financial assistance fails to satisfy all limbs of the test set out in the Subsidy Control Act 2022. The beneficiary of the funding is not acting in as an “enterprise” in this context, London Councils being a Joint Committee for the purpose of local government legislation and not engaged in the provision of chargeable goods or services on a market.

5. Financial comments

- 5.1. This Mayoral Decision seeks approval for the receipt of a grant from DSIT for the value of £300,000. This funding will be used to extend the Get Online London programme by 18 months.
- 5.2. In order to be awarded the grant funding the GLA is required to submit a VfM assessment to demonstrate how the funding is to be spent and that VfM is being achieved.
- 5.3. It is important to note that the 2025-26 budget has yet to be approved and as such, is still subject to change.
- 5.4. The expenditure for this project will be included within the proposed Upgrading London’s Infrastructure programme and aligns with the draft 2025-26 budget.

6. Legal comments

- 6.1. The foregoing paragraphs of this report indicate that the decisions requested of the Mayor 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, social development or improvement of the environment, in Greater London.
- 6.2. In implementing the proposals in respect of which a decision is sought, officers should comply 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 UK
 - consult with appropriate bodies.
- 6.3. In taking the decisions requested, the Mayor must have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 – namely the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010; and advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (race, disability, age, sex, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment) and persons who do not. To this end, the Mayor should have particular regard to paragraph 3 (above) of this report.
- 6.4. The decisions requested of the Mayor indicate that the proposed funding amounts to the provision of grant funding and not a not the payment for services. Officers must ensure that the funding is distributed fairly; transparently; and in accordance with the GLA’s equalities, and with the requirements of section 12 of the GLA’s Contracts and Funding Code.

- 6.5. The Subsidy Control Act 2022 requires that grant funding be assessed in relation to its four-limbed test. Officers have made this assessment at paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5 and have concluded that the proposed funding does not amount to a subsidy.
- 6.6. If the Mayor makes the decisions sought officers must ensure that:
- they are content that they can comply fully with the conditions upon the which the funding has been awarded by DSIT
 - no reliance is placed on the DSIT funding until a legal binding commitment to its award is secured
 - the GLA's current funding agreement with London Councils is varied to reflect the award of and conditions applicable to the award of the additional funding before any commitment to fund is made.

7. Planned delivery approach and next steps

- 7.1. This work will be delivered according to the following timetable:

Activity	Timeline
Execute MoU with DSIT	March 2025
Announcement	April 2025
Delivery start date	Underway
Delivery end date	December 2026
Project closure	December 2026

Appendices and supporting papers:

Appendix 1: Proposal for 18-month extension of the Get Online London service.

Appendix 2: Categories of benefits from digital skills interventions – evidence from Cebr report.

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 either be published 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:

Sara Kelly has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

✓

Sponsoring Director:

Phil Graham has reviewed the request and is satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

✓

Mayoral Adviser:

Howard Dawber has been consulted about the proposal and agrees the recommendations.

✓

Advice:

The Finance and Legal teams have commented on this proposal.

✓

Mayoral Delivery Board

This decision was agreed by the Mayoral Delivery Board on 17 March 2025.

✓

CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER:

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

Signature

Fay Hurren

Date

17/03/2025

CHIEF OF STAFF:

I am satisfied that this is an appropriate request to be submitted to the Mayor.

Signature

D. Bellamy

Date

17/03/2025