

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

REQUEST FOR MAYORAL DECISION – MD3011

Funding the extension of sub-regional digital connectivity leads

Executive summary:

In October 2019, the Mayor approved the award of grant funding at a sub-regional level for two years to assist with boroughs' costs of appointing officers to lead work on maximising investment in digital connectivity and infrastructure.

The officers are now in post helping the boroughs deliver projects which correspond with London Digital Access for All mission. They work with boroughs and operators to secure greater investment in mobile and broadband infrastructure, ensuring more Londoners can access the connectivity they need.

In order that this work can continue, this decision requests approval to extend funding to the sub-regional partnerships for these posts for another 12 months.

Decision:

That the Mayor:

- i. approves expenditure of £500,000 of the GLA budget, allocated for 2022-23, for the Digital Access for All recovery mission to extend funding for the current eight sub-regional digital connectivity posts for a further one-year period (the current funding was approved under [MD2530](#))
- ii. delegates authority to the Executive Director of Good Growth to approve the making of further grants related to sub-regional digital connectivity posts, and to authorise any further extension of these posts in the future.

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:

28/7/22

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

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. In October 2019, in order to support boroughs with the resource they needed to maximise investment in connectivity in their areas, the Mayor approved the award of £1m from the GLA's Strategic Investment Fund for new posts in the sub-regional partnerships. The funding approval is set out in MD2530. The Connected London team worked with London Councils and boroughs to agree a regional approach, and to shape the roles and responsibilities of the posts to match the requirements of each sub-region. Appointments were made in 2020. The people appointed to these sub-regional posts help boroughs with planning and coordination for digital connectivity deployment. They support boroughs to deliver full-fibre and stimulate further investment in London.
- 1.2. Their activities also align with key elements of the Digital Access for All mission, one of the nine missions of the London Recovery Programme. Its objective is that every Londoner should have access to good connectivity, basic skills, and the devices or support they need be online by 2025.
- 1.3. These roles have brought many benefits:
 - They have shown that developing and maintaining a strong working relationship between boroughs and the industry creates opportunities to achieve the goals of the Digital Access for All mission, identifying areas of opportunity and coordinating policy and best practice. They have worked on programmes to increase the awareness, take-up and affordability of digital services by focusing on skills and demand stimulation.
 - Sub-regional officers have established regional digital connectivity groups where digital borough officers come together to share their experiences, learn from each other and provide guidance on challenging issues they face in rolling out connectivity. These groups also benefit from attendance of telecommunication suppliers, officials from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and others who present key information to assist in accelerating digital programmes.
 - Postholders have helped many boroughs establish master wayleave agreements that allow suppliers to install full-fibre connections into social housing properties.
 - These roles have helped secure and deliver social value commitments as a part of wayleave agreements – including the recruitment of digital ambassadors to help improve residents' digital skills, discounted connections and other benefits for residents.
- 1.4. Some examples of the work carried out by the sub-regional postholders are set out below:
 - They played a critical role in shaping the borough-led aspects of the Digital Access for All mission whilst borough officers were occupied dealing with more immediate COVID-19 recovery.
 - Central London Forward's (CLF's) sub-regional officers have worked with their planning colleagues on developing guidance to better support planners approving telecoms applications.
 - CLF has also established a regional digital strategy to support boroughs in the delivery of their digital ambitions.
 - The West London Alliance (WLA) has brought together operators to highlight regeneration opportunities as a way of securing investment.
 - CLF supports regular engagement with mobile and broadband operators and providers to help increase dialogue and collaboration.

- Local London (LL) recently ran nine procurements to support the upgrading of public sites, and to secure wider investment. LL contracted £5m of digital infrastructure investment across the region that has extended the footprint of wholesale fibre; and resulted in reduced costs to boroughs, additional commercial investment, economic development and social benefits.
- WLA successfully secured DCMS Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator funding to roll out advanced wireless networks. This funding will support quicker deployment of new wireless networks in West London, delivering benefits for businesses, residents and public services.

1.5. Given the significant positive impact of the posts, the four sub-regional partnerships are looking to establish alternative sources of funding to continue them. The extension of the GLA funding for a further year will not only help to continue the coordination of engagement between industry and boroughs as new sources of funding are sought but will also help them to develop a business case for other funding sources to replace GLA funding over time. The funding options that the sub-regions have been exploring include:

- securing contributions from externally funded programmes and projects that the postholders would help to deliver
- building on current work on 5G roll-out to make a business case for sub-regional working, funded by contributions from operators and public funds
- forming a commissioning alliance to procure digital services, creating revenue from savings made
- partnering with London universities to invest in technology start-ups in the digital infrastructure sector.

1.6. To deliver the extension of the GLA funding, a change request will be prepared to amend the existing grant agreements in place.

1.7. The 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 in the future, will help avoid repetition of process, given that any future grant would be made on the same basis.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

2.1. The sub-regional digital connectivity roles align with the aims of the Mayor's Connected London programme, as well as those of the Digital Access for All mission. In particular, they support the following objectives:

- improve digital connectivity in under-served homes and areas
- coordinate digital connectivity work in London boroughs, including around digital inclusion
- support boroughs to develop their own digital strategies and toolkits
- make boroughs more appealing for digital inward investment, and attract highly skilled digital industries into boroughs, creating job opportunities for Londoners
- encourage greater coordination and senior management engagement – for example, through borough digital programme boards, to accelerate the roll-out of full-fibre and mobile connectivity.

2.2. The sub-regions will develop further programmes and projects to drive investment into boroughs and remove barriers to rolling out connectivity. Outcomes will include:

- targeted investment in digital infrastructure, by engaging with industry, sharing of boroughs' economic development plans, and collating and mapping available data
- new or improved digital services, by rolling out and coordinating projects to upgrade public-sector sites; for example, the WLA's Fibre West Programme will deliver 176 new connections to public buildings in areas with poor connectivity
- faster 5G deployments, by working better with industry, including through the WLA's Digital Connectivity Accelerator project
- better collaboration and coordination between sub-regions, local authorities, the GLA, providers, employers and other stakeholders through stakeholder management and networking opportunities
- opportunities to deliver future infrastructure and digital inclusion projects by working with the London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI) on the Digital Inclusion Innovation Programme
- a reduction in the number of digitally excluded Londoners as a result of supporting boroughs to include social value in wayleaves and procurement agreements; for example, operators providing free connections to vulnerable residents and community buildings.

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, as well as to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who have a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 3.2. Research undertaken by LOTI as part of the Digital Access for All mission shows that older Londoners; those with disabilities and learning difficulties; those with a minority ethnic origin, culture and language; those based in areas where connectivity is poor; and those on a low income are more likely to be digitally excluded. The 2016-17 Family Resources Survey reports that 56 per cent of adult internet non-users are disabled, even though disabled adults only make up 22 per cent of the UK population. The extension of the sub-regional roles will continue to help deliver the Digital Access for All recovery mission, which aims to address digital exclusion and improve Londoners' access to affordable connectivity; devices; and basic digital skills.
- 3.3. Reducing digital exclusion is key in supporting London's communities by improving access to services and narrowing social, economic and health inequalities.
- 3.4. The sub-regional officers will support boroughs to use digital connectivity grant funding to deliver services to community centres, sheltered accommodation and CCTV locations. Services to these locations will improve accessibility and reduce costs to digital inclusion.
- 3.5. Specific projects developed in this programme will undergo individual assessments to ensure the public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010 is complied with. Any potential negative equalities impacts will be identified, and relevant mitigations considered.

4. Other considerations

- 4.1. The key risks are set out in the table below.

Risk	Impact	Mitigation	Post-mitigation RAG rating
Sub-regional posts do not secure alternative funding beyond the period covered by GLA funding.	Boroughs are not adequately resourced to engage with strategic work on digital infrastructure. Boroughs will cease to act collectively in encouraging investment and adopting best practice and be limited in their ability to work towards the objectives of the Digital Access for All mission.	GLA identification of opportunities and support with applications for externally funded programmes and projects that the roles will be responsible for delivering. Work with sub-regions to develop business cases and demonstrate success and added value the roles provide to stakeholders, in order to support the case for future contributions to the roles.	Amber
Boroughs do not engage with the sub-regional posts and therefore do not realise benefits of sub-regional coordination.	Any borough that is not engaged could see a more limited impact of investment by network operators; would not be able to access economies of scale available to those working with other sub-regions; and would not be able to access as many opportunities coordinated at the sub-regional level.	GLA to support with borough engagement and act as an advocate for the work of the roles. Sub-regional partnerships to ensure alignment of the connectivity work programmes with boroughs' other identified objectives/priorities. This approach has proved successful to date.	Green
Existing postholder vacating the role.	This will lead to a gap in delivery of the sub-regional programme and funding.	Experience to date has shown little turnover of roles. There are two postholders for each sub-region. Whilst a sub-region recruits for any vacant post, there is still an officer to continue with their programme. The GLA will support the region by being part of the shortlisting process and interview panel.	Green

4.2. The funding of the sub-regional posts, and the work the postholders carry out, links to several mayoral strategies and priorities:

- Policy SI 6 in the London Plan sets out the need to improve digital connectivity across London. It explains that the Mayor will work to increase awareness and capability amongst boroughs and

developers of the effective provision of digital connectivity; and to support the delivery of policy requirements. It highlights that the Mayor will also help to identify spatial gaps in connectivity and overcome barriers to delivery to address this form of digital exclusion, in particular through his Connected London work. Implementation of Policy SI 6 will ensure that all new-builds in London will benefit from the gigabit-capable speeds and mobile connectivity that Londoners need. The sub-regional postholders have helped to put this policy into practice, facilitating master wayleave agreements with boroughs and allowing suppliers to install full-fibre connections into social housing properties.

- The Digital Access for All mission is for every Londoner to have access to good connectivity, basic digital skills, and the devices or support they need to be online by 2025. The sub-regional roles have helped boroughs to increase the speed and scale of the roll-out of digital infrastructure across London.
- Mission 3 of the Smarter London Together roadmap is to launch a new Connected London programme to coordinate connectivity and 5G projects. The sub-regional roles work as part of the Connected London programme by liaising with providers and boroughs to facilitate the deployment of fibre and 5G, tackling 'not-spots', and increasing the availability of digital services to Londoners. The Mayor's Economic Development Strategy for London includes an action for the Mayor to introduce a programme to tackle barriers to provision of fast, reliable digital connectivity. The programme includes promoting best practice and innovation; advocating the use of public-sector assets for digital connectivity; and championing the use of standardised agreements. These are all tasks that the sub-regional roles carry out across London, especially through their work with boroughs and providers on master wayleave agreements.

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

5. Financial comments

- 5.1. Approval is sought for expenditure of up to £500,000 to extend current arrangements in place with partners for eight sub-regional digital connectivity posts working to deliver the outcomes required of the Digital Access for All mission.
- 5.2. This expenditure will be funded from approved programme budgets in place for 2022-23.
- 5.3. Approval is also sought to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Good Growth to approve the making of further grants related to sub-regional digital connectivity posts; and to authorise any further extension of these posts subject to funding being available in the future.

6. Legal comments

- 6.1 The foregoing sections 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 which are facilitative of, 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 Mayor 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 Mayor should have particular regard to section 3 (above) of this report.
- 6.3 Officers have indicated that expenditure in respect of which approval is sought concerns the award of grant funding, it is 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 that the relevant grant-funding agreements in place are varied in accordance with their provisions before any commitment to provide the additional funding is made.
- 6.4 The Mayor may delegate the exercise of the GLA's powers to the Executive Director of Good Growth as proposed, should he wish.

7. Planned delivery approach and next steps

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

Activity	Timeline
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Mayoral decision signed	July 2022
Submit a change request to extend the sub-regional roles	August 2022
Change request approved	September 2022
Confirm extension of post with the sub-regions	October 2022
Transfer funds to each sub-region	November 2022

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 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:

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

✓

Mayoral Adviser:

Theo Blackwell has been consulted about the proposal and agrees the recommendations.

✓

Advice:

The Finance and Legal teams have commented on this proposal

✓

Corporate Investment Board

This decision was agreed by the Corporate Investment Board on 25 July 2022.

✓

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RESOURCES:

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

Signature

Date

D. Bone

25/7/22

CHIEF OF STAFF:

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

Signature

Date

D. Bellamy

24/7/22

