

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

REQUEST FOR MAYORAL DECISION – MD2447

Title: Voter registration pilot project

Executive Summary:

This Mayoral Decision seeks approval for a pilot programme of work to reduce inequalities in voter registration among young people across London. London currently has the lowest proportion of eligible voters registered to vote of the UK regions and nations. Young people, who are more likely to be recent home movers, renters and from a BAME background, are one of the most under-registered groups.

This work includes plans to commission a London Voter Registration Week and accompanying resources delivered by an external partner, with support from the London Assembly and the Mayor of London. The work would be assisted by a newly-established London Voter Registration Partnership, bringing together key stakeholders including London boroughs and the Electoral Commission, and a broad civil society coalition.

Decision:

That the Mayor approves expenditure of £100,000 on a 2019 voter registration pilot project.

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:

19/3/19

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

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. Civic participation is a key pillar of social integration. Not being registered to vote has other significant impacts, such as not being able to be selected for jury service, and increased difficulties in gaining a credit rating.
- 1.2. The voter registration pilot project builds on the social integration initiatives approved in MD2192 (Social Integration Programme), the workstreams included in the Citizenship and Integration Initiative approved in DD2176 (Citizenship and Integration Initiative) and DD2183 (Active Citizenship).
- 1.3. Although the proposed budget is less than £150,000, this proposal is being approved via a mayoral decision on the basis that it is novel, repercussive or potentially contentious, namely a) it is a pilot which may develop into a longer term and potentially larger scale programme of work, and b) this is a new area of work for the GLA which is potentially controversial and which must take place within very strict legal constraints. As the proposal has at its heart a partnership approach and given the key role of the London Assembly on these issues, this proposal has already been discussed with leaders of the London Assembly political groups and will be submitted for consultation by the London Assembly's GLA Oversight Committee before implementation begins.
- 1.4. A 2019 Cabinet Office paper highlights that London's current voter registration rate (85%) is the lowest of the UK regions and nations.
- 1.5. Analysis from the Electoral Commission, GLA's Intelligence Unit and civil society organisations has found that:
 - People less likely to be registered to vote include 16 - 24-year olds, home-movers, private renters, students and some BAME groups;
 - Young people are more likely to have one or more of the characteristics of other under-registered demographics, namely they are more likely to be renters, frequent home movers (especially students) and to be a member of an ethnic (and faith) minority group; and
 - An estimated 320,000 16 – 24-year-old Londoners are not on the electoral roll.
- 1.6. The GLA has a statutory power to improve social development in London and promoting voter registration fits within this remit. The GLA's activities to promote voter registration must be framed within its general powers to facilitate, coordinate or cooperate with the activities of other public bodies with statutory responsibility for voter registration, be 'impersonal' and politically neutral (both in terms of messaging and marketing and communication strategy), and be kept separate from the activity of the Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO).
- 1.7. Since the publication of the Social Integration Strategy, the GLA Communities and Social Policy (CSP) Unit has engaged with local authority electoral registration officers (EROs), the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) and with a range of civil society groups to develop an understanding of what interventions might help increase civic participation among under-registered and under-represented Londoners.
- 1.8. Underpinning this programme will be the creation of a London Voter Registration Partnership. The GLA will invite representatives from local authorities, the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Electoral Commission, and schools, colleges and universities, to form a London Voter Registration

Partnership that would act as an advisory group to inform and advise the GLA on its voter registration activities. This could be a long-term strategic partnership that enables the GLA to maintain close working relationships with London's boroughs and the Electoral Commission. Depending on the outcomes of the pilot project, the Partnership could support and co-ordinate a longer-term programme of work over the coming years, with an emphasis on learning and evaluation. In the shorter term, its role would include discussing and reviewing specifications for proposed GLA-commissioned work to ensure that this would be complementary to other activities at local level across London.

1.9. The voter registration pilot project (total budget £100,000) will be composed of the following workstreams:

- **Workstream 1:** an online London Voter Registration Week (LVRW) campaign planned to take place between 16 and 22 September. This workstream will involve commissioning a delivery partner, via a procurement process, to develop a campaign hub; coordinate activity with borough electoral registration services; build a broad coalition of influencers, civil society organisations, education institutions and other organisations that can reach young people at scale; and evaluate the impact of the pilot and produce a report of lessons learned. The budget for this workstream is £80,000.
- **Workstream 2:** London Voter Registration guidance and toolkits, capacity building resources that will not be election-specific to allow London's schools, colleges and universities to support students and teachers to run their own voter registration drives. This will reinforce the long-term nature of the project and help put active civic participation firmly on the calendar of London civil society every academic year. The GLA would ensure that the commissioned resources are available to all stakeholders by publishing all information on the hub, and by writing to council leads, EROs and Chief Executives to invite them to take part and promote the resources to schools and colleges by imbedding them on their platforms and pointing their networks and stakeholders to them. The budget for this workstream is £20,000.

This workstream will also be linked to the six modules on Political Literacy, aimed at teachers at Key Stage 5, that the GLA has already commissioned ShoutOut UK to develop as part of the London Curriculum. They would be launched alongside the other resources during the LVRW.

- **Workstream 3:** advocacy to support Workstreams 1 and 2 by seeking process changes which would make it easier to register to vote. Working closely with the local authorities means that some of these reforms could be agreed via the Partnership and trialled during LVRW.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

2.1. The following objectives are expected to be delivered through the voter registration pilot project:

- A successful LVRW that will see 50,000 16-24-year olds registered to vote and 5,000 downloads of voter registration guidance and toolkits, aimed at both students and teachers, that support local authorities to build capacity within local schools, colleges and universities to increase voter registration rates for 16-24-year olds; and
- The creation of a London Voter Registration Partnership that would act as an advisory group to inform and advise the GLA on its pilot voter registration activities, share best practice and coordinate activity beyond the pilot project as appropriate.

2.2. The voter registration pilot project will have the following outcomes:

- Raised awareness about how Londoners can participate in democratic processes;

- Increased registration rates, and reduced inequalities in voter registration rates; and
- The development of a wide coalition of London based organisations, institutions and influencers to promote voter registration activities.

3. Equality comments

- 3.1. Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, as public authorities, the Mayor and GLA must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and any conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act; and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not. Relevant protected characteristics under the Equality Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Compliance with the Equality Act may involve, in particular, removing or minimising any disadvantage suffered by those who share a relevant protected characteristic, taking steps to meet the needs of such people; and encouraging them to participate in public life, or in any other activity where their participation is disproportionately low, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding. In limited circumstances it may require treating people with a protected characteristic more favourably than those without the characteristic.
- 3.2. The voter registration project has a focus on tackling inequalities and barriers to civic participation among groups of Londoners who are currently less likely to be engaged, many of whom share relevant protected characteristics, and therefore reflects the requirements of the PSED regarding removing or minimising disadvantage and encouraging participation in public life.

4. Other considerations

Key risks and issues:

Risk	Mitigation	Current probability (1-4)	Current impact (1-4)	RAG	GLA Risk Owner
Reputational - activities are perceived to be for any party's electoral gain rather than for the social development of the city.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission a delivery partner who is an expert in the field, has a successful track record of increasing voter registration, has brought together a wide coalition in the past, and employs solid evaluation tools; • Secure cross-party support including via the Partnership, the Mayor of London, the London Assembly and the boroughs; • Ensure any activity is based on clear evidence; and • Careful consideration of appropriate communication channels/branding. 	2	3	A	Social Integration Team

Delivery – ensuring activities can be delivered before 23 Sept 2019 to avoid proximity to the 2020 Mayoral election.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure voter registration activities are immediately reviewed if a referendum or general election is called; • Make clear all stakeholders understand that the GLA must cease any activities in proximity to the 2020 elections; and • Undertake ‘soft’ market testing to ensure timescales are realistic. 	2	4	A	Social Integration Team
Evaluation – assessing the direct impact on voter registration rates.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the external partner’s activities can be measured and their impact on registration rates evaluated; and • Seek agreement from the government for their figures to be released on how many people reached their voter registration page by clicking through from the GLA’s social media channels, other GLA platforms and the LVRW hub. 	2	2	A	Social Integration Team

Links to Mayoral strategies and priorities

- 4.1 This pilot project is consistent with the high-level objective in the Mayor’s Social Integration Strategy, *All of Us*, to “equip more Londoners to participate in democratic processes”, and with the commitments set out in the Mayor’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, focusing on addressing the inequalities and barriers that are particularly detrimental to civic participation across London, but especially among young Londoners, and require specific interventions.

Consultation

- 4.2 In the development of this proposal, the GLA has extensively engaged with a diverse range of stakeholders, from civil society organisations, electoral administrators and the Electoral Commission. The proposal reflects these discussions and the issues they highlighted.

5. Financial comments

- 5.1. The expenditure of up to £100,000 on a 2019 voter registration pilot will be funded from the 2019-20 Social Integration Programme budget within the Communities and Social Policy Unit.

6. Legal comments

- 6.1. Encouragement to register to vote, including encouragement directed at particular areas or groups, is within the powers of the GLA under the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (GLA Act).
- 6.2. Electoral law gives specific statutory responsibilities for voter registration, and education about the elections, to electoral registration officers (EROs) in the boroughs, and the Electoral Commission. Section 31 of the GLA Act prevents the GLA from incurring expenditure in directly providing educational services. However, on the basis that promoting participation in the electoral process

further social cohesion and promotes social improvement within section 30 of the GLA Act, section 31(6) of the GLA Act allows the Mayor to undertake activities, including those that involve GLA expenditure, that entail co-operating with, or facilitating or coordinating the activities of, other bodies such as EROs, local authorities and the Electoral Commission.

- 6.3. The GLA's activities in this area must at all times be apolitical and not be able reasonably to be perceived as associated with the promotion of any political party or individual politician. They must also be kept distinct from the functions of the Greater London Returning Officer, whose actual and perceived impartiality is vital, and who has no role in respect of voter registration.
- 6.4. In light of this, the proposal to establish a London Voter Registration Partnership including key stakeholders such as EROs, local authorities and the Electoral Commission, to provide guidance and advice, and avoid duplication of activity and underline the non-partisan support for the project, is legally prudent.
- 6.5. Legal advice should be sought throughout the design and delivery phases with a view to ensuring compliance with the principles outlined above.

7. Planned delivery approach and next steps

Activity	Timeline
Set up the LVRW Partnership	End March / beginning April 2019
Procurement of contract	mid / end May 2019
Potential launch	15 September 2019
Delivery Start Date	16 September 2019
Final evaluation (self evaluation)	Start: 23 September 2019; End: 30 November 2019
Delivery End Date	22 September 2019
Project Closure	December 2019 (after the final evaluation)

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 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:

Dr. Elisabeth Pop has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

✓

Sponsoring Director:

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

✓

Mayoral Advisers:

Debbie Weekes-Bernard and Nick Bowes have been consulted about the proposal and agree 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 the 18 March 2019.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RESOURCES:

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

Signature

M. J. Ellis

Date

18.3.19

CHIEF OF STAFF:

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

Signature

D. Bellamy

Date

18/3/2019.

