

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR DECISION – ADD2439

Title: City Operations subscription to Babel Street

Executive Summary:

The Mayor has a strategic role in leading and communicating on incidents and events that affect the life of Londoners including public health crises, severe weather, crime, terrorism, public demonstrations and disorder, fires and disruption to transport or utilities.

Such incidents and events directly and indirectly impact on London's social development, its economy and its environment and Londoners rightly expect to hear from the Mayor in relation to them particularly where a major disruptive incident has occurred.

Huge volumes of open source data are available on internet hosted forums and this can both inform an assessment of potential disruption to the capital and provide a vital source of data to inform a response. However, it is difficult to identify such data in real-time without specific tools to filter and analyse it so as to provide assurance as to its integrity.

Babel Street provides a unique capability to be able to gather information freely available from the internet and highlight the relevant information in a timely and efficient manner. The Greater London Authority's City Operations Unit which has responsibility for informing the Mayor and stakeholders within the GLA regarding disruptive incidents and events therefore recommends that the GLA secure licences to access the web monitoring service made available by Babel Street INC. at a cost of up to £35,000 for the period of 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

The subscription would help to ensure the Mayor has accurate, current information at his disposal to enable him to speak with authority and lead London particularly in times of crisis and also to enable him to facilitate and coordinate the work of the GLA's functional bodies in appropriate cases.

Decision:

That the Executive Director of Strategy and Communications approves:

- the grant of a one year licence to access the service made available by Babel Street INC at a cost of up to £35,000 for the budget year 2020 / 2021; and
- an exemption from the requirement to hold a formal procurement process or to enter into a call-off the contract from a suitable framework in accordance with section 9 of the GLA's Contracts and Funding Code to enable the grant of the licence referred to above.

AUTHORISING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/HEAD OF UNIT

I have reviewed the request and am satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

It has my approval.

Name: Niran Mothada

Position: Executive Director of Strategy and Communications

Signature:



Date:

17/3/20

PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. The Mayor has a strategic role in leading and communicating on events that affect the life of Londoners including in relation to London's social development, its economy and its environment.
- 1.2. City Operations provides a situational awareness capability with the ability to identify, process, analyse critical elements of information about what is happening and turn this information into actionable intelligence.
- 1.3. As part of the core capabilities of City Operations, there is a need to access resources provided by private sector subject matter experts within areas of GLA's functional responsibility.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

- 2.1. The amount of data available on the internet is vast and traditional search engines can only access and interrogate a small proportion of it without requiring a considerable amount of user time to interrogate the returns. The limited size and resource available to City Operations means that it is necessary to engage external assistance to perform web monitoring effectively. The service provided by Babel Street will allow the City Operations to quickly and efficiently conduct research in the "surface" and "deep" web in a manner and at a speed which would be unachievable without automated, analytical search tools.
- 2.2. Section 9 of the GLA's Contract and Funding Code (the Code) requires that contracts for goods and services of more than £25,000 are procured by a formal tender process or via a call-off from a suitable framework. However, section 10 of the Code provides that an exemption from this requirement may be approved where there is (i) a complete absence of competition, and/or (ii) there are technical and intellectual property rights involved.
- 2.3. This procurement is not being offered for tender on the basis that:
 - There is a complete absence of competition: Although there are other products and services that provide the ability to monitor data sources, create custom feeds and conduct trend or statistical analysis, these exist as standalone products rather than the integrated, multi-functional solution offered by Babel Street; and
 - The supplier has technical and intellectual property rights over their product, with the appropriate registration of patents. According to publicly information two patents have been registered with the US Patent and Trademark Office for:
 - Cross Lingual Search using Multi-Language Ontology for Text Based Communication, defined as: A method for conducting a cross lingual searching utilizing an ontology reference process to ensure thoroughness. When a query is entered, an ontology database is accessed to identify all representations for the parent entity of interest within specified languages. These representations are used to form a search set that results in more thorough collection from the data sources. Thus, the disclosed method accommodates situations where languages do not follow the same construct (e.g. English compared to Chinese) and where direct translation does not adequately represent the intent of the user's inquiry.
 - Geospatial Origin and Identity Based On Dialect Detection for Text Based Media, defined as: A method for acquiring an author's geospatial location of origin from text based media through dialect detection. The method detects the dialect for a specified language using keywords, phrases, patterns, or gestures and identifies the geographical location for the author's origin or area of linguistic influence. The identified geospatial areas can include the overarching primary

areas of use for the base language coupled with a smaller geographical area bounded according to, for example, state, country, region, or political, tribal, or societal influence, for the specified dialect, and produces a map to the user with a polygon depicting the probable area of origin or influence. In instances where more than one element of dialect detection is available (multiple keywords, phrases, patterns, gestures) the intersection of these individual polygons produce increasing areas of probability where the solution space can exist for the combination of identified dialect components.

3. Equality comments

- 3.1 The GLA is subject to a public sector equality duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act ; to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (including belief and religion as well as race, disability, sex, age, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment) and persons who do not share it; and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 3.2 The potential impacts of purchasing these data platform licences have been considered and no adverse impact for people with protected characteristics (e.g. as to whether algorithms or search criteria employed are more likely to yield results which treat protected groups differently from non-protected groups) has been identified. However, we recognise that compliance with the section 149 duty is a continuing one and we will therefore keep this under review including in relation to the information received, who it relates to and how we use it so as to prevent and/or mitigate any adverse impact as appropriate.

4. Other considerations

- 4.1. Access to the Babel Street platform will support the situational awareness and incident response functions of City Operations by:
- speeding up and increasing the reach of searches which otherwise would be done manually by conducting separate searches of different online sources e.g. news outlets, social media (excluding Twitter), blogs, open message boards; and
 - use of tools to graphically represent and assist in the analysis of search results including through sentiment analysis of returns. Sentiment analysis can be defined as “the process of computationally identifying and categorizing opinions expressed in a piece of text, especially in order to determine whether the writer's attitude towards a particular topic, product, etc. is positive, negative, or neutral.” More simply put, it is an assessment of the attitudes of large numbers of authors to a specific incident or issue.
- 4.2. The information obtained by means of the searches of Babel Street will assist within areas of the Mayor's functional responsibility including in relation to resilience structures such as Strategic Coordination Group as well as activities of functional bodies such as Transport for London (e.g. transport disruption) and the Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime.
- 4.3. The data obtained from Babel Street will be used to support the existing reporting systems maintained by City Operations and enable these to be expanded and developed particularly in the areas of sentiment, trend and internet traffic analysis.

5. Financial comments

- 5.1 Assistant Director's approval is sought for expenditure of up to £35,000 per annum for the procurement of licenses to access Babel Street . The cost of this is to be funded from London Situational Awareness Team's 2020-21 budget agreed as part of 2020-21 budget setting process.

6. Legal comments

- 6.1. Under section 30 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (GLA Act), the Greater London Authority (including the Mayor) has a general power to do anything which it considers will further any one or more of its principal purposes which are (a) to promote economic development and wealth creation in Greater London; (b) to promoting social development in Greater London, and (c) to promote the improvement of the environment in Greater London. Section 31 restricts the GLA from duplicating the work of its functional bodies although it can cooperate, coordinate and/or facilitate the activities of those bodies, where appropriate. The Mayor may do anything which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to, the exercise of any functions of the GLA exercisable by the Mayor under section 34 of the GLA Act.
- 6.2. Appropriate controls are in place to ensure that any information provided by Babel Street is appropriately anonymised so as to ensure compliance with applicable data protection legislation and City Operations will coordinate with the GLA's Information Governance Team to ensure that the reports it disseminates also comply with applicable controls on the use and sharing of information.
- 6.3. In taking the decisions requested, the assistant director 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, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment) and persons who do not share it (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). To this end, the assistant director should have particular regard to section 3 (above) of this report.
- 6.4. Section 9 of the Code requires that the GLA seek a call-off from a suitable framework or undertake a formal tender process for contracts of more than £25,000. However, section 10 of the Code also provides that an exemption from this requirement may be justified on the basis that there is (i) a complete absence of competition, and/or (ii) there are technical or intellectual property rights involved. The officers have set out above the reasons why the procurement of licences to access Babel Street falls within the said exemption(s). On this basis, the assistant director may approve the proposed exemption(s) if satisfied with the content of this report. Officers have indicated that this ground applies and that the proposed contracts affords value for money.
- 6.5. Officers must ensure that appropriate contractual provision is in place and that the appropriate documentation is executed by Babel Street INC. and the GLA before the commencement of the services.

7. Planned delivery approach and next steps

Activity	Timeline
Delivery Start Date	01 April 2020
Delivery End Date	30 March 2021

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

If YES, for what reason:

Until what date: (a date is required if deferring)

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:

Dominic Beattie has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures.

✓

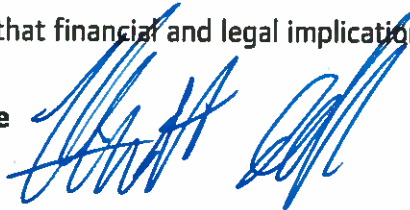
Corporate Investment Board

This decision was agreed by the Corporate Investment Board on 16 March 2020.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE:

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

Signature



Date

16/3/20

