

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR DECISION – ADD306

Title: First Steps Portal contract extension

Executive Summary:

This decision is seeking approval to use the contract variation powers within the existing First Steps Portal contract to extend the contract by one year to 31 March 2017 and agree associated updates and improvements to the First Steps Portal.

Decision:

That the Assistant Director approves the GLA and Share to Buy agreeing an extension of the First Steps Portal contract by one year to 31 March 2017 on the existing terms and at no cost to the GLA and associated updates and improvements to the Portal.

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: Jamie Ratcliff

Position: Assistant Director, Policy Programmes and Services, Housing and Land

Signature:

Date:

PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 The Mayor's First Steps programme prioritises the development of thousands of homes to part-buy across London and helping thousands of Londoners on low to middle incomes to become homeowners. The First Steps Portal was established to allow the public to search for information on the First Steps programme and search for properties.
- 1.2 In December 2012 HIG approved that the First Steps service would be exclusively web-focused and responsibility for handling enquiries will be transferred to providers. On 23 January 2013 MD1134 approved that from April 2013 the First Steps agent service would be exclusively provided via a single web portal, and that the GLA would enter into a contract with a private sector provider to deliver the single First Steps web portal. The approved scope of the First Steps Portal was to:
 - create and maintain awareness of the First Steps programme
 - inform and advise customers on their options
 - enable customers to search for properties available through the First Steps programme
 - signpost customers to developers
- 1.3 This approach was selected to mirror the open market sector as far as possible in terms of the customer experience, reduce duplication in First Steps processes, and improve value for money for taxpayers by reducing direct costs of providing the First Steps Service and by reducing duplication of eligibility and financial checks that need to be undertaken by providers for their own assurance.
- 1.4 Share to Buy successfully bid to provide the First Steps Portal service when it was procured in early 2013, and commenced delivery of the First Steps Portal service on 25 February 2013 for a period to 31 March 2016 at no cost to the GLA. The contract includes no cost to the public, with limited funds raised via GLA-approved promotional offers for housing providers. Share to Buy have provided a national website portal service to find properties and arrange mortgages for the affordable homes sector since 2010. Their portal has focused on affordability and a budget calculation service as a key part of the search function.
- 1.5 The First Steps Portal has been a success with over 110,000 users registered since its launch, and an estimated just over 50,000 Londoners helped through First Steps. Additionally, Share to Buy have held bi-annual First Steps Homes Show events where people interested in First Steps properties can meet providers and register their interest in person.
- 1.6 Feedback gathered in January 2015 by the GLA from a number of housing providers and over 1,800 registered First Steps users confirmed that stakeholder are happy with the Portal, though there are areas where some improvements are desired, including maximising awareness of the First Steps programme and Portal, and clarifying the property selection, application and referral process.
- 1.7 The current contract expires on 31 March 2016, approximately 5 weeks before a new Mayoral term. It is considered that it would be beneficial to extend the contract by one year on the current terms to avoid procurement of a new First Steps Portal service immediately before the start of a new Mayoral term and the risk that the newly procured service ceases to fully reflect the direction of the programme in the new Mayoral term.

- 1.8 This also presents an opportunity for the GLA and Share to Buy to agree updates and improvements to reduce complexity and improve ease of use of the Portal. These include changes to the appearance and functioning of the First Steps Portal, branding and use of the GLA website and contract amendments and would be agreed in spring and summer 2015.
- 1.9 It is expected this will be delivered via two contract variations, the first approving the extended contract length and the second approving the upgrades and improvements. As part of these discussions, the GLA and Share to Buy will investigate how they can work together to improve the reach and success of the bi-annual First Steps Homes Shows. Any additional proposals that require investment by the GLA will be submitted for the necessary approvals.
- 1.10 The contract beyond March 2017 will be retendered competitively.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

- 2.1 The objective of this decision is to facilitate a one year extension and improvements to the First Steps Portal, and to investigate ways to improve the First Steps Homes Shows.

3. Equality comments

- 3.1 The GLA has taken and will take appropriate steps to ensure that there are no potential negative impacts expected on those with protected characteristics. Those with protected characteristics will gain from the positive benefits of the First Steps Portal in equal measure, and there will be equality of access to participate in the delivery and benefit from the Portal, without discrimination.

4. Other considerations

a) key risks and issues

The following were identified as key risks:

Risk	Likelihood (out of 5)	Impact (out of 5)	Rating	Mitigation
Project not delivered on time	2	3	6	Reduce. Agree timescales with Share to Buy to ensure all upgrades and improvements are in agreed and in place with the contract extension agreed in time for the September Homes Show.
Not achieving stakeholder buy-in to scope, principles and objectives	1	5	5	Avoid. The updates and improvements will be designed from identified need, lessons learned and the views of stakeholders. Further development and engagement work will ensure the result is achieved.
Damage to GLA reputation from lack of success	2	2	4	Avoid. Work with Share to Buy and design programme to ensure the GLA is agreeing appropriate actions to improve the Portal.
Risk of legal challenge to contract variation	1	4	4	Avoid. Work with TfL Legal to avoid.

b) links to Mayoral strategies and priorities

The Mayor launched the First Steps intermediate housing programme that has delivered intermediate homes and helped Londoners gain a foothold on the housing ladder since 2008, as part of a target to assist 50,000 Londoners.

The Mayor's 2012 Housing Covenant built on this success by introducing a number of policy changes to streamline and improve the intermediate housing market.

The Mayor's 2014 London Housing Strategy includes targets for the number of First Steps homes delivered in the capital to be doubled by 2020, and doubled again by 2025, helping 250,000 Londoners into home ownership. The First Steps Portal will be a crucial service to achieve this target.

c) impact assessments and consultations

Internal and external stakeholders and users of the First Steps Portal have been consulted and their views taken into account.

5. Financial comments

5.1 The decision to extend this contract is on the same basis as MD1134, being that it is at nil cost to the GLA. Any upgrades to the system will also be delivered at no additional cost to the GLA.

6. Planned delivery approach and next steps

Activity	Timeline (2015)
Produce and agree workplan	June
Sign contract extension	June
Launch of Homes Show communications	June
Start build of website upgrade/improvements	July
Homes Show	September
Start review and agreement of any further commercial exploitation terms	September
Launch of any agreed further commercial exploitation terms	December

Appendices and supporting papers: none

Public access to information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI Act) 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 approval 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 Confidentiality: Only the facts or advice considered to be exempt from disclosure under the FOI Act 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:

Drafting officer to confirm the following (✓)

Drafting officer:

Robert Spender has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms that the Finance and Legal teams have commented on this proposal as required, and this decision reflects their comments.

✓

HEAD OF GOVERNANCE AND RESILIENCE:

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

Signature:

Date: