

REQUEST FOR DIRECTOR DECISION – DD1235

Title: ACCESS EUROPE

Executive Summary:

Access Europe Network (AEN) CIC is a new Community Interest Company that seeks to provide a one-stop service for London Local Authorities and the Voluntary Sector to access EU funding. Funding opportunities risk going untapped due to perceptions of complexity and bureaucracy. The proposal builds on London Councils' European Service which is available to London boroughs. The contract for this service expires in June 2014.

Decision:

That the Executive Director of Resources approves a contribution of £50,000 to Access Europe Network CIC in 2014/15 from the Local Enterprise Panel "LEP" Strategic Plans and EU Funds Investment Strategies Funding allocation.

AUTHORISING DIRECTOR:

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: Martin Clarke

Position: Executive Director Resources

Signature:

Date: 4 July 2014

PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

1.1 A new round of European Union (EU) funding is available to London between 2014 and 2020 to help tackle the challenges to jobs, growth and inclusion. EU funding offers opportunities for local authorities and third sector organisations. However, EU funding is often seen as complex and administratively burdensome. These barriers, both real and perceived, need to be addressed if London is to access EU funds effectively.

1.2 The support of the LEP will assist to fund AEN. The AEN is a new funding hub for London that will provide both free and paid-for services to local authorities and voluntary & community sector organisations. Funding for three years from London Councils, the City Corporation and Greater London Enterprise (GLE) has been confirmed. As the accountable body for the LEP, the GLA must enter into a funding agreement with AEN and provide the AEN the agreed funding of up to £50,000.

1.3 AEN would replace and extend the existing London Councils European Service, delivered under contract by GLE, with availability limited to, and used by, all London boroughs exclusively. The current contract expires in June 2014. GLE is the boroughs' economic development company; it aims to support borough access to funding for economic growth and social inclusion.

1.4 Boroughs and third sector organisations seek support to navigate the funding process in order to submit applications that stand chances of being successful. AEN aims to build capacity within applicant organisations, ensuring that ownership of applications sits firmly within the lead organisation.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

2.1 A range of services will be provided free of charge to London boroughs and London-based voluntary and community sector organisations (excluding large not-for-profit agencies, government bodies and large national charities, who would be invited to pay for services).

2.2 Services will include:

- Information on EU funding opportunities, provided via a website with briefings on all relevant funding opportunities, the policy background, case studies of funded projects and tips for successful applications.
- Email alerts providing early intelligence and information on opportunities
- Newsletters providing policy and funding updates, as requested by organisations
- A partner search, providing access to a wide range of contacts across the EU
- Seminars setting the scene for each new funding stream setting out investment priorities, eligibility criteria and case studies of previously successful projects
- Training events on key themes such as monitoring and evaluation, partnership development and management and identifying match funding
- Quarterly larger-scale conferences to provide overall information of forthcoming opportunities and networking opportunities
- Interactive application workshops, going through applications page by page. These will include sample applications, both good and poor quality, providing attendees with all of the information they need to develop a high-quality application

- 2.3 In addition, information and briefings will be provided on strategic issues, ensuring that London's local government and VCS is aware of, and able to feed into, debates on future EU policy and funding debates.
- 2.4 Additional paid services will be available to London organisations, supporting the sponsored activities and providing an income. These, to be paid for on a reasonable day rate, will include:
- Partnership building: providing information and intelligence on potential partners, proposing a balanced and effective partnership and supporting the development of partnership agreements and steering group set-up.
 - Consultancy to support proposal development: one-to-one intensive support for the development, refinement and submission of funding proposals. We will build the capacity of clients to develop bids by providing a critique of each section of an application as it is drafted, identifying strengths and weaknesses and ensuring that it meets the investment priorities of the programme.
 - Intensive consultancy support as boroughs/VCS organisations become more engaged in the process of applying for European funding, with tailored support provided for the development, refinement and submission of funding proposals.
- 2.5 Support with the development of European strategies and facilitation of discussions within individual boroughs/organisations.
- 2.6 After the first year, basic services will be marketed to local authorities and third sector organisations outside London. These will include:
- Seminars and workshops
 - Website subscriptions
 - The additional commercial services to be provided to London organisations.

3. Equality comments

- 3.1 Access Europe network will provide services to London local and regional government and third sector, to improve access to European funding. Many of the funds aim to support equality of opportunity for individuals with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, gender, religion or belief, sexual orientation) by addressing issues such as lifelong learning, skills and employment, violence against women and children, radicalisation, human trafficking, asylum and integration. The objective is to ensure that these funds can be used by London organisations to have a positive impact by supporting progress towards a fairer society, tackling discrimination and helping to move towards equality of opportunity for all.
- 3.2 In delivering the services, Access Europe network will treat all service users equally with dignity and respect, recognising, valuing and respecting difference and diversity. It will ensure that support is appropriate and accessible to all organisations, for example by using fully accessible venues, providing adjustments for those with sight or hearing impairments, avoiding religious holidays and celebrations. Services will be provided free of charge to all London third sector organisations, to ensure that support is readily available to all.

4. Other considerations

While there are no collective figures available which set out the shortfall of EU funding which boroughs and the third sector miss out on, it is noted that:

- There is no existing dedicated source of information on EU funding opportunities that can be accessed by London's boroughs and the third sector.
- Internal authorisation processes, often lengthy, mean that local authorities require early intelligence of opportunities to meet deadlines for submitting applications.
- Identifying match funding (a requirement for EU funds) can be difficult and support is needed to help identify ways of securing it.
- EU programmes are competitive and require high-quality applications: support for this is currently unavailable except through individual bid-writing consultants.
- Managing EU-funded projects is challenging; support is required to meet the demands of audit and compliance.

5. Financial comments

5.1 Approval is sought to allocate £50,000 to Access Europe Network CIC from the LEP's Strategic Plans and EU Funds Investment Strategies Funds budget for 2014-15, as a contribution towards an annual operating cost of £246,000.

5.2 The other funders are:

- London Councils - £66,000 per annum (the same level as the current European Service contract, for three years but subject to annual review)
- City Corporation - £50,000 per annum (for three years)
- Greater London Enterprise - £30,000 per annum (for three years)
- ESF Technical Assistance - £50,000 for 2014-15

Although some of the other funders have committed to supporting the proposal for a further two years, the LEP funding is for the 2014/15 financial year only.

5.3 Any changes to this proposal will be subject to further approval via the Authority's decision-making process.

6. Legal comments

Power to Undertake the Requested Decision

5.1 Under section 30 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (the 'Act') the GLA, after appropriate consultation, is entitled to do anything that will further the promotion, within Greater London, of economic development and wealth creation, social development and the improvement of the environment.

5.2 Furthermore, section 34 of the Act allows the GLA, to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the exercise of any functions of the GLA. As set out in section 1 of this report, the GLA is the accountable body for the LEP. Furthermore, the funding the subject of this decision form will assist AEN to provide assistance to London-based local authorities and third sector organisations in their attempt to secure EU funding. In light of this, the GLA's

provision of the funding on behalf of the LEP may be viewed as calculated to facilitate and conducive and incidental to economic and social development in Greater London.

The Funding

5.3 As the GLA is funding AEN's project and the ultimate beneficiaries of the project will be parties other than the GLA, the proposed grant of funding may be viewed as a conditional gift rather than a contract for services. In light of paragraph 6.4 of the GLA's Contracts and Funding Code, the officers are reminded to ensure that the funding be distributed fairly, transparently and in accordance with the GLA's equalities obligations. Furthermore, the officers must ensure that a funding agreement be put in place between the GLA and AEN, before any of the funding be provided to AEN.

7. Planned delivery approach and next steps

Activity	Timeline
Delivery start date	June 2014

Appendices and supporting papers:

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:

Iva Figueiredo has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms that the

✓

Assistant Director/Head of Service:

Alex Conway has reviewed the documentation and is satisfied for it to be referred to the Sponsoring Director for approval

✓

Finance and Legal teams have commented on this proposal as required, and this decision reflects their comments.

✓

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RESOURCES:

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

Signature:

Date: