

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

REQUEST FOR MAYORAL DECISION – MD3055

Title: Talk London Continuous Improvements

Executive summary:

Talk London is City Hall's online community. It exists to bring Londoners' voices into City Hall policy and programme-making.

It has hosted most of City Hall's online consultations – from clean air to housing and recovery from COVID-19. It ensures the Mayor can meet his statutory requirement to consult with Londoners on the formation of his strategies and policies.

In order to continue running City Hall consultations and engagement campaigns, we are seeking approval for funding for digital tools, and a programme of continuous improvements to the Talk London website. This is in order to improve accessibility and specific user journeys, making it easier for Londoners to join up and take part on Talk London, and to further diversify the Talk London active membership.

Decision:

That the Mayor approves expenditure of up to £296,000 across financial years 2022-23 and 2023-24, to support activity to deliver content engagement campaigns, and funding for a programme of continuous improvement of the Talk London website covering accessibility; security and user acceptance testing; user research and A/B (or split) testing; and resulting technical development and design resource.

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:

31/1/23

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

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. Talk London is City Hall's online community, which supports the Mayor and the GLA in placing Londoners' needs at the centre of its strategies and programmes. It does so by involving citizens in meaningful research, debate and consultation about how to improve the capital.
- 1.2. Talk London has an engaged a growing community of Londoners. It has delivered most of City Hall's online consultations – from clean air and housing to health inequalities, economic development and recovery from COVID-19 – at no additional cost to policy teams. The Talk London team also supports the delivery of consultation and engagement activities for the London Assembly, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, and the London Fire Commissioner. We have demonstrated that the development of compelling, accessible and highly shareable content has the capacity to drive huge audience reach and engagement.
- 1.3. The Talk London website relaunched in 2021 with increased functionality (authorised under MD2535 and MD2720). Londoners are encouraged to take part and have their say on Talk London via surveys, discussions and idea-generation activities. The addition of phase two and phase three features to the site was delayed until 2022, due to work on the London.gov digital estate. Since then, further functionality has been added including: enhancements to analytics; improvements to discussions and commenting; a much-requested search functionality; and an application programming interface with our email service provider to enable automated emails, and to make sending and segmenting more efficient.
- 1.4. In 2022, decisions were taken to work with a Mailchimp specialist agency in order to: guide and implement the Talk London email strategy (through Assistant Director decision form ADD2551); work with an analytics agency to review our important metrics, and transition onto Google Analytics 4 and automate reporting (ADD2592); and work with a digital agency to run user-testing and optimise engagement user journeys (ADD2583).
- 1.5. In order to continue facilitating high-quality engagement, and to further diversify the Talk London audience, we are seeking approval for: funding for digital tools for engagement content campaigns; support for continuous improvements to the Talk London website; and funding to acquire new members.
- 1.6. In order to run engagement content campaigns, and support the policy and programme teams with their engagement requirements, the Talk London team needs the use of several digital tools, including the Talk London email service provider; the website profanity filter; a search engine optimisation tool; and team project management tools.
- 1.7. It is best practice to make continuous improvements to a website, as digital behaviour and standards continue to evolve. Specifically for Talk London, continuous improvements are needed to maintain an engaged and active membership; and to grow the community by making it easier to find, join and take part on the Talk London website. This funding will cover accessibility, security and user acceptance testing; technical developments required to respond to policy and programme team needs; user research; and A/B (or split) testing and resulting changes to design and site optimisations to make it easier to find, join and take part on the Talk London website.
- 1.8. The Talk London membership has a natural and continuous turnover (or churn) through changes in email addresses; and members unsubscribing, no longer being interested or moving away from London. To actively grow and continue to diversify the community, funding is required for paid promotion through digital channels, including social media.

Type	2022-23 and 2023-24 spend	Description
Funding for digital tools for content engagement activities	£15,000	Digital tools to support content campaigns and consultations, including use of an email service provider; project management tools; an SEO tool; and other digital tools to support engagement, such as the web profanity filter.
Agencies and digital tools for continuous improvements onsite	£261,000	To fund continuous improvements to the Talk London website, including accessibility; security and user-acceptance testing; design; development; and user research and optimisation tools.
Paid promotion to grow and diversify the Talk London membership	£20,000	Funding for paid promotion through social media and other digital channels such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.
Total	£296,000	

- 1.9. We will be using analytics, user feedback, user testing and A/B testing to make sure we are making Talk London as accessible as possible; and as appealing and easy to use as possible for our under-represented audiences.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

2.1. The objectives are:

- to support policy and programme teams with engagement activities, through email activity to support campaigns
- to manage engagement content campaigns and projects, through the use of digital tools, including the website profanity filter and project management tools
- to run accessibility and penetration testing; and check and improve compliance with WCAG 2.1AA and make any required security improvements to the Talk London site.

2.2. The expected outcomes are:

- to further optimise the site through user research; A/B testing; implementing suggested changes; and measuring the resulting improvements
- to improve accessibility, making it easier for all Londoners to engage with City Hall through Talk London
- to respond to City Hall's policy and programme teams' policy engagement requirements, bringing the voices of Londoners into City Hall policymaking and programmes
- to increase the registration conversion rates for site visitors signing up as new members, allowing the Talk London team to further diversify the Talk London membership
- to increase the engagement conversion rates for current members taking part in the site; increase engagement with City Hall policies and programmes; and build trust between Londoners and the GLA.

3. Equality comments

- 3.1. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Mayor and the GLA are subject to the public sector equality duty and must have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
 - foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 3.2. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, and marriage/civil partnership status. The duty involves having appropriate regard to these matters as they apply in the circumstances, including having regard to the need to: remove or minimise any disadvantage suffered by those who share or are connected to a protected characteristic; take steps to meet the different needs of such people; and encourage them to participate in public life or in any other activity where their participation is disproportionately low. This can involve treating people with a protected characteristic more favourably than those without one.
- 3.3. Significant progress has already been made in terms of diversifying the audience, with 16 per cent of new members aged between 16 and 24, at the time of registration; and 26 per cent of new members coming from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic backgrounds since the relaunch of the Talk London site.
- 3.4. By making continuous improvements to the Talk London website – including running accessibility testing, adhering to WCAG 2.1AA standards, and running user testing with our under-represented target audiences – we will be able to further our goal of diversifying the Talk London membership so that we are more able to ensure participants reflect the London population.

4. Other considerations

Key risks and issues

- 4.1. Talk London was established to gather Londoners' views to help steer important policy decisions. It is, therefore, important that we reach and engage a diverse group of Londoners, who reflect the London population as much as possible. As Talk London is an 'open community' (meaning anyone can join), there is a risk that if we do not monitor new member sign-ups and target promotions to under-represented audiences, we will not be able to maintain a diverse audience. To mitigate this, any optimisations will specifically monitor participation rates from under-represented audiences; and a 'test, learn and iterate' approach will ensure we maintain and add to a website that appeals to a diverse audience. Our acquisition and outreach will continue to target under-represented audiences to bolster numbers of those who are traditionally harder to reach.

Links to Mayoral strategies and priorities

- 4.2. As part of his 2021 manifesto, the Mayor stated that he wants to build stronger communities and is determined to hear from Londoners directly, in part using the Talk London community as one of the channels to do this. Through online engagement activities, Talk London allows Londoners to participate in the design, development and delivery of strategies, policies and programmes, thereby ensuring that delivery of the Mayor's priorities for London are informed by the needs of Londoners.

Conflicts of interest

- 4.3. GLA officers involved in the preparation of this form do not have any conflicts of interest to declare.

5. Financial comments

- 5.1. This request is to approve continuous improvements required on Talk London, covering several aspects such as accessibility, security and user acceptance testing and technical developments to support programme needs. The work will be delivered through a combination of internal resource and small procurements.
- 5.2. The budget for Talk London is held within the City Intelligence Unit, Strategy and Communications directorate, comprising the current year budget plus the indicative budget allocated in 2023-24. The total expenditure for this work is approximately £296,000. It should be noted that the 2023-24 and subsequent budgets for this programme are not yet formally approved and will be subject to funding still being available via the GLA's 2023-24 budget setting process.

6. Legal comments

Power to undertake the requested decisions

- 6.1. The foregoing sections of this report indicate that the decisions requested of the Mayor concern the exercise of the Authority's general powers and fall within the Authority's statutory power to do such things considered to further or that are facilitative of, or conducive or incidental to, the promotion of economic development and wealth creation, social development and the improvement of the environment, all within Greater London; and in formulating the proposals in respect of which a decision is sought, officers have complied with the Authority'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; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation) 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 (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). To this end, the Mayor should have particular regard to section 3 (above) of this report.

Grant funding and procurement

- 6.3. The decisions above seek approval of budget for the Talk London project. To the extent that any of that budget be used to either procure services, supplies or works, or to provide grant funding, officers are reminded of the need to comply with the requirements of the Authority's Contracts and Funding Code.

7. Planned delivery approach and next steps

- 7.1. Any Talk London development or testing work will be delivered via existing Technology Group supplier contracts.
- 7.2. Many of the Talk London team's activities will be on an ongoing basis. The below is a rough timeline of what we expect to be doing, and when. However, as all GLA digital teams are expected to work in

an agile way, focusing on delivering value and being responsive to policy team needs, as well as the needs of Londoners, it is not possible to outline a detailed timeline of activities.

Activity	Estimated timings
Accessibility testing	Q4 2022-23
Security testing	Q4 2022-23
Digital tools for content engagement activities	Ongoing: Q3 2022-23 to Q4 2023-24
Working with digital agencies on user testing/user experience	Q4 2022-23 to Q2 2023-24
Continuous improvements, working with: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• development agency• user research/design agency• testing resource• optimisation tools	Ongoing, and focusing on delivering in an agile way: Q4 2022-23 to Q4 2023-24
Paid promotion to under-represented audiences	Dependent on campaign timings and policy team needs

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 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:

Selina Holliday has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

Sponsoring Director:

Niran Mothada 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 30 January 2022.

✓

✓

✓

✓

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RESOURCES:

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

Signature

D. Gane

Date

31 January 2023

CHIEF OF STAFF:

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

Signature

D. Bellamy

Date

31 January 2023

