

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

REQUEST FOR DIRECTOR DECISION – DD2647

Title: Extension of Engagement HQ platform licence for London Plan team

Executive Summary:

Agreement is sought to procure a new licence for the Engagement HQ 'Bang the Table' platform, covering a further 36 months, enabling effective and seamless digital engagement to continue with a diverse audience. The platform is already being used by the GLA for consultations on items of London Plan Guidance, as well as for the digital engagement strand of the Planning for London programme. The platform integrates well with the GLA's 'Talk London' platform. A planned upgrade to Talk London to provide similar functionality to Engagement HQ has not yet happened, and while the two platforms work together, both address different elements of the London Plan team's engagement needs.

Decision:

That the Executive Director of Good Growth approves:

1. the procurement of a new licence for the London Plan team to use the Engagement HQ 'Bang the Table' consultation platform for a three-year period until August 2026
2. expenditure of up to £56,000 over the three-year period, for the procurement of this licence.

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: Phillip Graham

Position: Executive Director, Good Growth

Signature:



Date:

07/08/2023

PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. This decision follows on from ADD2456 which sought approval for expenditure of up to £36,000 on a licence for a consultation tool to support consultations to be undertaken on London Plan Guidance over multiple years, and ADD2590 which subsequently sought approval to authorise expenditure of up to £21,000 for the period August 2022-23, exercising the second of two 12-month extensions to the GLA's initial 12 month licence to use the Engagement HQ 'Bang the Table' platform. This was necessary as the initial sum approved under ADD 2456 was insufficient to cover a third year.
- 1.2. Since the publication of the London Plan in March 2021, the [Bang the Table Platform](#) has been used to host consultation on some 12 items of London Plan Guidance with two further consultations currently open and another 8 planned over coming months. In addition a new area has been recently set up to host [Planning for London engagement](#) activity, making use of much more of the platform's functionality, including discussion forums, videos, timeline widgets, surveys and more. This tool was procured to improve outreach and engagement with a more diverse audience, which can be difficult for stakeholders, given the complexity of planning matters. The consultation package offers a useable front-end user interface and back-end functionality that can reach a wider audience and enable more sophisticated analysis. Its functionality can also integrate with social media and other GLA online consultation tools such as Talk London.
- 1.3. At the time of the licence being procured the intention was to continue work with the digital engagement team to build equivalent capability and functionality into the in-house Talk London platform. It was noted that in-house tools such as Talk London
“provide some functionality similar to some aspects of these third-party tools, however, Talk London is specifically aimed at residents and does not currently cater for all types of stakeholders in a seamless, integrated way”.
- 1.4. The intention was for the London Plan team, the Digital team and Talk London team to explore the potential to integrate additional functionality into Talk London as part of the Talk London upgrade so that at a future point there would be no need to procure an external tool. However, this work has been further delayed, due to work on London.gov.uk.
- 1.5. Given the extensive use that is being made of the platform, particularly the engaging content in support of the Planning for London Programme, and the anticipated ramping up of this activity as the drafting of a new London Plan commences, it is no longer considered realistic that Talk London can meet this need, either now or in the medium term future, given the significant disruption that would ensue from having to take content down, rebuild it and redirect traffic to a new platform.
- 1.6. A new licence for the Engagement HQ Bang the Table platform is therefore sought for a three-year period, at an estimated total cost of £56,000 over three years.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

- 2.1. The objective of the project remains the same as previously. The proposal is to procure a new three-year licence to use the platform (which has now been used for three years). This will ensure uninterrupted service for Planning consultations, such as London Plan Guidance, as well as enabling the continued hosting of Planning for London programme materials.

- 2.2. The licence also provides opportunity for other teams to use the platform for engagement, if appropriate, as it provides a seamless user experience and integrated analysis functionality between wider stakeholders and Londoners.
- 2.3. The outcomes outlined in the previous ADD remain relevant. These outcomes, all of which are met by the current provider, dictate that the Bang the Table product should:
 - be user friendly and engaging to ensure improved outreach
 - include the ability to use London Plan / Guidance branding
 - be accessible through different media – including tablets, phones and desktop PCs
 - include functionality to sit within London.gov.uk webpages and be searchable for search engines
 - include the ability to link to social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc and integrate with internal GLA products such as Talk London (<https://www.london.gov.uk/talk-london/>)
 - provide flexibility to organise and display pages with a wide range of features that are easy to implement with limited training needed
 - offer seamless user registration for all types of stakeholders, including Londoners and wider stakeholders
 - include reporting tools for analysis of all stakeholder responses.

3. Equality comments

- 3.1. The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) set out at Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the GLA, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to the need to:
 - eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 3.2. The three aims of the duty must be fulfilled on a continuing basis by the GLA when exercising its functions. In addition, public bodies must take steps to take account of a person's disability and make reasonable adjustments to remove barriers for disabled people. This duty is 'anticipatory'.
- 3.3. All the London Plan Guidance is subject to an equality impact assessment which will specifically draw out any equalities issues that may affect or be affected by the individual pieces of guidance. This will also be used to help inform what discretionary consultation above the standard baseline might be appropriate for each piece of new guidance - i.e. what groups should be targeted to increase their levels of engagement.
- 3.4. This decision however is related to the procurement of a new licence for the engagement platform which is currently used. This is to support the ongoing and future consultation for London Plan Guidance, the Planning for London Programme and consultation on future iterations of the London Plan.
- 3.5. The consultation tool procured adheres to the following equality principles:

- the layout and content of the pages for consultation is designed to be easily navigable and accessible for screen readers
- there is an option to download the whole document in a printer friendly format for people who do not have access to a computer
- all pages comply with WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standards and the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018
- colour contrast has a ratio of 4.5:1 to meet the AA standard
- web-links are clear and front-loaded, and tell the user if they open in a new tab; PDF and Word documents have a clear name and include the file size.

3.6 It should be noted that the GLA uses a range of engagement methods to overcome issues of digital exclusion such as in person events.

4. Other considerations

Key risks and issues

- 4.1. This DD is for a new licence for up to three years, with a break clause after years 1 and 2. There is a considerable risk that if the licence is allowed to expire on 11th August 2023 there will be disruption to consultation activity, including analysis of responses of recent consultations (such as the Affordable Housing and Development Viability London Plan Guidance (LPG)). This is due to both the impact on end users who have registered with the platform, as well as access to data that has been captured as a result of recent consultations. It would also likely delay planned consultation activity in the Autumn while an alternative solution is procured. It is therefore considered crucial to secure an uninterrupted extension to the existing licence.
- 4.2. The contract will be managed in line with standard GLA risk management procedures by the GLA London Plan team.
- 4.3. No one involved in the drafting or clearance of this decision has any potential or perceived conflicts of interest.
- 4.4. The proposed approach to the procurement is to call off the licence from TfL's Reseller and Associated Services Framework (the "Reseller Framework"). This procurement approach will involve the running of a mini-competition in accordance with the rules of the Reseller Framework to obtain a new three year licence including the required break clauses. Although it may add from 1 to 3 percent to the cost of the licence (representing the value of the chosen reseller's own margin), the use of the Reseller Framework is the standard approach to the procurement of such licences.

Links to Mayoral strategies and priorities

- 4.5 The London Plan Guidance supports the implementation of the London Plan and Mayoral priorities contained in the other statutory strategies. It is considered important to maintain the current approach to consultation to ensure continuity, and to avoid delaying future consultations or analysis of recent consultations. The tool also enables compliance with the Public Sector Accessibility Regulations 2018; an extension of the licence thus avoids possible legal challenge relating to consultations not being undertaken in accordance with due process.

Consultations and impact assessments

- 4.6 As described in paragraph 3.3, the guidance itself will be subject to an equality impact assessment, and the webpages are designed to adhere to the specifications as set in paragraph 3.5.
- 4.7 The consultation tool also allows for interactions with social media such as Twitter and Facebook as well as the potential to integrate features between internal tools such as Talk London.
- 4.8 The tool also supports the GLA in complying with its obligations in relation to GDPR, with user log-ins that are GDPR compliant.

5 Financial comments

- 5.1 Approval is sought for the expenditure of up to £56,000 over a period of up to three-years, to fund a new licence for the Bang the Table consultation platform for this period. This is assumed to be based on an initial sum of £16,000 with an additional uplift of up to 10 per cent in subsequent years, together with an assumed margin to account for the procurement route.
- 5.2 Payments will be made annually up front, and the planned profile of the expenditure is shown below:

	23/24	24/25	25/26	Total
Estimated cost	£16,000	£17,600	£19,360	£52,960

As noted in 5.1 this includes a 10% increase each year and there is a further contingency of £3,040 above this across the duration of the contract.

- 5.3 The cost of this licence will be funded from the London Plan programme budget, held within the Planning & Regeneration unit. Expenditure for 23-24 financial year is affordable within the approved 2023-24 GLA budget and the indicative plan for 2024-25 and 2025-26. Budget for 2024-25 onwards will need to be approved as part of the Mayor’s budget setting process for those years.
- 5.4 To mitigate any risk of the programme not being sufficiently resourced in future years to cover costs following the budget-setting process, any contractual agreements will include the usual break clauses that could potentially be exercised if required.
- 5.5 All appropriate budget adjustments will be made.

6 Legal comments

- 6.1 The decision requested of the Executive Director of Good Growth (the “Executive Director”) concerns the exercise of the GLA’s general powers, falling within the GLA’s statutory powers to do such things considered to further the promotion of economic development and wealth creation, social development or the promotion of the improvement of the environment in 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; and
 - consult with appropriate bodies.
- 6.2 Section 334 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (the “Act”) requires the Mayor to prepare and publish a spatial development strategy; known as the London Plan. Section 339 of the Act requires

the Mayor to keep the London Plan under review; especially as regards matters which may be expected to affect the development of Greater London or the planning of its development.

- 6.3 Pursuant to section 34 of the Act, the GLA, acting by the Mayor, has the power to do anything which is calculated to facilitate or, is conducive or incidental to the exercise of any of its statutory functions. In this case, the procurement of a platform to facilitate engagement with the public in relation to the London Plan may be viewed as incidental to its section 30 powers defined above as well as its duties under section 334 and 339 of the Act.
- 6.4 In taking the decisions requested, the Executive Director must have due regard to the PSED - namely the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 (the "Equality Act"); and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations 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 (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). Throughout the process outline above and in particular as set out in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.6, due regard will need to be had to the Equality Act and equality impact considerations and mitigations.
- 6.5 The officers are reminded to comply with the Contracts and Funding Code when undertaking the procurement of the new engagement platform licence. At paragraph 4.4, above, the officers have indicated that the proposed procurement route will be a call-off from the Reseller Framework. To that end, the officers are reminded to comply with Reseller Framework's requirements in relation to call-offs.

7 Planned delivery approach and next steps

Activity	Timeline
Procurement of contract [for externally delivered projects]	July 2023
Delivery Start Date [for project proposals]	August 2023
Delivery End Date [for project proposals]	August 2023

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? YES

If YES, for what reason: Contains details of proposed spend ahead of seeking formal quotes via Reseller Framework; publication should be deferred until this process is complete to avoid receiving uncompetitive quotes.

Until what date: 31 October 2023

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:

Nina Miles has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

✓

Assistant Director/Head of Service:

Lisa Fairmaner has reviewed the documentation and is satisfied for it to be referred to the Sponsoring Director for approval.

✓

Financial and Legal advice:

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

✓

Corporate Investment Board

A summary of this decision was reviewed by the Corporate Investment Board on 7 August 2023.

✓

INTERIM CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER:

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

Signature:



Date:

07/08/2023