

	Officer Key Decision
	Report to the Director Communications Insight and Innovation
Authority to Enter into a Grant Agreement for Investment in Digital Infrastructure between the West London Alliance Boroughs	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key Decision
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	<p>Name: Madeleine Leathley Job Title: Head of Digital Transformation Email: madeleine.leathley@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Name: Emma Sharpe Job Title: Digital Programme Manager Email: emma.sharpe@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Name: Unnati Desai Job Title: Digital Project Manager Email: unnati.desai@brent.gov.uk</p>

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report requests approval to enter into a grant agreement with London Borough of Ealing for a grant funded programme to roll out new fibre connections to public buildings in areas which benefit West London’s residents and businesses. The programme is a collaboration between five of the seven West London Boroughs, being Ealing, Hillingdon, Barnet, Harrow and Brent.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

That the Director, Communications Insights and Innovation, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Community Power:

- 2.1 Approves the Council entering into a grant agreement with the Lead Authority London Borough of Ealing who received grant funding to the sum of £7.7 million from the City of London Corporation from the Strategic Investment Pot Round 1 (SIP-1) to unlock investment in digital infrastructure under a grant funding agreement dated 4 March 2019 (the CLC Agreement). A portion of the SIP-1 funding remains available for fibre connection to public buildings, to be apportioned between the West London Alliance Boroughs. The programme is a collaboration between five of the seven West London Boroughs, being Ealing, Hillingdon, Barnet, Harrow and Brent. In signing this grant agreement, the Council will be entitled to directly receive their portion of the remaining grant funding; indicative amount being £651,275.

3.0 Detail

Contribution to Borough Plan and Strategic Priorities

- a) The proposed programme of rolling out new fibre connections to public buildings directly supports the Council's priorities by enhancing digital connectivity in underserved areas. This initiative is aligned with the Borough Plan, which aims to improve infrastructure, boost local economy, and provide better services to residents and businesses.
- **Enhancing Digital Infrastructure**: By providing gigabit fibre connections to public buildings, the programme addresses the critical need for faster internet speeds, ensuring that community centres, libraries, and other public spaces have reliable access.
 - **Supporting Economic Growth**: Improved digital connectivity is essential for attracting businesses and encouraging economic development in West London, thus contributing to the broader goal of economic prosperity.
 - **Improving Community Services**: High-speed internet in public buildings will enhance the quality of services offered to residents, facilitating better access to information, education, and technology.
- b) This fibre infrastructure project not only meets the strategic objectives outlined in the Borough Plan but also demonstrates the Council's commitment to leveraging modern technology to foster a thriving, connected community.

Background

- 3.2 The council has been successful in its application to the London Borough of Ealing (LB Ealing) for a grant funded programme to roll out new fibre connections to public buildings in areas which benefit West London's residents and businesses.
- 3.3 In July 2018, £7.7m of funding from SIP Round 1 was allocated to the West London Alliance for digital connectivity projects. In October 2020, MHCLG awarded £22.1m to London through the Getting Britain Building Fund (GBBF). In this package of funding, £2m (£1.8m net) has been allocated to the West London Alliance by the GLA to fund new fibre connections in the 7 West London boroughs. The £1.8m of GBBF funding was combined with the remaining £6.1m of SIP 1 fibre funding to create a budget of £7.9m for new connections to public buildings (the Fibre West project).

- 3.4 WLA Fibre West Project is a fibre infrastructure project to install new gigabit fibre connections in public buildings (such as libraries and community centres) in areas which have slow fibre speeds (less than 30 megabits per second). The connection to the public building de-risks operator investment into the immediate area to upgrade homes and business premises with gigabit speeds.
- 3.5 LB Ealing (as the accountable body for WLA), in partnership with Harrow, Brent, Hillingdon and Barnet agreed a contract with British Telecommunications (BT) in March 2022 to deliver 176 public upgraded sites across the five boroughs and 127 CCTV sites in Barnet. Hammersmith & Fulham and Hounslow are progressing their own local projects and are outside of the BT contract.
- 3.6 There have been performance issues with the BT contract (slow pace of delivery and missed milestones in year one) which has resulted in 48 sites being de-scoped and the arrangement with BT being scaled back.
- 3.7 The table below sets out the remaining SIP 1 grant available, pending the outcome of the BT contract review and final account.

Borough	Indicative Amount of SIP 1 Grant Funding Remaining
Ealing	£660,221
Brent	£651,275
Harrow	£385,862
Hillingdon	£840,555
Barnet	£151,960
H&F (outside of the BT contract)	£0
Hounslow (outside of the BT contract)	£865,000
Total (Indicative)	£3,554,873

Table 1. Indicative grant amount remaining per borough.

- 3.8 To date, £4.15-£4.4m of grant funding has been spent on a joint borough commission with BT to deploy Full Fibre Infrastructure Build (FFIB) to sites across the five boroughs. Therefore, there remains £3.30-£3.55m of SIP 1 funding unallocated and available to WLA boroughs.
- 3.9 It has been proposed that the remaining funding available will be apportioned between the West London Alliance Boroughs (as per Table 1) for the purpose of improving fibre connectivity to public buildings. This is consistent with Council objectives and priorities, namely Strategic Priority 1: Prosperity and Stability in Brent via Desired Outcome 1: Easing the Cost-of-Living Crisis and Desired Outcome 3: Brent for Business.

- 3.10 Brent will use a portion of the remaining grant for an existing wayleave agreement with Hyperoptic for properties. Officers will enter into a 5-year installation and services contract to provide broadband network services and equipment for 153 units, offices, and community rooms. The total value is £139,435, covering £27,115 + VAT for installation and £22,464 annually for broadband provision. Brent will also invest £15,000 in Streetwave, a mobile coverage platform, to access accurate 4G and 5G speed and coverage maps in Brent, supporting connectivity projects in the borough.
- 3.11 Subject to clause **Error! Reference source not found.** in the agreement, the Lead Authority will transfer the Allocated Grant remaining to the Recipient in one transaction upon the receipt of a valid receipt of an invoice for the Grant.
- 3.12 Except where otherwise specified, the terms of the Agreement shall apply from the Commencement Date until the earlier of:
- the termination of the CLC Agreement; and
 - the delivery of all Approved Projects (the “Expiry Date”).

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 4.1 The membership of the West London Alliance and the related connectivity and digital work was reviewed and agreed as part of the Digital Strategy 2022-2026. This included consultation with the lead member and Cabinet as part of the approval process.

5.0 Financial Considerations

- 5.1 Officers have assessed the potential for utilising the Council's own resources to support activities and infrastructure related to digital projects and fibre connections. However, they have determined that grant funding from the West London Alliance's Fibre for West Projects would be advantageous. The indicative grant is £651,275 from the SIP-1 pot, as set out in paragraphs 2.0 and 3.7.
- 5.2 Throughout the project, officers will collaborate closely with the lead authority, Ealing Council, and other boroughs within the West London Alliance to maximise the benefits of this grant funding, which aims to enhance connectivity and support digital initiatives related to connectivity. As the Council will be an “Accountable Body” when receiving grant funding, the Corporate Director, Finance and Resources approve the proposed grant arrangements.
- 5.3 Currently, officers are not aware of any alternative funding sources that could enable the Council to implement a program of this magnitude on its own. With that in mind, it is important for the project team to consider deliverability and additional resources that will be needed for this project, and to assess how much Business As Usual resource will be needed from the existing workforce.

5.4 Confirmation that as the Council will be an “Accountable Body” when receiving grant funding, the Corporate Director, Finance and Resources approves the proposed grant arrangements.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 In accordance with section 9 of the table at paragraph 9.5 of Part 3 of the Constitution, submission of bids for additional resources from government and other bodies is a decision for a Corporate Director in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member. Officers have confirmed in Section 3 that relevant approval and consultation was obtained.

6.2 The Director, Communications Insights and Innovation has delegated authority pursuant to paragraph 9.5 [and 9.7] of Part 3 of the Constitution and Financial Regulation 8.2.2 of Part 2 of the Constitution to enter into grant funding arrangements. In doing so, the Director must ensure that the objectives of the grant agreement are consistent with the Council objectives and priorities in accordance with Financial Regulation 9.1.2.

6.3 As the Council will be an accountable body in respect of grant funding and in accordance with Financial Regulation 9.1.1, the Director of Communications Insights and Innovation must only exercise delegated powers to enter into grant funding arrangements where the Corporate Director, Finance and Resources approves entry into such arrangement. The Corporate Director, Finance and Resources has confirmed in the Financial Implications approval to enter into the grant agreement.

6.4 The Council is required to enter into a formal grant agreement. Legal Services have reviewed the grant agreement and can confirm that it is legally permissible for the Council to enter into the grant agreement.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 Pursuant to s149 Equality Act 2010 (the “Public Sector Equality Duty”), the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it,

7.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

7.3 Having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected

characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.

- 7.4 There is no prescribed manner in which the council must exercise its public sector equality duty but having an adequate evidence base for its decision is necessary.
- 7.5 If there are no equality implications arising out of this decision then consider inserting a paragraph along the lines of “The proposals in this report have been subject to screening and officers believe that there are no adverse equality implications.
- 7.6 The proposals in this report have been subject to screening and officers believe that there are no adverse equality implications.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 8.1 Officers have considered how the grant could affect the Council’s environmental objectives and climate emergency strategy. Based on the review, officers found no adverse implications.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

- 9.1 Not Applicable

10.0 Communication Considerations

- 10.1 Regular updates on project progress will be provided, including milestones achieved and any challenges encountered, during programme board and digital and customer board meetings. Detailed reports and documents related to the grant agreement and project implementation will be shared with all key stakeholders.

Report sign off:

Sadie East
Director, Communications Insights and Innovation