

DMPC Decision – PCD 914

Title: Project Alpha Social Media Hub Grant Agreement Variation Proposal

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this document is to seek approval to enter into a grant variation with the Home Office to provide additional funding for the MPS hosted; NPCC sponsored Project Alpha Social Media Hub.

In June 2020, the Home Office agreed to a grant agreement for £1,479,306.16 to fund the project for the current financial year (second year of funding). An additional £267,354.64 became available in November, increasing the current Grant funding provision to a maximum £1,746,660.80 for 2020/21.

The further funding, which is the result of a separate Home Office decision is to provide an uplift of five police officers, meeting direct pay and overtime, plus training and equipment (specific to role) costs within the Hub to provide enhanced capacity and additional flexibility for shift working.

The original funding period for the grant variation was 01/10/2020 until 31/03/2021. The duration is now reduced due to a delayed Home Office decision resulting from the COVID situation. Funding will reflect actual expenditure incurred during this reduced period and amount to less than the £267,354.64 available.

The additional funding will allow the Hub to deliver an enhanced response to tackle gang related serious violence and organised criminality that includes county line offending by taking action against online activity. This will focus on investigation, enforcement and disruption work against high harm gangs utilising a range of tactics. Additionally, referrals will be made to social media companies for the removal of illegal and harmful content intended to incite serious violence. DAC Graham McNulty retains oversight as the NPCC Gangs Portfolio lead.

The core aims of the Hub are:

- Deliver a strategy and capabilities to tackle the growing issue of threat, risk and harm generated by gangs through their use of social media platforms that perpetuates serious youth violence and facilitates organised crime.
- Develop methodology and best practice in partnership with other Police Forces, agencies and the third sector to enhance the online response of law enforcement. Advancing skills, knowledge and the use of technology to deliver innovative and effective digital solutions.
- Gauge the scale of the online threat and associated demand on law enforcement. Allow for analysis of online gang networks and how they exploit closed and open groups to operate organised criminality – e.g. recruitment into county lines, Child Criminal and Sexual Exploitation.

- Continued development of a national intelligence network, which would be the UK's first dedicated open source Intelligence function designed to tackle gang criminality and the associated violence.

Recommendation:

The Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime is recommended to approve:

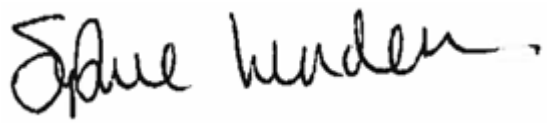
1. A grant variation of up to £267,354.64 from the Home Office to fund additional police officer posts for the Social Media Hub, increasing the current Grant funding provision by a maximum of £267,354.64 from £1,479,306.16 to £1,746,660.80 in 2020/21. Funding will reflect actual expenditure incurred during current financial year.
2. Enhancement of Project Alpha Social Media Hub capability through increased officer numbers to address the threat, risk and harm of gang violence and organised crime perpetuated through online activity.

Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime

I confirm I have considered whether or not I have any personal or prejudicial interest in this matter and take the proposed decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct. Any such interests are recorded below.

The above request has my approval.

Signature



Date

18/01/2021

PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE TO THE DMPC

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. As traditional communication data fragments with the introduction of new technology and communication providers, Social Media is becoming an ever-increasing key element within serious gang related violence and organised criminality that includes County Lines. This is relevant throughout London and across the UK.
- 1.2. With the proliferation of social media as a method of communication, there is a clear business need to develop new solutions to meet increasing demands.
- 1.3. The scale of the current complex risks posed by gangs in relation to the exposure of young people and the vulnerable to violence, criminal and sexual exploitation is extensive and affects every police force area.
- 1.4. The need for increased collaboration within law enforcement and with industry providers to deliver a better understanding of scale and risks and develop solutions collaboratively.
- 1.5. The Hub proof of concept operated during the previous financial year was Home Office funded and approved by the Deputy Major for Policing and Crime on 12/03/2019.

2. Issues for consideration

- 2.1. This information is contained in the restricted section of the report.

3. Financial Comments

- 3.1. In June 2020, the Home Office agreed to a grant agreement for £1,479,306.16 to fund Project Alpha for the current financial year (second year of funding). An additional £267,354.64 became available in November, increasing the grant funding provision to a maximum £1,746,660.80 for 2020/21.
- 3.2. The grant variation will deliver an uplift of five officers (DSx1, PCx4) for the remainder of the financial year, increasing the total from seventeen to twenty-two and providing enhanced operational delivery, incorporating 24/7 cover.
- 3.3. The additional officers will increase the Project Alpha Internet Intelligence and Investigation Team, whilst existing staff within Covert Policing remain unchanged.
- 3.4. The original funding period for the grant variation was 01/10/2020 until 31/03/2021. This period has now been reduced to 01/01/2021 until 31/03/2021. This is due to a delayed Home Office funding decision resulting from the COVID pandemic. Funding will reflect actual expenditure incurred during this reduced period and the amount to less than the £267,354.64.

- 3.5. Following consultation with the Home Office Serious Violence Unit, it is anticipated that funding to support the project including the increased numbers will continue into 2021/2022. Approval of the grant variation enables the commencement of recruitment activity in preparation of the next financial year, whilst additionally supporting enhanced operational delivery until the 31/03/2021. Continued funding for the expanded Project Alpha has been included within the Home Office three-year funding review.
- 3.6. The conditions on which the Home Office has made this grant relate to direct pay costs with the addition of overtime, plus training and equipment specific to the role. MPS support costs are not included. The previous accepted funding for the Hub in year one and year two (2019/2020 and 2020/2021 respectively) has been on this basis. Support costs for an officer within Project Alpha are £16,000 per year. The exact figure will be dependent on the activity period.
- 3.7. The funding will be recovered through the submission of a quarterly return to the Home Office in accordance with existing terms and conditions outlined in the existing Grant Agreement in place to fund Project Alpha.
- 3.8. The original grant agreement for Project Alpha totaling £1.48m sets out the aims and objectives, governance, compliance (legal and strategic), strategic oversight and dissemination of relevant material, insurance and liabilities, HR and financial agreements and written with legal oversight.
- 3.9. At the end of the existing funding period and if no further funding is made available, there will be a phased exit strategy for staff to transition back into existing MPS posts.
- 3.10. A full breakdown of the costs is contained within restricted section of the report.

4. Legal Comments

- 4.1. The Home Office will pay the Additional Grant to the Metropolitan Police in exercise of the power conferred by Section 56 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004).
- 4.2. The proposed additional grant funding and variation to the grant agreement is permitted under Schedule 3, Paragraph 7 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011.
- 4.3. Paragraph 4.8 of the MOPAC Scheme of Consent and Delegation provides the DMPC has delegated authority to approve bids for grant funding made and all offers made of grant funding; and/or where appropriate a strategy for grant giving.
- 4.4. There are no legal reasons as to why this grant variation, the terms of which are set out within the main grant agreement, cannot be accepted. Reviewed throughout the funding period.

- 4.5. The grant agreement will be published pursuant to The Elected Local Policing Bodies (Specified Information) (Amendment) Order 2012.

5. GDPR and Data Privacy

- 5.1. The MPS is subject to the requirements and conditions placed on it as a 'State' body to comply with the European Convention of Human Rights and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018. Both legislative requirements place an obligation on the MPS to process personal data fairly and lawfully in order to safeguard the rights and freedoms of individuals.
- 5.2. Under Article 35 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Section 57 of the DPA 2018, Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) become mandatory for organisations with technologies and processes that are likely to result in a high risk to the rights of the data subjects.
- 5.3. Data Protection Impact Assessment completed. The project will ensure a privacy by design approach, which will allow the MPS to find and fix problems at the early stages of any project, ensuring compliance with GDPR. DPIAs support the accountability principle, as they will ensure the MPS complies with the requirements of GDPR and they demonstrate that appropriate measures have been taken to ensure compliance.

6. Equality Comments

- 6.1. This business case has undergone a full Equalities Impact Assessment. Due regard has been taken to the Equality Act's Public Sector Equality Duty under Sec 149 of the Equality Act 2010. Consideration has been taken to assess equality impact caused by the proposed business change including effective engagement and analysing relevant equality information. As a result, no negative impact has been identified to any individual at this stage.

7. Background/supporting papers

- 7.1. Decision PCD 545 in March 2019 approved funding for this work in 2019/20. Decision PCD 867 in November 2020 approved the continuation of funding in 2020/21.

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 MOPAC website following approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.

Part 1 Deferral:

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

If yes, for what reason:

Until what date: N/A

Part 2 Confidentiality: Only the facts or advice considered as likely to be exempt from disclosure under the FOIA should be in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a **Part 2** form – YES

ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION	<i>Tick to confirm statement (✓)</i>
Financial Advice: The Strategic Finance and Resource Management Team has been consulted on this proposal.	✓
Legal Advice: The MPS legal team has been consulted on the proposal.	✓
Equalities Advice: Equality and diversity issues are covered in the body of the report.	✓
Commercial Issues Commercial issues are not applicable	✓
GDPR/Data Privacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GDPR compliance issues are covered in the body of the report. • A DPIA has been completed 	✓
Director/Head of Service: The Chief Finance Officer has reviewed the request and is satisfied it is correct and consistent with the MOPAC's plans and priorities.	✓

Chief Executive Officer

I have been consulted about the proposal and confirm that financial, legal and equalities advice has been taken into account in the preparation of this report. I am satisfied that this is an appropriate request to be submitted to the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime.

Signature



Date 5/01/2021



MOPAC

MAYOR OF LONDON
OFFICE FOR POLICING AND CRIME

Project Alpha Social Media Hub Home Office Grant Agreement Variation

MOPAC Investment Advisory & Monitoring meeting 5th February 2021

Report by DSU Mike West on behalf of the Chief of Corporate Services

Part 1 – This section of the report will be published by MOPAC. It is classified as OFFICIAL – PUBLIC

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The further funding, which is the result of a separate Home Office decision is to provide an uplift of five police officers, meeting direct pay and overtime, plus training and equipment (specific to role) costs within the Hub to provide enhanced capacity and additional flexibility for shift working.

The original funding period for the grant variation 01/10/2020 until 31/03/2021. Duration now reduced due to delayed Home Office decision resulting from COVID situation. Funding will reflect actual expenditure incurred during this reduced period and amount to less than the £267,354.64 available.

The additional funding will allow the Hub to deliver an enhanced response to tackle gang related serious violence and organised criminality that includes county line offending by taking action against online activity. Focusing on investigation, enforcement and disruption work against high harm gangs utilising a range of tactics. Additionally, making referrals to social media companies for the removal of illegal and harmful content intended to incite serious violence. DAC Graham McNulty retains oversight as the NPCC Gangs Portfolio lead.

The core aims of the Hub are:

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platforms that perpetuates serious youth violence and facilitates organised crime.

- Develop methodology and best practice in partnership with other Police Forces, agencies and the third sector to enhance the online response of law enforcement. Advancing skills, knowledge and the use of technology to deliver innovative and effective digital solutions.
- Gauge the scale of the online threat and associated demand on law enforcement. Allow for analysis of online gang networks and how they exploit closed and open groups to operate organised criminality – e.g. recruitment into county lines, Child Criminal and Sexual Exploitation.
- Continued development of a national intelligence network, which would be the UK's first dedicated open source Intelligence function designed to tackle gang criminality and the associated violence.

Recommendations

The Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, via the Investment Advisory and Monitoring meeting (IAM), is asked to approve:

- 1. To approve a grant variation from the Home Office to fund additional police officer posts within the Social Media Hub, increasing the current Grant funding provision by a maximum of £267,354.64 from £1,479,306.16 to £1,746,660.80 in 2020/21. Funding will reflect actual expenditure incurred during current financial year.**
- 2. Enhancement of Project Alpha Social Media Hub capability through increased officer numbers to address the threat, risk and harm of gang violence and organised crime perpetuated through online activity.**

Time sensitivity

A decision is required from the Deputy Mayor by 19th February 2021. In accordance with the decision timetable. This is to allow continued operational delivery for FY 20/21 to achieve desired outcomes.

Non-confidential facts and advice to the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime

Introduction and background

1. As traditional communication data fragments with the introduction of new technology and communication providers, Social Media is becoming an ever-increasing key element within serious gang related violence and organised criminality that includes County Lines. This is relevant throughout London and across the UK.
2. With the proliferation of social media as a method of communication, there is a clear business need to develop new solutions to meet increasing demands.

3. The scale of the current complex risks posed by gangs in relation to the exposure of young people and the vulnerable to violence, criminal and sexual exploitation is extensive and affects every police force area.
4. The need for increased collaboration within law enforcement and with industry providers to deliver a better understanding of scale and risks and develop solutions collaboratively.
5. The Hub proof of concept operated during the previous financial year was Home Office funded and approved by the Deputy Major for Policing and Crime on 12/03/2019.

Issues for consideration

This information is contained in the restricted section of the report

Contributes to the MOPAC Police & Crime Plan 2017-2021¹

The work the Hub will undertake directly impacts upon serious violent crime and the criminality of urban street gangs/Organised Crime Groups. It will also seek to reduce the criminal and sexual exploitation of young people.

Financial, Commercial and Procurement Comments

In June 2020, the Home Office agreed to a grant agreement for £1,479,306.16 to fund Project Alpha for the current financial year (second year of funding). An additional £267,354.64 became available in November, increasing the grant funding provision to a maximum £1,746,660.80 for 2020/21.

The grant variation will deliver an uplift of five officers (DSx1, PCx4) for the remainder of the financial year, increasing the total from seventeen to twenty-two and providing enhanced operational delivery, incorporating 24/7 cover.

The additional officers will increase the Project Alpha Internet Intelligence and Investigation Team within MO2 Met Intel, whilst existing staff within MO3 Covert Policing remain unchanged.

Original funding period for the grant variation - 01/10/2020 until 31/03/2021. Period now reduced to 01/01/2021 until 31/03/2021. This is due to a delayed Home Office funding decision resulting from the COVID pandemic. Funding will reflect actual expenditure incurred during this reduced period and amount to less than the £267,354.64.

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¹ [Police and crime plan: a safer city for all Londoners | London City Hall](#)

year one and year two (2019/2020 and 2020/2021 respectively) has been on this basis.

Support costs for an officer within Project Alpha is £16,000 per year. The exact figure will be dependent on the activity period.

The funding will be recovered through the submission of a quarterly return to the Home Office in accordance with existing terms and conditions outlined in the existing Grant Agreement in place to fund Project Alpha.

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A full breakdown of the costs is contained within restricted section of the report.

Legal Comments

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Paragraph 4.8 of the MOPAC Scheme of Consent and Delegation provides the DMPC has delegated authority to approve bids for grant funding made and all offers made of grant funding; and/or where appropriate a strategy for grant giving.

There are no legal reasons as to why this grant variation, the terms of which are set out within the main grant agreement, cannot be accepted. Reviewed throughout the funding period.

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Privacy Comments

The MPS is subject to the requirements and conditions placed on it as a 'State' body to comply with the European Convention of Human Rights and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018. Both legislative requirements place an obligation on the MPS to process personal data fairly and lawfully in order to safeguard the rights and freedoms of individuals.

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Data Protection Impact Assessment completed. The project will ensure a privacy by design approach, which will allow the MPS to find and fix problems at the early stages of any project, ensuring compliance with GDPR. DPIAs support the accountability principle, as they will ensure the MPS complies with the requirements of GDPR and they demonstrate that appropriate measures have been taken to ensure compliance.

Real Estate Implications

The increased team of officers will remain in existing office space provided in year one within the MPS estate. The proposal does not increase current desk allocation due to the introduction of new shifts and agile working. Further information is contained within the restricted section of the report.

Environmental Implications

There are no identifiable benefits to the London Environment Strategy

Background/supporting papers

This information is contained in the restricted section of the report

Report author: **Mike West, Det Supt, work number 07785 518789**

Part 2 – This section refers to the details of the Part 2 business case which is NOT SUITABLE for MOPAC Publication.

The Government Security Classification marking for Part 2 is:
OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE [OPERATIONAL]

Part 2 of MPS Project Alpha Social Media Hub is exempt from publication for the following reasons:

FOIA Sec 31 Law enforcement

(1) Information which is not exempt information by virtue of section 30 is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice—

(a) The prevention or detection of crime,

- (b) The apprehension or prosecution of offenders,
- (c) The administration of justice,

The paper will be exempt until 01/04/2025 in accordance with MPS policy pending review.