

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

KEY DECISION

Report Title: RENEWING THE JOINT VENTURE AGREEMENT FOR THE COUNCIL TO REMAIN A MEMBER OF THE CENTRAL LONDON FORWARD BOROUGH PARTNERSHIP

Date: 20 March 2024

Decision Maker	Leadership Team
Reporting Officer	Maxine Holdsworth, Chief Executive
Key Decision number	KD1008933
Access to information	Public

Wards All Wards

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Council has been a member of Central London Forward since its inception in 2007. An existing partnership agreement signed by all the member boroughs of this sub-regional partnership expires on the 31 March 2024. This report seeks approval to renew the Council's signature to the agreement, for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2028, and to payment of the annual subscription.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Leadership Team is recommended to:

- 2.1 Agree that the Council enters into a renewed partnership agreement for Central London Forward for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2028,
- 2.2 Agree to pay an annual subscription, which has been frozen at the current level of £40,000.

3. REASONS FOR DECISION

3.1 The current partnership agreement concludes on the 31 March 2024. Under the Council's Constitution, partnership arrangements between boroughs and public agencies are reserved as a Leadership Team decision.

Further information on this report can be obtained from the contact officer, graham.hart@rbkc.gov.uk.

- 3.2 The Council Plan identifies the importance of working collectively and in partnership to assist progress on delivering the ambitions for a borough that is Fairer, including on skills, employment, and health.
- 3.3 The activities of the Central London Forward partnership deliver a range of direct and related benefits to the borough and the Council as detailed below.
- 3.4 The Council continues to collaborate with the boroughs who are members of Central London Forward as a key central London voice and contributor.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Central London Forward (CLF) is a strategic partnership composed of local authorities. The member authorities include The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and the boroughs of Camden, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth, Westminster, and the City of London Corporation.
- 4.2 Four of the above members (Hackney, Haringey, Lewisham, and Tower Hamlets) were previously associate members having joined Central London Forward in 2017 when Government devolution of the commissioning of the Work and Health Programme identified a 12-borough geography as the contracting area.
- 4.3 Originally established in 2007, CLF was created to champion the strategic interests of central London's residents and businesses and to provide a platform for public policy and collaboration. The Council has been a member since the inception of Central London Forward.
- 4.4 CLF was established to influence policy at national and London level with particular focus on issues affecting central London including the importance of central London to both London and national economies, making the case for sufficient investment and resources, promoting the needs of central London with a focus on sustainable economic development, and to identify and co-operate on areas of mutual interest.
- 4.5 CLF is not a legal entity, the partnership requires one local authority to act as the 'accountable' or 'contracting' body, though all economic and employment programme bids are coordinated and managed under CLF programme management resource.
- 4.6 The accountable borough for central London sub-region is the City of London.
- 4.7 CLF is the largest of four sub-regional partnerships across Greater London that act as a conduit between the boroughs and London government. The other sub-regional partnerships include:
 - Local London (9 borough members in east and south London).
 - West London Alliance (7 borough members across west London).
 - South London Partnership (5 borough members in south London).

Further information on this report can be obtained from the contact officer, graham.hart@rbkc.gov.uk.

4.8 The CLF Board is composed of Leaders of each member borough and supported by a Chief Executive Group. Officer groups are established for various themes, including economy, transport and planning matters.

5. THE ACTIVITIES OF CENTRAL LONDON FORWARD

5.1 The Board have agreed to focus upon the Main Objectives - to promote inclusive and sustainable growth, so that central London's economy thrives, and all our residents and communities benefit from the opportunities that this creates.

The Main Objectives shall be delivered by:

- **Coordinating and convening across central London** – CLF facilitates networks for Leaders, Cabinet Members, officers and other stakeholders, in order to support partnership working and collective action.
- **Sharing evidence and best practice** – CLF conducts and commissions research on shared challenges and priorities, and it helps share best practice, to inform decision-making.
- **Acting as a collective voice** – CLF seeks to influence national and regional policy makers to secure better outcomes for central London.
- **Managing cross-borough programmes** – CLF manages and delivers cross-borough employment and skills programmes which help residents into decent work.

5.2 The updated agreement incorporates the variations that were made after the previous renewal in respect of Associate members as referred to above. The agreement has been reviewed by the Council's legal department, with comment below.

5.3 There is an annual subscription charge of £40,000. This subscription is the contribution to the core costs of the CLF officer team composed of a director and policy officers, employed by the accountable body City of London. The subscription is paid out of the Chief Executive's budget.

5.4 The partnership may enter into joint project work and activity and these specific decisions are taken within the Governance of CLF and each individual member authority. Some projects or bids to lever in funding could involve various partnership groupings, not every CLF project necessarily involves all 12 boroughs.

5.5 The updated agreement incorporates the following changes:

- Scrapping the Associate Membership model, so that there is only one tier of membership.
- Re-wording the Main Objectives (as above) and delivery activities so that it better reflect the focus of current work.

Further information on this report can be obtained from the contact officer, graham.hart@rbkc.gov.uk.

- Removing the reference to the Chair and Deputy Chair having to come from different political parties. This formalises the current arrangement - which was approved by the Board after the 2022 local elections - whereby the Chair and Deputy are currently both from Labour-led boroughs.
- 5.6 The benefits of membership include the inclusion in devolved funding arrangements from the Greater London Authority. Currently this funding includes the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (employment and skills) which has resulted in a grant award to RBKC of up to £315,000 up until March 2025.
- 5.7 CLF has also procured and managed devolved employment support programmes at significant scale across the sub-region, including the Work and Health programme (Job Entry Targeted Support) – a COVID-19 measure, and a targeted programme for under-represented groups. The CLF procured programmes have supported 1159 residents in RBKC with 656 entering employment.
- 5.8 CLF are seeking the same level of devolution arrangement for the planned DWP Universal Support programme for long term unemployed, however, this funding may be devolved to GLA level for procurement.
- 5.9 CLF has also recently commissioned research on behalf of members in the following subjects:
- Low carbon retrofit labour demand analysis for central London including borough reports (completed)
 - Bakerloo Line upgrade and extension impact assessment (February 2024)
 - Building an Inclusive Economy in Central London (February)
 - Good work in central London (Spring)
 - Tackling employment rights abuse in central London (Spring)
- 5.10 It is proposed that the Council continue its participation and membership of Central London Forward to support the lobbying for further devolution to local authorities in London. This will also continue the benefits of shared learning and good practice that allows the opportunity to continue to influence and shape future policy and programme design for the central London sub-region.

6. OPTIONS, ANALYSIS AND PROPOSALS

- 6.1 The Leadership Team could decide not to renew as a Partner to the agreement, withdrawing from Central London Forward at the end of the current agreement. This would however leave the Council isolated from future central London policy and programme decisions and outside of a formal sub-regional partnership. **This is not the recommended option.**
- 6.2 There would be a reputational risk to Council as it may be seen not to support ambitions for London and the collective work of authorities, and the London Councils shared vision for greater devolution to London Government.

Further information on this report can be obtained from the contact officer, graham.hart@rbkc.gov.uk.

- 6.3 The Leadership Team could decide to agree to renewing the agreement and continue to be an active participant in current policy and programme delivery for the sub-region, and participation in devolved funding programmes from the Greater London Authority. **This is the recommended option.**
- 6.4 Should the Council wish withdraw at a future point, the Council is able to withdraw from this agreement by providing 9 months written notice of withdrawal which would take effect on the 31 March in any year.

7. CONSULTATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 7.1 The Joint Venture Agreement is a strategic agreement that underpins the Council's partnership working with other authorities. The agreement itself does not contain any specific programmes or policies for consultation. Officers have concluded that this is not required.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Council has lawful power under the Localism Act 2011 section 1, the general power of competence, to participate in this partnership arrangement with other local authorities to work together on strategic areas of interest and to agree to this renewal of the Partnership Agreement which has been in place since 2008.
- 8.2 Legal Services have reviewed the draft updated partnership agreement and proposed some amendments, and overall considers that it is appropriate to regulate the relationship between the signatories. The accountable body, the City of London Corporation, agrees to take responsibility for any losses it causes to the other participants by not discharging its duties, and there are appropriate provisions around employment of a delivery team and accounting for expenditure of the combined subscriptions.

9. FINANCIAL, PROPERTY AND ANY OTHER RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Head of Financial Management (Strategy and Planning) confirms that £40,000 has been allocated for this purpose in the Council's budget. There are no significant financial implications for renewing the contract for a further four years. Any risks of agreeing to a further four year's membership are mitigated by the fact that the Council can withdraw from the CLF at any time by giving nine months written notice.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no direct implications within the decision and membership, however the partnership work and research undertaken by Central London Forward does contribute to knowledge and the development of actions to address the environmental challenges and Net Zero aspirations.

11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The decision to renew and completing the agreement does not have a direct impact upon the Council's Human Resources, staffing complement, or equalities.

12. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The decision relates to entering into an overarching agreement and not specific policies or projects and their impact. Where individual projects or initiatives are proposed they will be subject to the Council's governance processes with due regard for equalities implications and where necessary Equalities Impact Assessments.

13. APPENDICES

- 13.1 None.

14. SUPPORTING AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 14.1 None.

*Maxine Holdsworth
Chief Executive*

Mandatory clearance process

Cleared by **Corporate** Finance (*LM*)

Cleared by Legal Services (*DD*)

Cleared by Communications (*NPT*)