



5G Innovation  
Regions and  
Smart  
Infrastructure  
Pilots  
Programme  
Evaluation

**Process evaluation report  
(application process)**

**October 2024**

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# Glossary

**Table 1: Abbreviations**

Key term	Definition
<b>5GIR</b>	5G Innovation Regions
<b>DSIT</b>	Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>MNO</b>	Mobile Network Operator
<b>PAS</b>	Publicly Available Specification
<b>SIPP</b>	Smart Infrastructure Pilots Programme
<b>UKTIN</b>	UK Telecoms Innovation Network

**Table 2: Glossary**

Key term	Definition
<b>Activities</b>	The material and human resources used to undertake the tasks which underpin an intervention
<b>Benefits</b>	Positive outputs and outcomes (including economic, social, and environmental) resulting from an intervention
<b>Impact</b>	The changes which result from the intervention over the longer term and that would not have happened otherwise
<b>Network/ tech provider</b>	Organisation providing advanced wireless technology networks or related technologies/ infrastructure
<b>Outcomes</b>	The changes which result from the intervention outputs over the short and medium term
<b>Outputs</b>	The deliverables that directly result from the inputs and activities related to an intervention
<b>PAS 191</b>	Publicly Available Specification 191 sets out requirements for the design, installation and maintenance of multi-functional lighting columns (i.e. columns that can be used for a number of additional purposes including hosting small cells, Electric Vehicle (EV) charging, Closed Circuit TV (CCTV), Internet of Things (IoT) sensors and street signage for example).
<b>Steering Group</b>	The Steering Group for the evaluation has the role of providing advice, guidance, scrutiny and challenge to the evaluation. It consists of DSIT officials and a member of the Cabinet Office's Evaluation Taskforce

# Executive summary

## 1.1 Introduction

To support the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's (DSIT) ambition to deliver world-class digital infrastructure across the UK, drive innovation and unlock opportunities for economic growth, and as part of its Wireless Infrastructure Strategy<sup>1</sup>, DSIT is currently in the process of delivering two wireless infrastructure programmes: 5G Innovation Regions (5GIR) and the Smart Infrastructure Pilots Programme (SIPP). Details of these programmes can be found in Section 2.1.2 and Section 2.1.3 of this report.

Government departments are expected to undertake comprehensive, robust and proportionate evaluations of their policy interventions in order to understand how policies and programmes are working and to ensure the best value for public money.<sup>2</sup> To that end, in February 2024, DSIT commissioned KPMG to undertake programme-level evaluations of 5GIR and SIPP.

The 5GIR and SIPP evaluations will comprise process, impact and economic evaluations. The evaluations for the two programmes will be conducted concurrently due to the synergies between the programmes and their evaluations.

In May 2024 KPMG produced a scoping and baseline report, signed off by DSIT, setting out: the research questions to be answered by each evaluation; the approach to the evaluations; and their associated timings. The process evaluation will consist of two elements: one element covering the application process, to be conducted between June and September 2024; and the other element covering the delivery of the programme, to be conducted between April and August 2025.

This report sets out the findings of the first element of the process evaluation – relating specifically to the application process.

In delivering this process evaluation we have worked closely with the DSIT evaluation project team<sup>3</sup> and the Steering Group<sup>4</sup> that has been set up as part of the 5GIR and SIPP evaluations (hereafter referred to as the DSIT evaluation team and Steering Group respectively).

## 1.2 Process evaluation research question (application process)

The agreed evaluation research question, as detailed in the scoping report<sup>5</sup>, for this element of the process evaluation is:

- What went well and what could be improved with regard to the 5GIR/SIPP programmes, specifically in relation to the application process (from the point of view of LAs and DSIT)?

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-wireless-infrastructure-strategy/uk-wireless-infrastructure-strategy>

<sup>2</sup> See: [About us - Evaluation Task Force - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> The DSIT evaluation project team has overall responsibility for the evaluations and provides ongoing input and direction in relation to the evaluation such that it meets DSIT's requirements; the team is comprised of DSIT officials.

<sup>4</sup> The Steering Group provides advice, guidance, scrutiny and challenge to the evaluations, with the aim of supporting the evaluations and ensuring the findings are robust and provide useful insights to build the evidence base in relation to digital infrastructure. It consists of DSIT officials covering the areas of policy, analysis, benefits realisation and technical expertise with respect to the 5GIR and SIPP programmes, together with a member of Cabinet Office's Evaluation Taskforce.

<sup>5</sup> 5G Innovation Regions and Smart Infrastructure Pilots Programme Evaluation: Scoping and baseline report. May 2024. KPMG

## 1.3 Data and evidence collection

The approach taken to delivering the process evaluation, agreed as part of the scoping report, aligns to the principles of the HM Treasury Magenta Book<sup>6</sup>.

The main research methods that were used to collect data/information for this evaluation are set out below:

— **Review of documentation:**

- A wide range of documentation was reviewed to help answer the evaluation research question. Documentation included: pre-competition engagement materials; competition application guidance documents; and DSIT scoring assessment spreadsheets, amongst other internal programme documentation.

— **Interview with DSIT officials:**

- An interview with nine DSIT officials involved in the delivery of the two programmes was undertaken to gather primarily qualitative evidence to support the process evaluation. The interview provided insights into officials' views on the application processes and design of the 5GIR and SIPP programmes. This insight was based on officials' involvement in the design and subsequent delivery of the two programmes and their interaction and engagement with LAs through the pre-application and post-application periods.

— **Surveys:**

- Three separate surveys were run over the course of the evaluation to help answer the evaluation research question. Two of these surveyed applicants to each of the two programmes respectively: the 5GIR Survey which surveyed successful 5GIR applicants and unsuccessful 5GIR applicants; and the SIPP Survey which surveyed successful SIPP applicants and unsuccessful SIPP applicants. A third survey was conducted of all LAs across the UK (the All LA Survey) to obtain input specifically from those who did not apply to one or either of the programmes.
- Good responses to the surveys were achieved, providing confidence in the results derived from them. 68 LAs responded to the All LA Survey. For the 5GIR Survey we received similar response rates for both successful applicants (70%) and unsuccessful applicants (65%). For the SIPP Survey we received a full response from successful applicants (ie a response rate of 100%). However, for unsuccessful applicants to SIPP we received two responses from the total of five unsuccessful applicants. As a result, some care is required when interpreting the results for unsuccessful SIPP applicants given the small number of responses involved.

## 1.4 Key findings

### 1.4.1 Summary of the 5GIR process evaluation findings

**Effective advertising with room to improve further:**

- DSIT officials felt that the programme's advertisement strategy, which included direct communication with LAs as well as national press releases and social media engagement proved effective in reaching a wide audience. Indeed, officials noted that the 5GIR briefing event had the highest registration numbers for a DSIT programme compared to previous events.
- Respondents to the 5GIR Survey cited a wide range of means of becoming aware of the opportunity. An email from DSIT was reported as the most common means of becoming aware of the 5GIR opportunity (a finding replicated in the All LA Survey for those LAs who were aware of the 5GIR opportunity).
- Nevertheless, the All LA Survey suggests that there is still room for improvement in outreach efforts to raise awareness of available opportunities. Three-quarters of LAs that responded to the All LA Survey and hadn't applied for the 5GIR programme, were not aware of the opportunity.

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<sup>6</sup> HM Treasury 2020; Magenta Book. See: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/879438/HMT\\_Magenta\\_Book.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/879438/HMT_Magenta_Book.pdf)

- Investing in such outreach (through developing improved contacts at LAs for example) could be beneficial as a significant proportion of LAs expressed interest in applying for similar programmes in the future. Around two-thirds of respondents to the All LA Survey that hadn't applied for the 5GIR programme stated they would be interested in applying for opportunities similar to 5GIR in the future.

**High application interest:**

- The 5GIR programme received 36 applications, reportedly exceeding initial expectations among DSIT officials. Moreover, applications were received from every region of the UK.

**Strong application quality:**

- DSIT officials felt the quality of applications was high, with 21 shortlisted and 10 ultimately successful. They reported that successful applications demonstrated clear vision, ambitious goals, strong partnerships, and sustainable funding models.

**Innovative funding method:**

- DSIT officials said that, based on the interactions they had with LAs during the application process, the innovative funding method employed for the 5GIR programme (whereby the funding method provides increased flexibility and freedom to local authorities in devising plans to meet the grant requirements) was an attractive feature for LAs and was generally well-received by them.
- Over a third of respondents to the 5GIR Survey tended to, or definitely, agree that the method of funding was an important factor in their decision to apply for the 5GIR programme.
- The DSIT team that designed the programme reported that they had considered aspects that would make the programme attractive to LAs – particularly illustrated by the funding mechanism employed.

**Areas for improvement:**

- Following their experience of the application process, officials identified areas for potential improvement as including: extending the application timeframe; increasing funding allocation; and strategically timing the competition outside of holiday periods. Whilst this provides useful insights for consideration for future programmes, DSIT officials noted that the timing of the application window for the 5GIR and SIPP opportunities was constrained by the spending review cycle which meant the funds for these programmes needed to be disbursed by March 2025.
- Timing was also identified as a challenge in responses to the 5GIR Survey:
  - Almost half (46%) of respondents 'definitely disagreed' that they received a sufficient amount of time to make the 5GIR application.
  - In free-text responses, a number of respondents highlighted that the timing of the competition (through the summer holidays) made the process of applying difficult.
- Finally, a majority of respondents that were not successful in applying for 5GIR funding (10 out of the 17 unsuccessful applicants that responded to the survey) noted they had not received feedback from DSIT on their bids. Of these, six specified that they had requested feedback from DSIT (the application guidance stated that all applications would receive feedback upon request). However, DSIT officials noted that according to their own records there were four applicants that requested feedback and were not sent it, and that this was an oversight on DSIT's behalf.

## 1.4.2 Summary of the SIPP process evaluation findings

**Targeted advertisement:**

- When compared to the advertisement strategy used for the 5GIR programme, SIPP employed a more limited and targeted advertisement approach. Consistent with the difference in the size of budgets for the two programmes (with 5GIR accounting for over £36m central government spend as compared to £1.3m for SIPP) a more limited range of channels or methods were used to advertise the SIPP opportunity when compared to the 5GIR opportunity.

**Moderate application interest:**

- Whereas the 5GIR opportunity provided applicants with quite a lot of autonomy to suggest how the funding might be spent, SIPP was narrower in scope – focused particularly on the use of

advanced wireless technology on multi-purpose poles. SIPP received 11 applications, which was reportedly in line with the expectations of DSIT officials given its narrower scope. However, the All LA Survey showed a significant proportion (84%) of LAs that did not apply to SIPP were not aware of the opportunity.

**Mixed application quality:**

- DSIT officials felt the quality of SIPP applications was mixed, with some low-quality submissions. This was attributed to:
  - limited time and resources for application completion - the SIPP competition was open for applications for around 4 weeks over the summer period, 2 weeks less than the period for the 5GIR competition; and
  - the lack of existing relationships between LAs and external stakeholders - required in order to develop proposals - and little time for these to be developed within the application timeframes.

**Limited geographical spread:**

- The geographical spread of successful applications was primarily concentrated in England, with one successful application from Scotland. There were no SIPP applications from Wales or Northern Ireland. Officials felt the limited number of applications from across the UK was due to the programme's focus on specific types of projects, which appealed to LAs within these nations already engaged in similar initiatives. However, the All LA Survey shows that 84% of respondents that hadn't applied for SIPP were not aware of the opportunity, indicating that low levels of awareness may also have contributed to limited applications, particularly given the majority of respondents to the All LA Survey reported that they would be interested in similar programmes in the future.

**Match funding requirement:**

- Officials felt that SIPP's match funding requirement may have discouraged potential applicants.
- This was reflected in survey responses, with one of the most common points raised in the free-text comments to the SIPP Survey concerning the lack of clarity over the match-funding element of the programme.
- Respondents to the SIPP Survey were generally positive about the application process, particularly praising the funding mechanism used. Over 60% of respondents tended to, or definitely, agree with the statement, "*This method of funding was an important factor in my decision to apply for SIPP*". Neither the match funding nor the funding mechanism employed in SIPP were raised as reasons for not applying amongst non-applicants.

**Areas for improvement:**

- Areas for potential improvement identified by DSIT officials and LAs via the surveys include:
  - simplifying match funding requirements;
  - being clearer in the application guidance and associated materials about the specific outcomes expected from the programme, so that LAs had a better understanding of this;
  - extending the time period for applications; and
  - raising awareness of the opportunity more generally.

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 The context for the evaluation

#### 2.1.1 Background to the evaluation

To support the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's (DSIT) ambition to deliver world-class digital infrastructure across the UK, drive innovation and unlock opportunities for economic growth, DSIT is currently in the process of delivering two wireless infrastructure programmes: 5G Innovation Regions (5GIR) and the Smart Infrastructure Pilots Programme (SIPP).

These programmes are being delivered as part of DSIT's wider activity to encourage 5G adoption across the UK and support the delivery of the Wireless Infrastructure Strategy.<sup>7</sup> This strategy sets out DSIT's vision for how advanced wireless infrastructure can become an integral part of the UK's economy and society by 2030, and how people, business and public services across the UK can realise the full benefits of 5G and other forms of advanced wireless connectivity.<sup>8</sup>

More detail about the two programmes is provided in the sections below.

Government departments are expected to undertake comprehensive, robust and proportionate evaluations of their policy interventions in order to understand how policies and programmes are working and to ensure the best value for public money.<sup>9</sup> To that end, in February 2024, DSIT commissioned KPMG to undertake programme-level evaluations of 5GIR and SIPP.

The 5GIR and SIPP evaluations will comprise process, impact and economic evaluations. The evaluations for the two programmes will be conducted concurrently due to the synergies between the programmes and their evaluations.

In May 2024 KPMG produced a scoping and baseline report, signed off by DSIT, setting out: the research questions to be answered by each evaluation; the approach to the evaluations; and their associated timings. The process evaluation will consist of two elements: one element covering the application process, to be conducted between June and September 2024; and the other element covering the delivery of the programme, to be conducted between April and August 2025.

This report reports the findings of the first element of the process evaluation – relating specifically to the application process.

In delivering this process evaluation we have worked closely with the DSIT evaluation project team<sup>10</sup> and the Steering Group<sup>11</sup> that has been set up as part of the 5GIR and SIPP evaluations (hereafter referred to as the DSIT evaluation team and Steering Group respectively).

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<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-wireless-infrastructure-strategy/uk-wireless-infrastructure-strategy>

<sup>8</sup> See:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64c3c3177aea5b00126a8e34/5g\\_innovation\\_regions\\_application\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64c3c3177aea5b00126a8e34/5g_innovation_regions_application_guidance.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> See: [About us - Evaluation Task Force - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/about-us/evaluation-task-force)

<sup>10</sup> The DSIT evaluation project team has overall responsibility for the evaluations and provides ongoing input and direction in relation to the evaluation such that it meets DSIT's requirements; the team is comprised of DSIT officials.

<sup>11</sup> The Steering Group provides advice, guidance, scrutiny and challenge to the evaluations, with the aim of supporting the evaluations and ensuring the findings are robust and provide useful insights to build the evidence base in relation to digital infrastructure. It consists of DSIT officials covering the areas of policy, analysis, benefits realisation and technical expertise with respect to the 5GIR and SIPP programmes, together with a member of Cabinet Office's Evaluation Taskforce.

## 2.1.2 About the 5GIR programme

As part of DSIT's ambition to drive 5G adoption, 5GIR is a £40 million programme seeking to develop digital ecosystems that leverage local areas' sector-specific expertise and capabilities.<sup>12</sup> Programme delivery commenced in November 2023 and will run until March 2025.

As part of the programme, DSIT invited applications for funding from LAs across the UK to establish themselves as '5G Innovation Regions'. Through this funding, DSIT aims to enable places across the UK to unlock opportunities which utilise advanced wireless connectivity, supporting the following strategic objectives of the programme<sup>13</sup>, to:

- drive economic growth in places by supporting places in adopting wireless connectivity for services based around local opportunities for growth;
- accelerate commercial investment in 5G and other advanced wireless technologies by aggregating and demonstrating demand; and
- foster the emergent 5G ecosystem by enabling "learning by doing".

Specifically, ten 5G Innovation Regions have received DSIT funding through the programme. Regions will deliver interventions with the intention of promoting and demonstrating how the development and scaled adoption of 5G and other advanced wireless technologies (in businesses and in the delivery of public services) can generate benefits at the local level. The intention is for the regions to target key sectors with high potential for local economic growth and productivity gains and to drive innovative applications powered by 5G and other advanced wireless connectivity from proof of concept to widespread adoption.

## 2.1.3 About SIPP

SIPP is a £1.5 million programme that seeks to enable six LA-led pilots to procure and test smart multipurpose columns for mobile and wireless connectivity services, and other relevant uses. Through this, the aim is for LAs to make efficiency savings as well as increase connectivity for their local communities.<sup>14</sup> The £1.5 million of Government funding allocated to the programme is intended to be matched by smart service providers working with the participating LAs. The main overall objective of the programme is to improve the understanding and realisation of the benefits of utilising street furniture and other assets for network deployment.

The programme aims to support the implementation of DSIT's UK Wireless Infrastructure Strategy. Specifically, the strategy highlights that operators will likely need to deploy additional wireless infrastructure to meet the growing demand for mobile access to data, including the installation of small cells rather than more traditional mobile phone masts or poles, to provide services in areas where additional capacity in coverage and speed is required.<sup>15</sup> The use of public sector assets, like lamp posts or other types of street furniture, to house small cells is likely to become increasingly important for the rollout of advanced wireless networks. SIPP aims to fill this gap by enabling successful pilots to procure and test smart multi-purpose columns for mobile and wireless connectivity services, and other relevant uses.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> DSIT 2024, A guide to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's (DSIT) telecoms research, development and innovation current funding and opportunities. See: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65d85a5854f1e700111658db/A\\_guide\\_to\\_DSIT\\_s\\_Telecoms\\_Research\\_Development\\_Innovation\\_Initiatives.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65d85a5854f1e700111658db/A_guide_to_DSIT_s_Telecoms_Research_Development_Innovation_Initiatives.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> See: [5G Innovation Regions \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65d85a5854f1e700111658db/A_guide_to_DSIT_s_Telecoms_Research_Development_Innovation_Initiatives.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> DSIT Smart Infrastructure Pilots Programme (SIPP) Competition application guidance. See: [Smart Infrastructure Pilots Programme competition application guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65d85a5854f1e700111658db/Smart_Infrastructure_Pilots_Programme_competition_application_guidance.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> UK Shared Business Services Ltd (2023) Mini Competition against an existing Framework Agreement (MC) on behalf of Department for Science, Innovation & Technology Subject: 5G Innovation Regions and Smart Infrastructure Pilots Programme Evaluation. Sourcing Reference Number: PS23394

<sup>16</sup> UK Shared Business Services Ltd (2023) Mini Competition against an existing Framework Agreement (MC) on behalf of Department for Science, Innovation & Technology Subject: 5G Innovation Regions and Smart Infrastructure Pilots Programme Evaluation. Sourcing Reference Number: PS23394

## 2.2 Structure of this report

The purpose of this report is to report on the outcome of the process evaluation relating to the application process for the two programmes.

The rest of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 3 sets out the approach to the process evaluation, including:
  - the research question to be answered – detailed in Section 3.2;
  - the sources of information used to answer the questions – detailed in Section 3.3; and
  - the approach to the interview and surveys used to answer the research questions for the 5GIR and SIPP programmes – detailed in Section 3.4.
- Section 4 reports the main findings from the evaluation for the 5GIR programme and SIPP respectively.

## 3 Approach to the process evaluation

### 3.1 Overview of the process evaluation

This report relates to the process evaluation, specifically covering the application process for both the 5GIR and SIPP programmes. This element of the process evaluation covers the processes involved in advertising the two programmes and their respective application processes. Where evidence allows, the report identifies lessons learned that may be of benefit to programmes or projects with similar characteristics and to inform future delivery.

The evaluation draws on evidence collected at the programme-level. Therefore, findings and conclusions are at the programme level, rather than at the individual project or region level.

### 3.2 Process evaluation research question

This report seeks to answer the following evaluation research question:

*What went well and what could be improved with regard to the 5GIR/SIPP programmes, specifically in relation to the application process (from the point of view of LAs and DSIT)?*

This question was developed in collaboration with the DSIT evaluation team<sup>17</sup> and reviewed and agreed by the Steering Group<sup>18</sup> for the two programmes as part of the scoping phase of the evaluations.

### 3.3 Sources of information

The process evaluation draws on the following sources of data and information:

- **Programme documentation** – in particular:
  - 5GIR Comms and Engagement Plan;
  - 5GIR Pre-Competition Engagement;
  - 5G Testbeds and Trials (5GTT) programme<sup>19</sup> lessons learned [specifically for information on the design of the 5GIR programme];
  - Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator (DCIA)<sup>20</sup> Process Evaluation Lessons Learned Report [specifically for information on the design of SIPP];
  - 5GIR collaboration event interview log;
  - DSIT 5GIR Competition Application Guidance;
  - DSIT SIPP Competition Application Guidance; and
  - DSIT scoring assessment spreadsheets.
- An **interview** with DSIT officials on the application process (and aspects of the design of the programmes);
- Two **surveys** of applicants to the two programmes, issued to four different groups (successful applicants to the 5GIR programme; unsuccessful applicants to the 5GIR programme – together

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<sup>17</sup> This team has overall responsibility for the evaluations and is providing ongoing input and direction in relation to the evaluations such that it meets DSIT's requirements.

<sup>18</sup> This group has been established with the role of providing advice, guidance, scrutiny and challenge to the evaluations, with the aim of supporting the evaluations and ensuring the findings are robust and provide useful insights to build the evidence base in relation to digital infrastructure. It consists of DSIT officials covering the areas of policy, analysis, benefits realisation and technical expertise with respect to the 5GIR and SIPP programmes, together with a member of the Cabinet Office's Evaluation Taskforce.

<sup>19</sup> The 5GTT programme ran between 2017 and 2023 and explored the benefits and challenges of deploying 5G technologies.

<sup>20</sup> The DCIA programme ran between 2021 and 2023 and explored the deployment of wireless networks to publicly owned infrastructure assets. One workstream of the programme concerned the development of a publicly available specification (PAS) for smart lamp posts. As such the programme was a forerunner to SIPP.

the “5GIR Survey”; successful applicants to SIPP; and unsuccessful applicants to SIPP – together the “SIPP Survey”); and

- A **survey** issued to all LAs (the “All LA Survey”) to understand the reasons why some LAs did not apply to either or both of the programmes.

## 3.4 Approach to interview and surveys

### 3.4.1 Interview

KPMG ran a semi-structured interview with a range of DSIT officials involved in the design and delivery of the 5GIR and SIPP programmes. Participants included officials involved in the original design of the two programmes; the advertising of the programmes; and the delivery of the programmes (including technical advisers to the programmes and benefit realisation officers).

The objective of the DSIT interview was to obtain insights and, primarily, qualitative evidence to inform the process evaluation. An interview guide was developed for use in the interview. This was provided to the DSIT evaluation team for comment and to ensure all relevant areas were covered.

The interview sought to obtain information and views on the following aspects:

- channels used to advertise the opportunity;
- the number of applications received;
- the quality of applications received;
- the geographic spread of applications received;
- how applicants found the application process (with any learning for future programmes); and
- whether the design of the programme was clear and based on best practice developed from the experience of past programmes.

The interview was conducted with nine DSIT officials and was held online via Microsoft Teams, lasting 60 minutes. The DSIT officials to be interviewed were agreed between KPMG and the DSIT evaluation team and selected based on their involvement in the application process as well as the design and subsequent delivery of the two programmes.

During the interview, when a particular point was made by a DSIT official, other participants were invited to provide alternative views and perspectives. Where no other alternative views were put forward, and no DSIT officials disagreed with the point made, this was taken as the consensus view among the group. As a result, when reporting on the findings from the process evaluation (see Section 4), statements are reported as the views of DSIT officials where such a consensus was achieved.

All comments from the interview have been anonymised.

### 3.4.2 Surveys

#### 3.4.2.1 5GIR and SIPP Survey

Using the contact details provided at the time of application, a survey was sent to all successful and unsuccessful applicants to both the 5GIR and SIPP programmes. Apart from referencing the programme (5GIR or SIPP) and whether the LA was successful in applying to the programme or not, the survey was essentially the same – asking the same questions of the four different groups. The survey was built using an online survey tool and covered the following topics:

- LAs’ awareness of the opportunity (and through what channels);
- the quality of the guidance on the application process;

- whether the alternative method of funding offered in these programmes generated more (or less) interest in the opportunity;
- whether the scoring of applications was perceived as being consistent and fair; and
- how applicants found the application process (with any learning for future programmes).

The surveys were originally intended to be run in June 2024. However, with the calling of the General Election and guidance around research activities during election periods<sup>21</sup>, following consultation with DSIT officials the surveys were delayed until after the General Election.

Recipients of the surveys were initially contacted through email communications from DSIT in order to forewarn them of the forthcoming survey. These communications were followed up with emails directly from KPMG, between 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> July, to both successful applicants (current programme participants) and unsuccessful applicants, providing a link to the survey. Given that the surveys were conducted over the summer period – a period over which many LA staff were likely to be on holiday -, a chaser email was sent on 12<sup>th</sup> August to all non-respondents to the surveys as at the beginning of August. The surveys were kept open for the whole of the summer and closed on the 4<sup>th</sup> September.

### 3.4.2.2 All LA Survey

After liaising with Local Government officials, the All LA Survey was issued to LAs in Scotland and Northern Ireland through direct emails. These emails were sent to contacts provided by the Local Government Associations in those two nations.

In England and Wales, LAs were reached and invited to participate via various bulletins sent out by both the Local Government Association and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (formerly the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) – these bulletins included:

- **Local Government bulletin:** This bulletin reaches a broad audience within local government.
- **Local Digital newsletter:** This newsletter focuses on digital initiatives and targets relevant personnel within councils.
- **Cyber, Digital and Technology Bulletin (CDT bulletin):** This monthly bulletin primarily reaches digital leads in councils.
- **Chief Executive bulletin (CEX bulletin):** This weekly bulletin is distributed to local government chief executives.

The survey was built using an online survey tool and covered the following topics:

- whether the LA applied for either the 5GIR or SIPP opportunities;
- LAs' awareness of the opportunities (and through what channels); and
- any reasons why LAs didn't apply for either of the programmes.

### 3.4.2.3 Survey response rates

Table 3 sets out the different organisations contacted through the three surveys as part of this evaluation and the response rate from for each group.

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<sup>21</sup> See for instance: [General election guidance 2024: guidance for civil servants \(HTML\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) and [Researching in pre-election sensitivity periods - User Research Manual - Department for Education](#)

**Table 3: Surveys conducted as part of the process evaluation**

Source of data/ information	Number surveyed	Participation (and response rate)
5GIR Survey	10 successful applicants 26 unsuccessful applicants	7 successful applicants (70%) 17 unsuccessful applicants (65%)
SIPP Survey	6 successful applicants 5 unsuccessful applicants	6 successful applicants (100%) 2 unsuccessful applicants (40%)
All LA Survey	Survey was open to all LAs in the UK	68 responses received of which 67 did not apply for at least one of the 5GIR or SIPP programmes (see details below).

For the All LA Survey, although all LAs were invited to respond, for the purpose of the process evaluation we were interested only in results from those LAs that had not applied to one or both of the programmes, such that we did not duplicate responses to the 5GIR and SIPP Surveys.

A screening question was therefore asked at the start of the survey, asking LAs if they had applied to either (or both) of the programmes. Of the 68 LAs that replied to the screening question:

- 1 had applied to both programmes – this LA was excluded from the reporting
- 1 had applied to SIPP only
- 22 had applied to 5GIR only
- 44 had either applied to neither or reported that they didn't know.

As a result:

- 45 LAs were asked questions relating to the 5GIR programme; and
- 66 LAs were asked questions relating to SIPP

## 4 Findings of the process evaluation

### 4.1 Introduction to the findings

The findings set out in the following sections seek to answer the process evaluation research question first for the 5GIR programme (Section 4.2) and then for SIPP (Section 4.3).

Each section starts with some context on the application process using information from the documentation review (e.g. application guidance and business case information). For each section key themes covered include: the advertising of the opportunity; the results of the application process; the impact the funding mechanism had on the application process; and lessons learned from the process (including the design of the programme).

Findings reported are based on evidence gathered through the review of DSIT programme documentation, the DSIT interview and the surveys detailed in Section 3.

### 4.2 5GIR application and design process

#### 4.2.1 Context to the 5GIR application process

The 5GIR competition guidance sets out that the competition for 5GIR funding opened for applications on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2023. A launch/briefing event was held on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2023. The deadline for clarification questions was 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2023 and applications were required to be submitted by 10<sup>th</sup> September 2023<sup>22</sup>.

Applications were to be assessed against the 5GIR Competition Application Guidance<sup>23</sup> and were ranked for shortlisting with the highest scoring applications selected as preferred applicants.

In terms of what DSIT was looking for, the application guidance stated, “5G Innovation Regions should target key sectors with high potential for local economic growth and productivity gains. These will vary by area, but should include: public services (including “smart communities” applications); rural industries (including agri-tech and food production); transport and logistics; advanced manufacturing; and creative industries. 5G Innovation Regions are not designed to increase wireless coverage, but rather to bring together, at scale, multiple use cases within a 5G Innovation Region. The outcome of this is to demonstrate the benefits of accelerated 5G adoption. Supported by the Wireless Infrastructure Strategy, 5G Innovation Regions will build on the learnings of the 5G Testbeds and Trials (5GTT) Programme to drive innovative applications powered by 5G and other advanced wireless connectivity from proof of concept to widespread adoption. It is our ambition that projects will demonstrate the scalability, replicability, and sustainability of 5G use cases across key sectors of the economy, creating 5G Innovation Regions across the UK.”

The questions that applicants had to answer were:

#### — Section A – the vision (50%)

A1: What will your project deliver at a regional level? (12.5%);

A2: What will your project deliver at a sectoral level? (12.5%);

A3: How will you ensure that the environment created by your proposal will support the development of an ecosystem for 5G (and other advanced wireless technologies) within the UK? (12.5%); and

A4: What local strengths and commitment will support delivery of the 5G innovation region? (12.5%).

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<sup>22</sup> See: [5G Innovation Regions \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

<sup>23</sup> See: [5G Innovation Regions \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

— **Section B: Delivery of the vision (12.5%)**

- B1: Provide a detailed project plan (12.5%);
- B2: How will the project be governed, decisions made and risks managed? (12.5%);
- B3: Provide an outline proposal for the sources and uses of funds for the project and explain how the uses represent value for money (12.5%); and
- B4: What is your approach to ensuring that the project will be sustainable after the period of DSIT funding? (12.5%).

Answers to each question were given a score of between 1 and 7. All applications were sifted – with only those passing the sift going through to evaluation. The DSIT guidance stated, “*Applicants scoring an average score below 4 will be deemed ineligible for funding and not evaluated further.*”

Applications were then ‘triaged’, with the guidance noting, “*All applications passing the sift will be evaluated and moderated beginning with a triaging process in which they will be assessed based on questions A1 and B1 (see earlier) before a full assessment on the application will be completed. Applicants must meet the minimum threshold for evaluation to proceed.*”

However, the guidance highlights that DSIT reserved the right to consider applications for shortlisting that did not meet the threshold (outlined above) in two cases:

- “*If an application fails to meet the threshold by a narrow margin as a result of the range of scoring by individual assessors being of significant variance from the average score for one or more competition questions for that application (“an outlier”). The application may be considered for shortlisting following a review of the outlier assessor’s comments and approach if the outlier score may reasonably be eliminated and the average assessment score that is recalculated falls within the threshold above.*”
- DSIT reserves the right to adjust the threshold in line with the volume of applications received”

In terms of deciding on what applications would be successful, DSIT guidance noted that, “*DSIT will take a portfolio approach, based on the moderated assessment, in determining which projects to fund, ensuring that we have a variety of successful applications within the funding envelope.*”

## 4.2.2 Awareness of and interest in the 5GIR opportunity

### 4.2.2.1 Advertising the 5GIR opportunity

As part of the DSIT interview, DSIT officials were asked about the main channels used to advertise the 5GIR programme. They noted several different sources, including:

- National press releases;
- GOV.uk;
- DSIT briefing events;
- DSIT social media channels including LinkedIn and Twitter;
- UKTIN social media channels including LinkedIn and Twitter;
- TechUK;
- Working groups (including ADEPT);
- LAs’ newsletters and bulletins;
- Direct emails to key stakeholders; and
- Bi-lateral meetings with LAs.

While DSIT officials lacked direct access to engagement statistics for the various advertising channels used to promote the 5GIR programme, they observed several key indicators of success. Notably, they reported that the 5GIR briefing event witnessed the highest registration numbers relative to previous

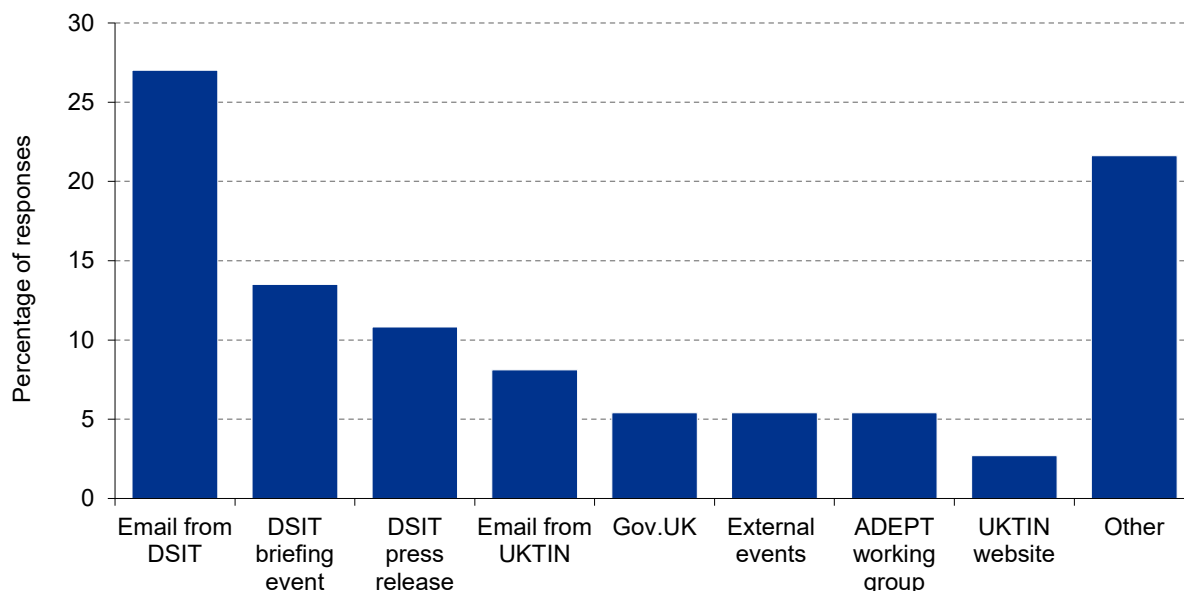
briefing events for other DSIT programmes, suggesting this briefing event generated significant interest.

In addition, DSIT officials felt that UKTIN's extensive network played a crucial role in disseminating information and generating interest among potential participants, and that direct communication with LAs and devolved governments was effective at reaching all parts of the UK.

#### 4.2.2.2 Applicants' awareness of the 5GIR opportunity

To obtain further evidence on the effectiveness of DSIT's advertising of the programme, respondents to the 5GIR Survey were asked how they became aware of the 5GIR opportunity. As shown in Figure 1 below, the most commonly cited method was an email from DSIT, with 27% of responses reporting this as the source by which they became aware. "Other" reasons were the next most frequently reported, with 22% of responses highlighting this category. These "other" reasons primarily related to finding out from a third party such as a consultancy, telecoms company, or the Catapult Network<sup>24</sup>. DSIT briefing events and DSIT press releases were also cited as a common means of awareness.

Figure 1: How did the applicant become aware of the 5GIR opportunity? (n=24)



Note: applicants could select multiple answers  
Source: 5GIR Survey

The findings shown in Figure 1 suggest that DSIT's marketing efforts (including via emails, briefing events and UKTIN) were effective in making LAs aware of the 5GIR opportunity, but also that other routes, including via other third parties, played a role in raising awareness among LAs.

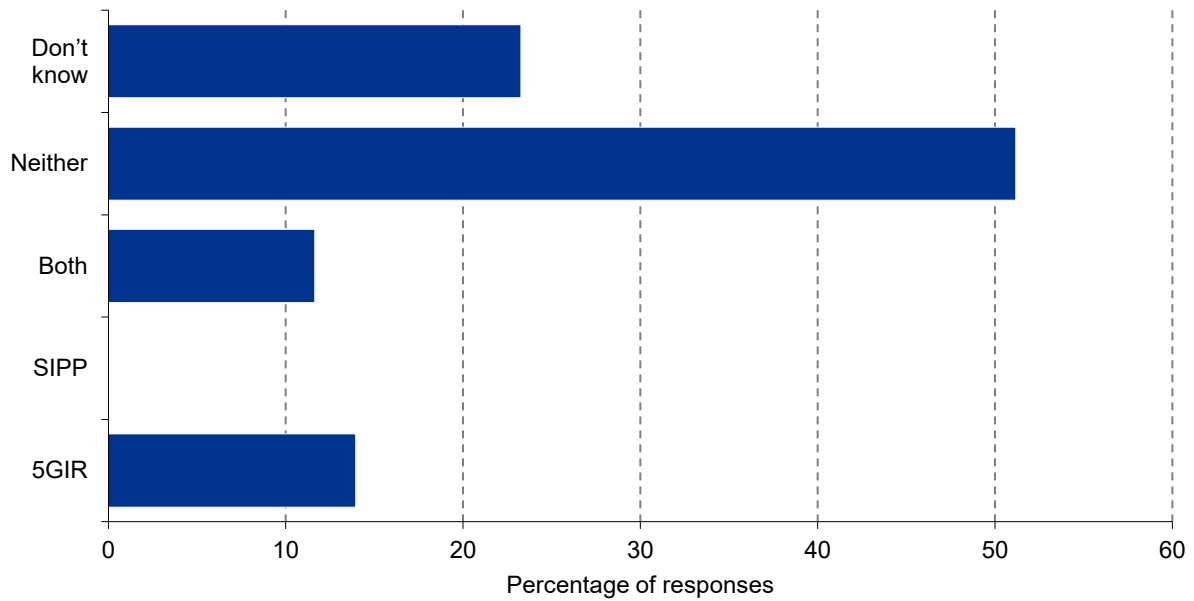
#### 4.2.2.3 Awareness of the 5GIR by non-applicants

To assess the effectiveness of efforts to raise awareness of the 5GIR programme, it is also important to understand the awareness of the programme among those LAs that did not apply.

As shown in Figure 2, among respondents to the All LA Survey that hadn't applied for the 5GIR programme, 75% reported that they were not aware of the 5GIR opportunity, or did not know if they were aware. 11% of respondents said they'd heard of both 5GIR and SIPP, with 14% saying they had heard of 5GIR only.

<sup>24</sup> See: [Home - The Catapult Network](#)

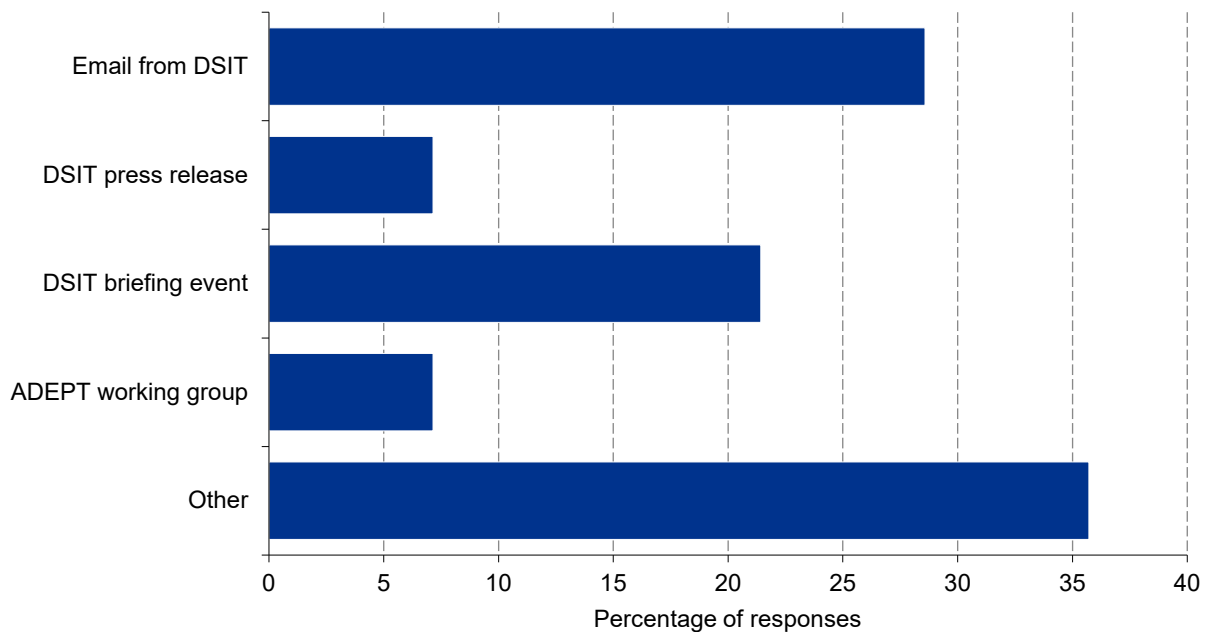
Figure 2: Was the individual or LA aware of the 5GIR programme? (n=44)



Note: Asked of all LAs that did not apply to the 5GIR programme  
Source: All LA Survey

Furthermore, those who stated they were aware of one or both of the opportunities but chose not to bid were asked how they became aware of the opportunities.

Figure 3: How did the non-applicant become aware of the 5GIR opportunity? (n=10)



Note: Asked of all LAs that were aware of opportunities - applicants could select multiple answers  
Source: All LA Survey

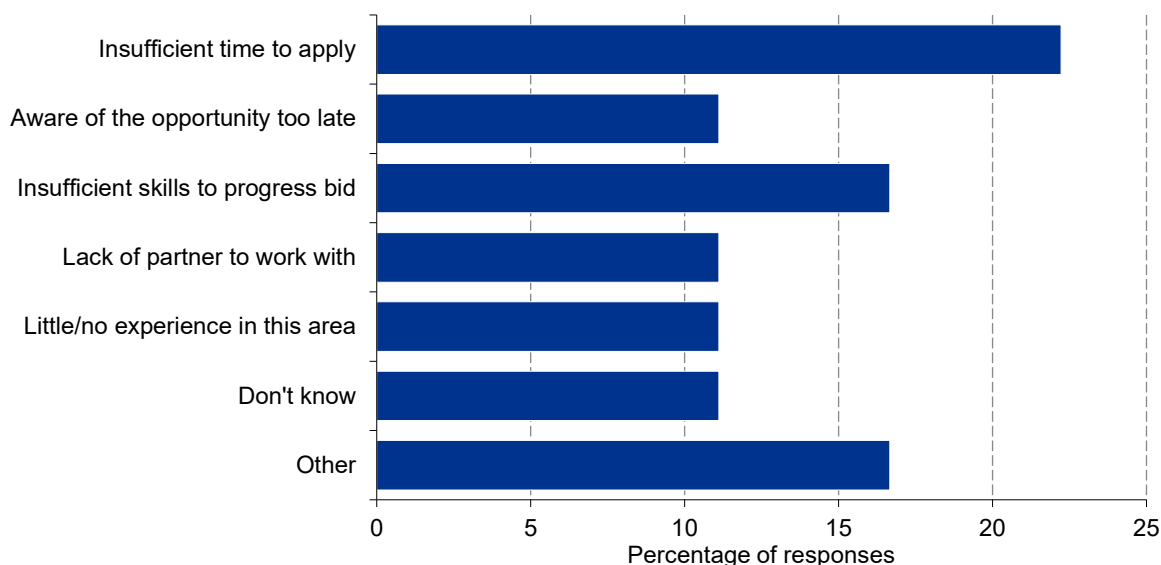
The results show that alongside 'other'<sup>25</sup> (which included sources such as Scotland 5G Centre and the Local Government Newsletter), DSIT email communications and DSIT briefing events were the

<sup>25</sup> Not all respondents that selected 'other' stated the source by which they became aware of the opportunity.

most commonly cited way LAs had become aware of the 5GIR opportunity. Evidence therefore shows that for both applicants and non-applicants, an email from DSIT was a particularly effective way of making LAs aware of the opportunity. However, the high proportion of respondents to the All LA Survey who said they weren't aware of the opportunity implies that emails from DSIT did not reach all LAs. This suggests that there is an opportunity to reach more LAs with details of programmes in the future through developing more direct contact details within LAs.

To understand why LAs who were aware of the programmes did not apply, and therefore how response rates could be increased in the future, respondents to the All LA Survey were asked to state their main reason for not applying.

**Figure 4: What were the main reasons that non-applicants didn't apply for the 5GIR opportunity? (n=10)**



*Note: Asked of all LAs that were aware of opportunities but did not bid - applicants could select multiple answers  
Source: All LA Survey*

Figure 4 above shows that the main reason for not applying for the 5GIR opportunity was because of an insufficient amount of time to apply (22%).

#### 4.2.2.4 Number and geographical spread of applications for the 5GIR programme

In relation to the overall number and geographical spread of applications, DSIT officials were satisfied with the applications received.

When asked if there was a target number of applications for the 5GIR programme, DSIT officials commented that, whilst they did not have a specific target, they aimed to award funding to 10 LAs.

DSIT officials considered there to have been high demand for the opportunity, noting that the number of applications they ultimately received, of 36, exceeded their expectations.

They also expressed satisfaction with the geographical spread of the applications received for the 5GIR opportunity. As shown in Table 4, applications were received from every region of the UK<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Where region is defined as the International Territorial Level 1 (see: [International geographies – Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk))

**Table 4: Number of 5GIR applications by region**

Region	Applications received
North East	3
North West	4
Yorkshire and the Humber	3
East Midlands	1
West Midlands	2
East	4
London	3
South East	5
South West	2
Scotland	6
Wales	2
Northern Ireland	1

Source: KPMG based on DSIT scoring assessments

A key objective of the programme was to establish 5GIR within devolved nations. This objective was achieved for Scotland and Northern Ireland but no 5GIR funding was allocated to Wales. With respect to this lack of funding to Wales, DSIT officials noted that South Wales’s own independent scheme<sup>27</sup> (similar to the 5GIR programme) may have contributed to the lack of applications from LAs in Wales.

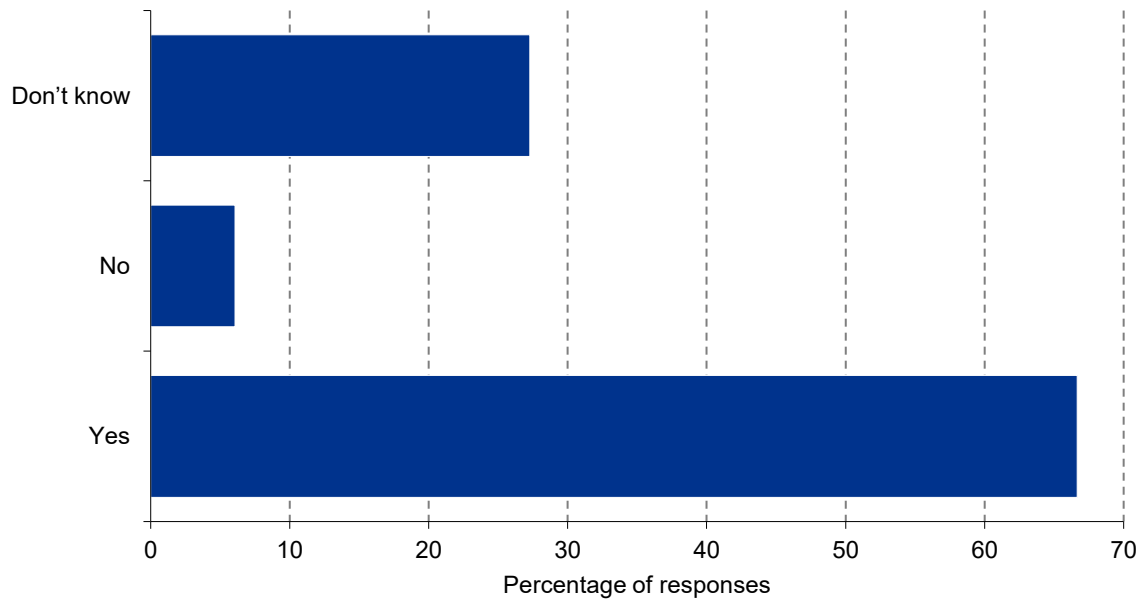
#### 4.2.2.5 Interest of non-applicants in future opportunities

To understand whether, in future, the number of applications could be boosted, respondents to the All LA Survey were asked if opportunities similar to the 5GIR programme were to arise again, would they be interested in applying.

Figure 5 shows that the majority of survey respondents would be interested in applying for similar opportunities again, with 67% stating they would apply for an opportunity similar to the 5GIR programme.

<sup>27</sup> See: [Digital Infrastructure Programme | Swansea Bay City Deal](#)

**Figure 5: If opportunities similar to the 5GIR programme was to arise again, would the respondent be interested in applying? (n=33)**



*Note: Asked of all LAs that did not apply to the 5GIR programme  
Source: All LA Survey*

### 4.2.3 Quality of applications for the 5GIR programme

In terms of the quality of applications, DSIT officials interviewed considered the applications received for the 5GIR programme met their expectations. They highlighted the overall high quality of applications, noting that only one out of the 36 total applications failed to meet the quality threshold. Additionally, they noted that 21 applications were shortlisted for the final funding stage.

When further questioned about the 21 shortlisted applications, DSIT officials emphasised the high quality of proposals received and noted that many applications were close contenders for the final 10 successful applicants. DSIT officials also noted that reaching the shortlist required applications to be of exceptionally high quality, further demonstrating the calibre of proposals submitted for the 5GIR programme.

When asked about the final ranking of applicants and advice on which applications were funded, DSIT stated that whilst some applications initially scored within the top 10 – or close to it - a further clarification process to assess deliverability was carried out with some LAs. If the LAs were unable to provide satisfactory responses to questions about the proposal's deliverability and scope then their position in the rankings was altered (and similarly for LAs just outside the top 10 who could, convincingly, answer questions around deliverability).

DSIT officials felt that the overall quality of bids may have been contributed towards by the information provided at DSIT briefing events and consistent messaging throughout the promotion of the opportunity. To evidence this they reported a significant decrease in the number of questions asked by LAs during the application process compared to previous opportunities. In total 120 questions were received, covering topics including the eligibility criteria, levels of funding and general queries such as deadlines.

With regards to the main factors that distinguished successful applications from unsuccessful applications, DSIT officials noted the following key areas:

- **Vision and visibility:** successful applications tended to present a clear and compelling vision for their projects, demonstrating how they would contribute to the overall goals of the 5GIR programme.
- **Scale and boldness of vision:** successful applications demonstrated ambitious and impactful projects that addressed significant challenges and opportunities.
- **Credible partnerships:** successful applications evidenced strong partnerships with relevant stakeholders.
- **Funding streams:** successful applications presented sustainable funding models, including contributions from partners and other sources.
- **Strong project planning:** successful applications demonstrated meticulous planning, with clear timelines, milestones, and deliverables.
- **Confidence in delivery:** successful applications instilled confidence in DSIT officials that the project team possessed the necessary expertise, experience, and commitment to deliver on their goals.

DSIT officials also identified the following three main areas that contributed to the lower scores of unsuccessful applications:

- **Lack of partnerships and connections:** unsuccessful applications often lacked strong partnerships with relevant stakeholders.
- **Limited Value for Money (VFM) and sustainability:** unsuccessful applications struggled to demonstrate how their projects would provide VFM and ensure long-term sustainability.
- **Poor quality risk register:** unsuccessful applications often presented weak risk registers, failing to adequately identify and mitigate potential risks associated with their projects.

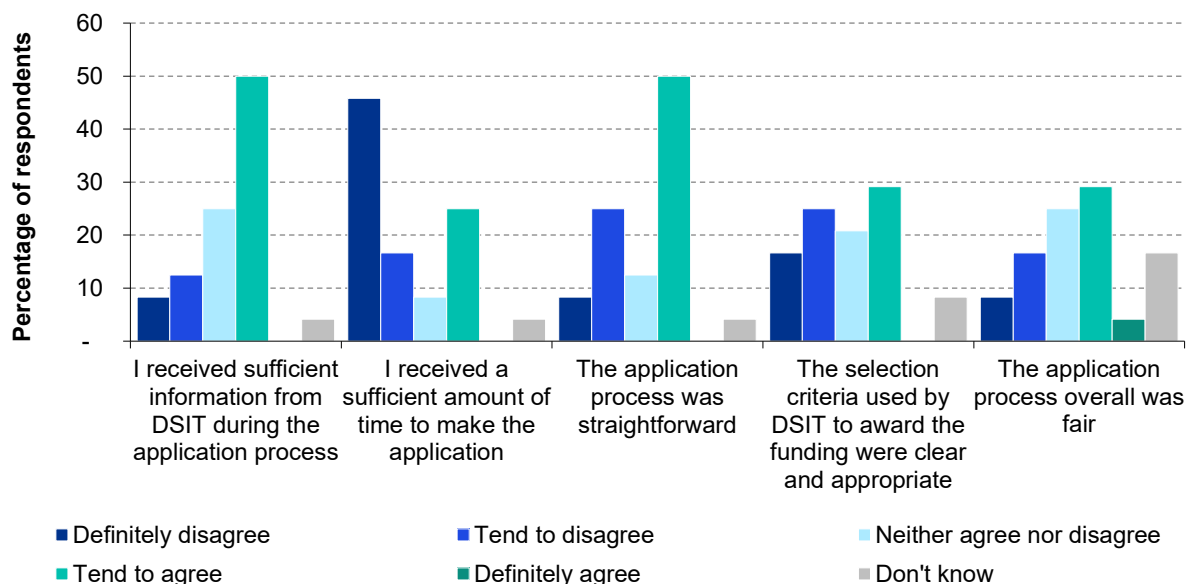
#### 4.2.4 Views on the 5GIR application process

##### 4.2.4.1 Applicants' views of the application process

To understand the applicants' views on the application process for the 5GIR programme, survey respondents to the 5GIR Survey were asked to what extent did the applicants agree or disagree with the following statements:

- *"I received sufficient information from DSIT during the application process";*
- *"I received a sufficient amount of time to make the application";*
- *"The application process was straightforward";*
- *"The selection criteria used by DSIT to award the funding were clear and appropriate";* and
- *"The application process overall was fair."*

**Figure 6: To what extent did the 5GIR applicants agree or disagree with the following statements? (n=24)**



Source: 5GIR Survey

Figure 6 shows that half of the survey respondents (50%) agreed that they received sufficient information from DSIT during the application process and the same proportion agreed the application process was straightforward.

However, Figure 6 also shows that 46% of respondents definitely disagreed that they received a sufficient amount of time to make the application.

In comparing the responses from successful and unsuccessful participants in the survey – the biggest difference in responses concerned the last question: whether the application process overall was fair. Around three-quarters of successful applicants tended to agree that the process was fair, whereas 43% of unsuccessful applicants tended to disagree or definitely disagreed with the statement.

#### 4.2.4.2 Additional feedback on the application process

Survey respondents to the 5GIR Survey were also asked to provide additional free-text comments regarding their views on the application process and potential improvements. The issues on which comments were asked included:

- Suggestions on additional information that would have been helpful when applying;
- Recommendations on how to make the application process more straightforward;
- Learnings derived from their application experience; and
- Additional comments on the applicants' experience of the application process.

Overall, the main points made by respondents on these issues included:

- 10 LAs (out of the 21 applicants that left some free-text responses) specifically raised ideally having more time to complete the application process;
- Similarly, 4 LAs explicitly noted that the timing of the application process (through the summer period) hindered their application (particularly in terms of getting hold of partners to participate in the application);

- A majority of respondents who were not successful in applying for 5GIR funding (11 out of 17) were frustrated by the lack of feedback provided by DSIT on their applications;
- A couple of LAs stated that clearer guidance on the type of bid sought by DSIT would have been useful; and
- One respondent felt that the award of funding was politically motivated and that their bid had not been progressed as a result.

#### 4.2.5 5GIR funding mechanism

##### 4.2.5.1 DSIT's view of the 5GIR funding mechanism

The 5GIR programme used a different approach to funding to the traditional method previously used in other programmes. The 5GIR business case set out the reasoning for using an alternative funding mechanism stating, *“Successful projects from England and/or Wales will be funded via section 31 of the Local Government Act. The conditions of funding under section 31 means that DSIT has less control over grant recipients, compared to previous awards made under the Industrial Development Act. Telecoms policy is reserved to the UK Government, so DSIT has oversight and can give preference to the types of proposed activities that we wish to see take place across the UK. This option has been selected, after approval at Delivery Management Board due to the increased flexibility and freedom it gives local authorities in devising plans to meet the grant requirements and the shorter timescales to contract, as well as less resource pressure for internal DSIT programme management.”*

As part of the interview, DSIT officials reported they felt that, based on feedback received from LAs, this funding mechanism generated more interest compared to traditional methods. Increasing the number of applications was cited by the DSIT officials as a key factor in choosing this method, as previous experience with LAs on similar projects suggested traditional funding approaches may have detracted from the attractiveness of the programme.

Specifically, DSIT officials highlighted the lack of red tape associated with the chosen funding method as a critical advantage, especially given the short timescales involved. Overall, they believed this innovative funding method would facilitate more project development in the future and was preferred by LAs.

##### 4.2.5.2 Applicants' views of the 5GIR funding mechanism

To understand from applicants the importance of the funding mechanism in their decision to apply for the 5GIR programme, three survey questions were asked to the 5GIR Survey respondents with regards to:

- Previous methods of funding from DSIT/DCMS to 5GIR programme applicant;
- The importance of the funding mechanism for the applicants in applying for the 5GIR programme; and
- Alternative methods of funding for the 5GIR programme.

In relation to previous methods of funding, half of the respondents to the 5GIR Survey (12 out of 24 survey respondents) indicated that they had previously received funding for programmes from DSIT/DCMS relating to telecoms/wireless connectivity. Specifically, these programmes included:

- DCMS/BDUK Superfast Broadband Programme;
- Project Gigabit (specifically GigaHubs);
- Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN);
- Open Networks Ecosystem Competition (ONE Competition);
- 5GTT Programme;
- 5G Create; and

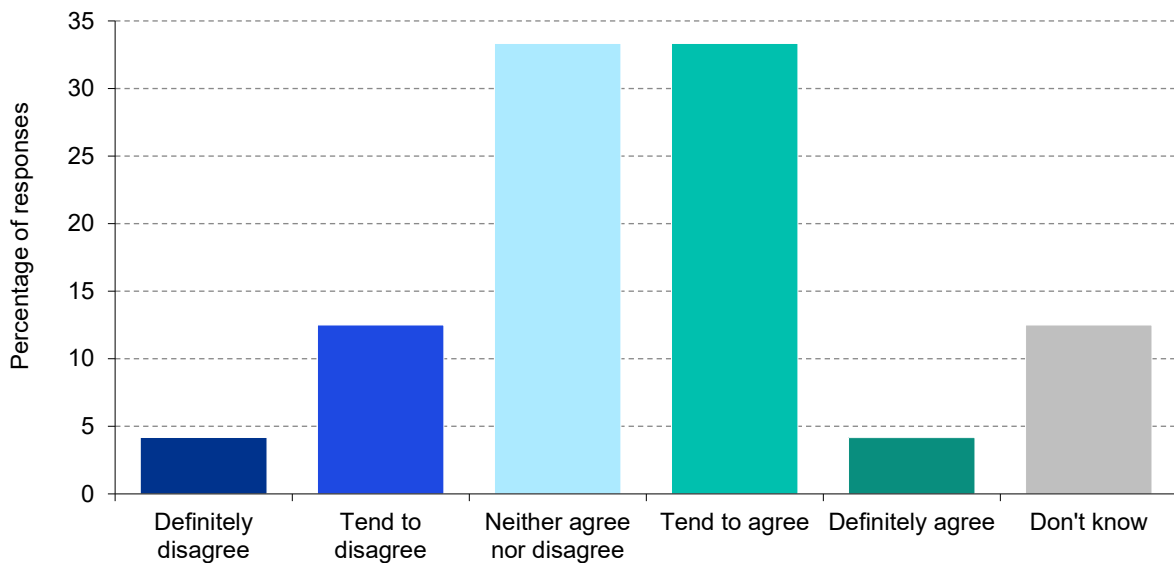
— DCIA programme.

Comparing successful applicants with unsuccessful applicants: 70% of successful applicants had previously received funding from DSIT/DCMS for similar programmes compared to 44% for unsuccessful applicants.

5GIR Survey respondents were also asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

— “This method of funding was an important factor in my decision to apply for this programme.”

**Figure 7: To what extent did the applicant agree or disagree with the following statement? “This method of funding was an important factor in my decision to apply for the 5GIR programme.” (n=24)**

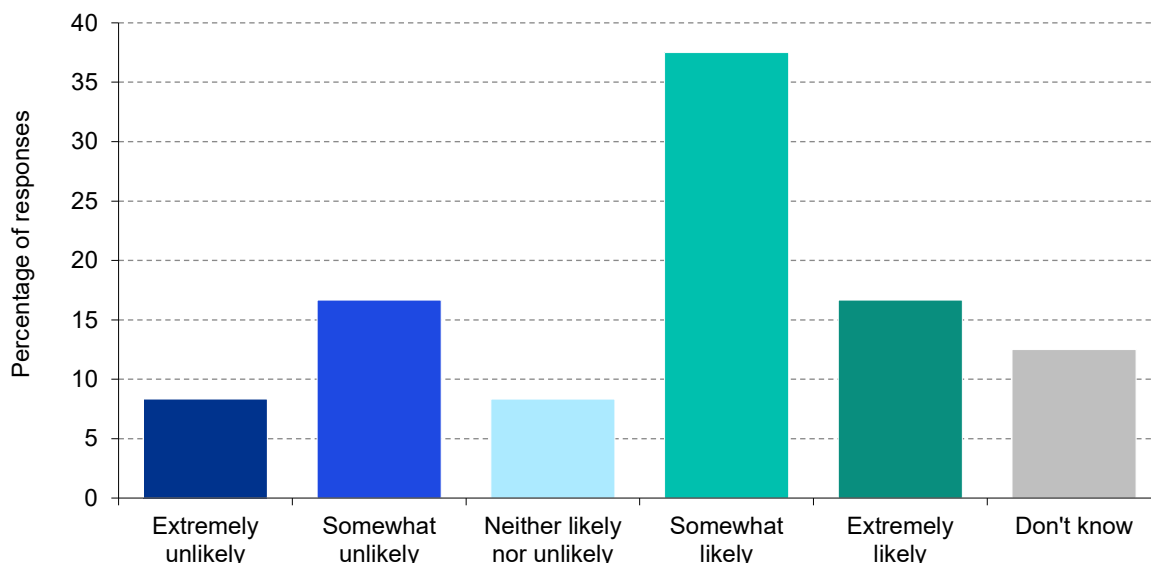


Source: 5GIR Survey

Figure 7 shows that over a third of survey respondents (37%) agreed that the method of funding was an important factor in their decision to apply for the 5GIR programme, while around a third neither agreed or disagreed.

Finally, 5GIR Survey respondents were asked how likely is it that they would have still applied for the 5GIR programme if a more traditional method of funding had been used for this programme. Figure 8 presents these results.

**Figure 8: If a more traditional method of funding had been used for this programme, how likely is it that you would have still applied for 5GIR? (n=24)**



Source: 5GIR Survey

Figure 8 shows that over half (54%) of applicants for the 5GIR programme said that it was somewhat or extremely likely that they would have still applied for the opportunity if more traditional methods of funding were used.

Although just over half (54%) of applicants said that it was likely that they would have still applied for the 5GIR opportunity if a more traditional method of funding was used, the findings from 5GIR applicants overall support the view of DSIT officials that the funding method was an important factor in encouraging applications. Whilst a specific funding question was not asked in the All LA Survey, no respondent to the all LA Survey mentioned the issue of funding in free-text responses.

## 4.2.6 5GIR – DSIT lessons learned

### 4.2.6.1 Effectiveness of the 5GIR programme application process

DSIT officials were asked if there was anything in particular that would have made the 5GIR application process more effective in receiving higher quality bids. In response they identified the following areas for improvement:

- **Extended application timeframe:** DSIT officials suggested providing more time for LAs to complete the application, allowing for thorough preparation and submission of high-quality proposals.
- **Strategic timing of the competition:** holding the competition outside of the summer holiday period would ensure that LAs have sufficient resources and personnel available to dedicate to the application process. However, DSIT officials also noted that, for this opportunity, the timing of the application window (and the amount of time set aside for the application process) was largely constrained by the spending review cycle which meant the funds for these programmes needed to be disbursed by March 2025.
- **Increased funding allocation:** a larger funding pot would enable the support of more projects and potentially attract a wider range of applicants with innovative ideas.

The points around timing were also reflected in the 5GIR Survey responses, as reported in Section 4.2.4.1.

Despite these points, DSIT officials felt the 5GIR application process was an overall success and emphasised the positive outcomes achieved in terms of the volume, quality and geographic spread of the applications received.

#### 4.2.6.2 Design of the 5GIR programme

As part of the DSIT interview, officials reported that the content of the 5GIR programme had been primarily driven by policy considerations, rather than any specific best practices or lessons from previous programmes.

They noted that the design elements that they expected to be most effective in delivering a successful programme were the emphasis in the programme on engaging and involving a wide range of participants (both in terms of providers of networks and users of the network) and the focus on sustainability of activity post-funding.

They noted that the level of engagement with the market was a crucial factor in the programme's ability to deliver against objectives, but ultimately, the programme's success would be measured by its sustainability post-funding and whether it continued to deliver positive outcomes after the initial funding had ceased.

In terms of views on potential improvements to the 5GIR programme design, DSIT officials acknowledged that the programme's financial and programme reporting requirements had not been as "light touch" as initially envisioned for LAs. However, they noted that the programme was broadly running in line with their expectations.

### 4.3 SIPP application and design process

#### 4.3.1 Context on the SIPP application process

The competition for SIPP funding opened for applications on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2023. A launch/briefing event was held on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023. The deadline for the receipt of applications was 7<sup>th</sup> July 2023.

Applications to SIPP were due to be assessed during July with successful applicants notified in late July and the project mobilised in August 2023.

Applications were to be assessed against the Competition Application Guidance<sup>28</sup> and were ranked for shortlisting with the highest scoring applications selected as preferred applicants.

In terms of what DSIT was looking for from SIPP funding, the application guidance stated:

- *“Procuring multi-purpose columns, as defined by the PAS 191 specification, and deploying them in their area to meet local mobile coverage / capacity requirements and other use case needs (e.g. EV charging, IoT, CCTV etc) - and, by doing so, unlocking efficiencies in their network deployments, as well as new opportunities across the supply chain and innovative commercial models.*
- *As a result of this activity, gaining greater knowledge of future demand and requirements for their infrastructure and services, which in turn leads to improvements in local mobile coverage and contributes to the wider economic benefits that wireless connectivity provides.”*

The questions that applicants had to answer in their application were:

- A1: Describe your experience in the deployment of smart infrastructure in your area (17.5%)
- B1: Describe how you will manage the installation of equipment on newly procured and deployed multi-purpose columns (17.5%)

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<sup>28</sup> See: [Smart Infrastructure Pilots Programme competition application guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

C1: Describe the projects measurable outcomes (15%)

D1: Describe how the project will be governed, decisions made and risks managed (25%)

D2: Set out your outline proposal for financial and non-financial contributions to the project and explain how these represented value for money (25%)

Answers to each question were given a score of between 1 and 7 (1 being 'serious concerns'; 7 being 'Outstandingly good confidence'). All applications were to be sifted – with only those passing the sift going through to a final evaluation. The DSIT guidance stated, "*Applicants scoring an average score below 4 will be deemed ineligible for funding.*"

Applications were then 'triaged' with the guidance noting, "*All applications passing the sift will be evaluated and moderated beginning with a triaging process in which they will be assessed based on questions A1 and B1 (see above) before a full assessment on the application will be conducted. Applicants must meet the minimum threshold for evaluation to proceed.*"

However, the guidance highlights that DSIT reserved the right to consider applications for shortlisting that did not meet the threshold (outlined above) in two cases:

- "*If an application fails to meet the threshold by a narrow margin as a result of the range of scoring by individual assessors being of significant variance from the average score for one or more competition questions for that application ("an outlier"). The application may be considered for shortlisting following a review of the outlier assessor's comments and approach if the outlier score may reasonably be eliminated and the average assessment score that is recalculated falls within the threshold above.*"
- *DSIT reserves the right to adjust the threshold in line with the volume of applications received"*

In terms of deciding which applications would be successful, DSIT guidance noted that, "*DSIT will take a portfolio approach in determining which projects to fund ensuring that we have a variety of successful applications within the funding envelope.*"

## 4.3.2 Awareness of and interest in the SIPP opportunity

### 4.3.2.1 Advertising the SIPP opportunity

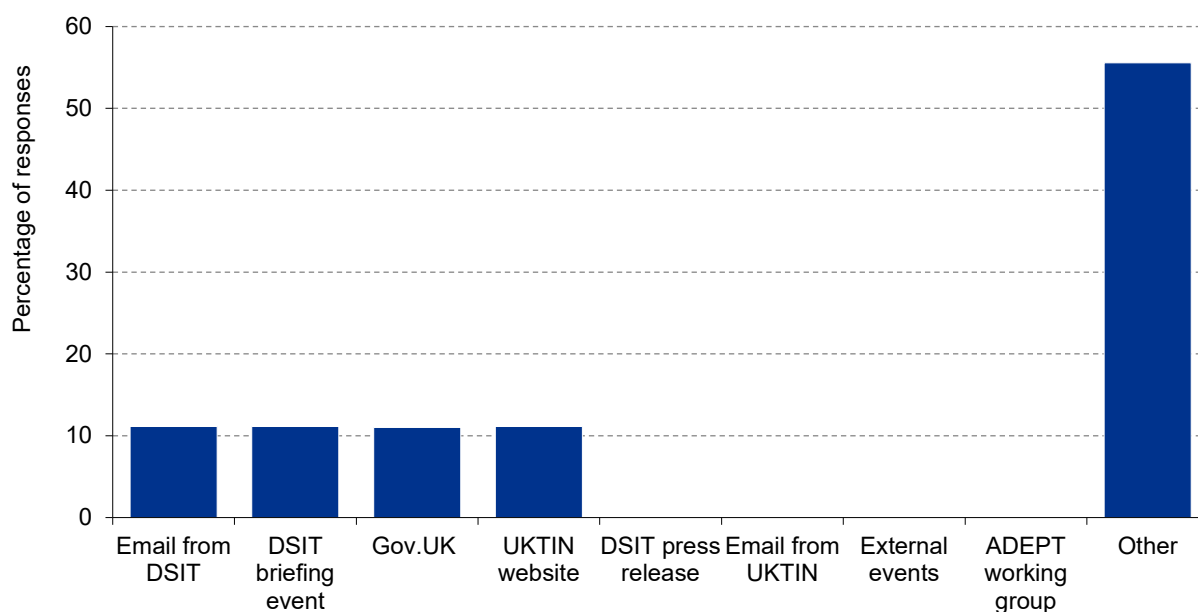
When asked about the communication channels used to promote the SIPP opportunity, DSIT officials noted that a more focused approach had been used for SIPP when compared to the 5GIR opportunity. Specifically, consistent with the difference in the size of budgets for the two programmes (with 5GIR accounting for over £36m central government spend as compared to £1.3m for SIPP) a more limited range of channels or methods were used to advertise the SIPP opportunity when compared to the 5GIR opportunity.

Channels through which the SIPP opportunity was advertised included via Gov.uk and the UKTIN website as well as via the DCIA forum – which DSIT officials felt had been the most effective way to reach an audience of likely interested parties.

### 4.3.2.2 Applicants' awareness of opportunity

To understand the awareness of the SIPP among applicants, respondents to the SIPP Survey were asked how they became aware of the SIPP opportunity.

**Figure 9: How did the applicants become aware of the SIPP opportunity? (n=8)**



*Note: applicants could select multiple answers*  
*Source: SIPP Survey*

Figure 9 above reveals that the most prevalent method by which SIPP Survey respondents were made aware of the SIPP opportunity was "other," accounting for 56% of responses. Respondents selecting this response noted sources including the Greater London Authority (GLA), Scotland 5G Centre, and the Scottish Govt Digital Connectivity Network.

Other methods of awareness included email communications from DSIT, DSIT briefing events, Gov.UK, and the UKTIN website, with 11% of responses highlighting each of these as their source of information.

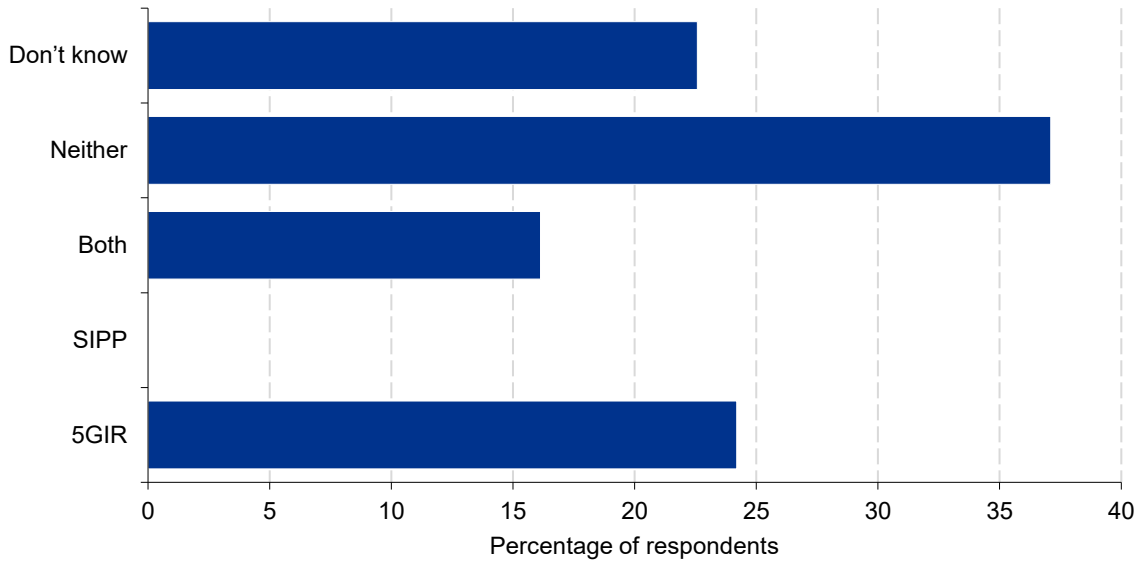
No other methods were reported as sources of awareness for SIPP applicants. This suggests a more limited range of awareness sources for the SIPP opportunity compared to the 5GIR programme.

#### 4.3.2.1 Awareness of SIPP by non-applicants

To assess the effectiveness of efforts to raise awareness of SIPP, it is also important to understand the awareness of the programme among those LAs that did not apply.

As shown in Figure 10, among respondents to the All LA Survey that did not apply for SIPP, 84% reported that they were not aware of SIPP, or did not know if they were aware. 16% of respondents said they'd heard of both 5GIR and SIPP.

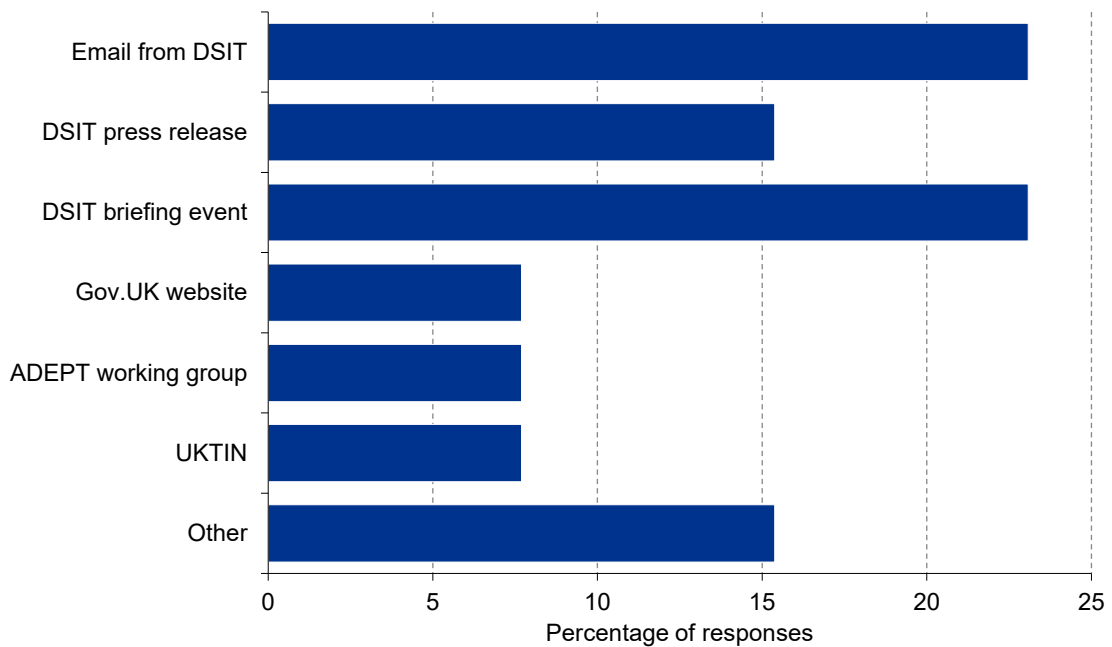
Figure 10: Was the individual or LA aware of SIPP? (n=62)



Note: Asked of all LAs that did not apply to SIPP  
Source: All LA Survey

Furthermore, those who stated they were aware of SIPP but chose not to bid were asked how they became aware of the opportunity.

Figure 11: How did the non-applicant become aware of the SIPP opportunity? (n=7)



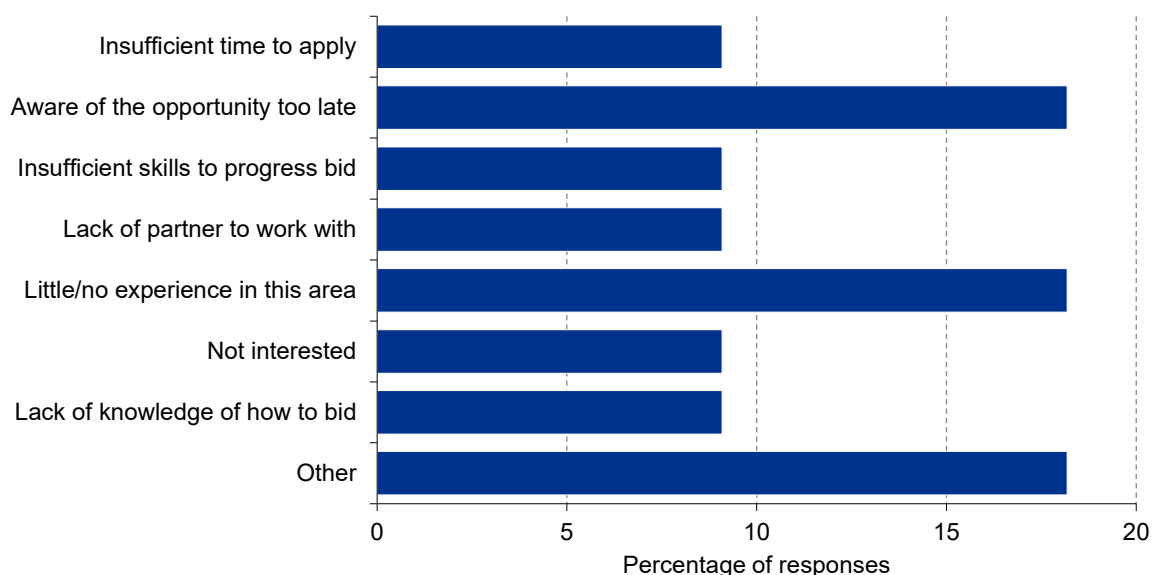
Note: Asked of all LAs that were aware of opportunities - applicants could select multiple answers  
Source: All LA Survey

The results show that DSIT email communications and DSIT briefing events were the most commonly cited way LAs had become aware of the SIPP opportunity. Considering the results from the SIPP Survey and All LA Survey together suggests that there is an opportunity to reach more LAs with

programmes in the future – particularly through direct communication with LAs which seems an effective means of making LAs aware of opportunities.

To understand why LAs who were aware of SIPP did not apply, and therefore how response rates could be increased in the future, respondents to the All LA Survey were asked to state their main reason for not applying.

**Figure 12: What were the main reasons that non-applicants didn't apply for the SIPP opportunity? (n=7)**



*Note: Asked of all LAs that were aware of opportunities but did not bid - applicants could select multiple answers*  
*Source: All LA Survey*

Figure 12 above shows that the main reason for not applying for the SIPP opportunity was because LAs became aware of the opportunity too late or had little/no experience in the area.

#### 4.3.2.2 Number and geographical spread of applications for SIPP

In relation to the number of applications received for SIPP, DSIT officials recognised that SIPP was a much narrower programme than 5GIR, with a different scope and focus on specific types of projects. This meant that the target audience was largely limited to LAs already engaged in similar initiatives. As a result, they anticipated receiving fewer applications compared to the broader 5GIR opportunity.

When asked about the target number of applications for the SIPP opportunity, DSIT officials clarified that there was no formal target set. However, they acknowledged that they would have been satisfied with receiving at least 10 applications, but were focused on receiving at least a minimum of 6. The programme received a total of 11 applications.

In relation to the geographical spread of the SIPP applications, DSIT officials stated that it was roughly in line with their expectations. They noted that a concentration of the applications were from England, with, as shown in Table 5, just one application being received from outside England, from Scotland.

**Table 5: Number of SIPP applications by region**

Region	Applications received
North East	1
North West	1
Yorkshire and the Humber	1
East Midlands	0
West Midlands	0
East	1
London	4
South East	1
South West	1
Scotland	1
Wales	0
Northern Ireland	0

Source: KPMG based on DSIT scoring assessments

DSIT officials attributed this limited geographical spread to the fact that LAs who applied had already previously engaged in similar DCIA projects. Indeed, given that direct email communication was the most common way LAs found out about the SIPP opportunities, those who had previously engaged were more likely to be made aware of the opportunity, and therefore apply, while evidence from the All LA Survey suggests a high proportion were not aware of the opportunity. Additionally, DSIT officials stated that the unique infrastructure in Northern Ireland presented challenges for participation in the programme, which they considered resulted in no applications from the region.

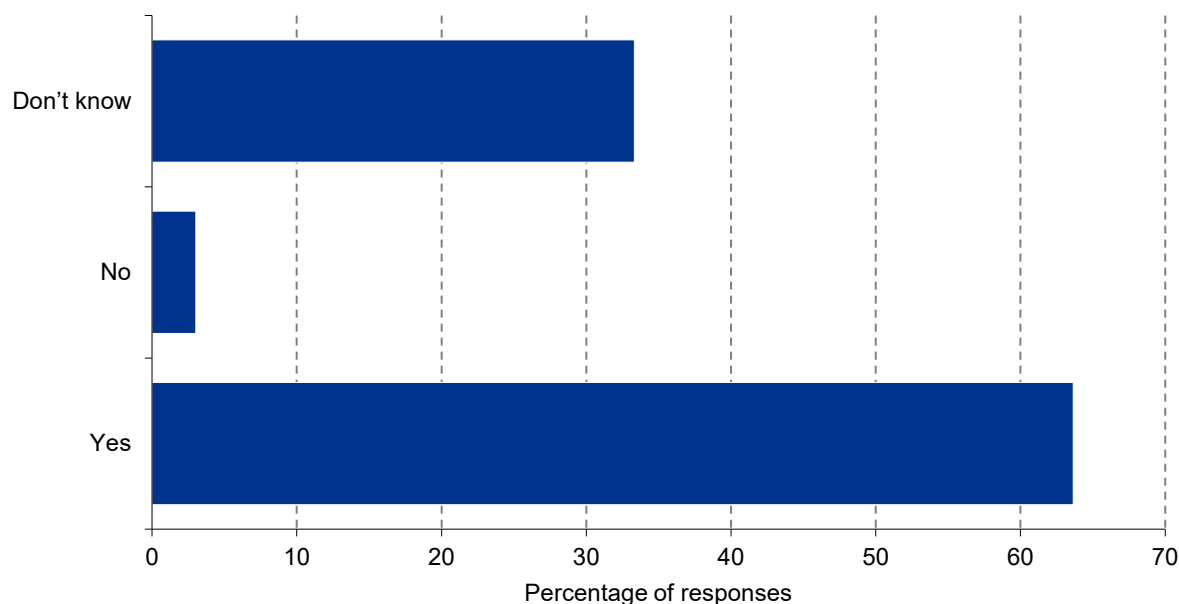
However, despite the limited scope of SIPP, DSIT officials stated they had hoped to receive applications from a wider range of geographical locations for this specific opportunity.

#### **4.3.2.1 Interest of non-applicants in future opportunities**

To understand whether, in future, the number of applications could be boosted, respondents to the All LA Survey were asked if opportunities similar to SIPP were to arise again, would they be interested in applying.

Figure 13 shows that the majority of survey respondents would be interested in applying for similar opportunities again, with 64% stating they would apply for an opportunity similar to SIPP.

**Figure 13: If opportunities similar to the SIPP programme was to arise again, would the applicant be interested in applying? (n=33)**



Note: Asked of all LAs that did not apply to SIPP  
Source: All LA Survey

### 4.3.3 Quality of applications for SIPP

When asked about the overall quality of the SIPP applications received, DSIT officials acknowledged that they did not have specific expectations due to the niche nature of the programme. However, they noted that some of the applications were of low quality and scored poorly. In terms of distinguishing strong bids the factors were similar to those for the 5GIR programme (see Section 4.2.3).

DSIT officials attributed this to a few factors, including the limited time to make applications and the lack of existing relationships between LAs and external stakeholders – primarily between LAs and mobile network operators (MNOs).

Despite these challenges, DSIT officials emphasised that the applications that progressed to funding met the required quality threshold and demonstrated a strong understanding of the programme's goals. DSIT officials noted that there were only a small number of questions asked by LAs as part of the application process – approximately 30 – and the majority of these pertained to the match funding requirements of the programme.

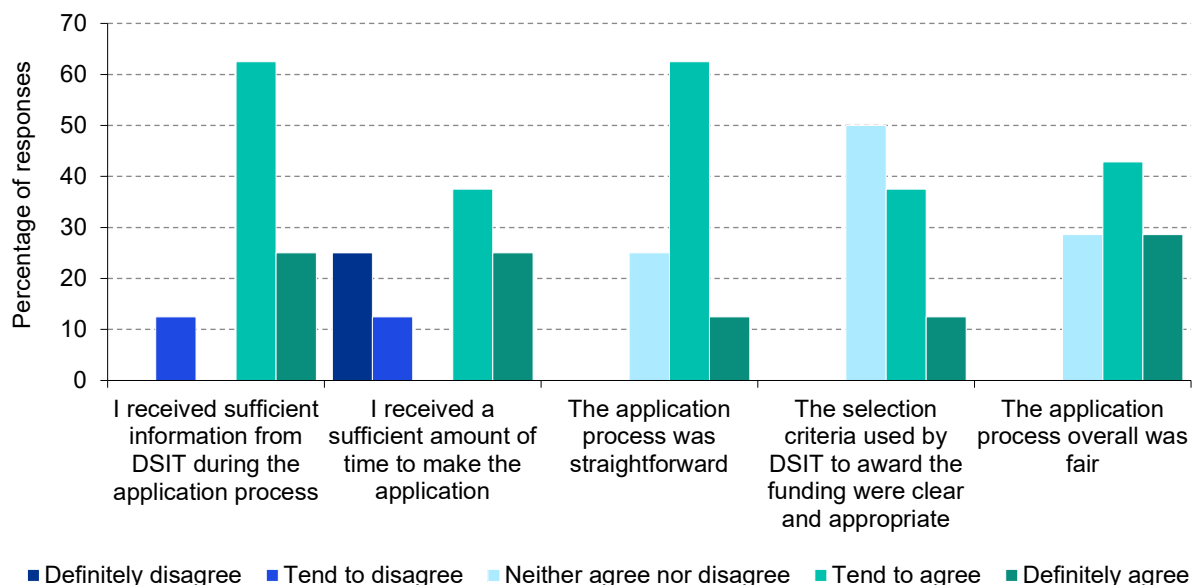
### 4.3.4 Views on the SIPP application process

#### 4.3.4.1 Applicants' views of the application process

To understand the applicants' views on the application process for SIPP, survey respondents to the SIPP Survey were asked to what extent did the applicants agree or disagree with the following statements:

- "I received sufficient information from DSIT during the application process";
- "I received a sufficient amount of time to make the application";
- "The application process was straightforward";
- "The selection criteria used by DSIT to award the funding were clear and appropriate"; and
- "The application process overall was fair."

**Figure 14: To what extent did the SIPP applicants agree or disagree with the following statements? (n=8)**



Source: SIPP Survey

Figure 14 shows that over 60% of SIPP Survey respondents agreed that they had received sufficient information, that they had enough time to make the application, that the application process was straightforward, and that the application process overall was fair. Over 50% of the respondents also stated that the selection criteria used by DSIT to award the funding were clear and appropriate.

Comparing successful applicants with the two unsuccessful applicants from which we received responses to the SIPP Survey: both of the unsuccessful applicants disagreed with the statement that they received a sufficient amount of time to make the application whereas all but one of the successful applicants agreed with the statement.

#### 4.3.4.2 Additional feedback on the SIPP application process

Survey respondents to the SIPP Survey were also asked to provide additional free-text comments regarding their views on the application process and potential improvements. The issues on which comments were asked for included:

- Suggestions on additional information that would have been helpful when applying;
- Recommendations on how to make the application process more straightforward;
- Learnings derived from their application experience; and
- Additional comments on the applicants’ experience of the application process and process evaluation.

The most common points raised by respondents in relation to these issues concerned match-funding where LAs stated that more clarity over the match funding requirements and the restrictions relating to the requirements would have been useful. Other points raised by respondents to the survey included: the document upload process could be made simpler; more time could have been made available for the application; and the timing of the application process made applying more difficult than it might have been.

## 4.3.5 SIPP funding mechanism

### 4.3.5.1 DSIT's views of the SIPP funding mechanism

When asked if they believed the funding method used for SIPP generated more or less interest compared to more traditional funding, DSIT officials commented that the match-funding element may have discouraged potential applicants.

### 4.3.5.2 Applicants' views of funding

To understand from applicants the importance of the funding mechanism in their decision to apply for the SIPP programme, three survey questions were asked to the SIPP Survey respondents with regards to:

- Previous methods of funding from DSIT/DCMS to SIPP applicant;
- The importance of the funding mechanism for the applicants in applying for SIPP; and
- Alternative methods of funding for the SIPP.

In relation to previous funding accessed, half of respondents reported that they had previously received funding for programmes from DSIT/DCMS relating to telecoms/ wireless connectivity. These programmes included:

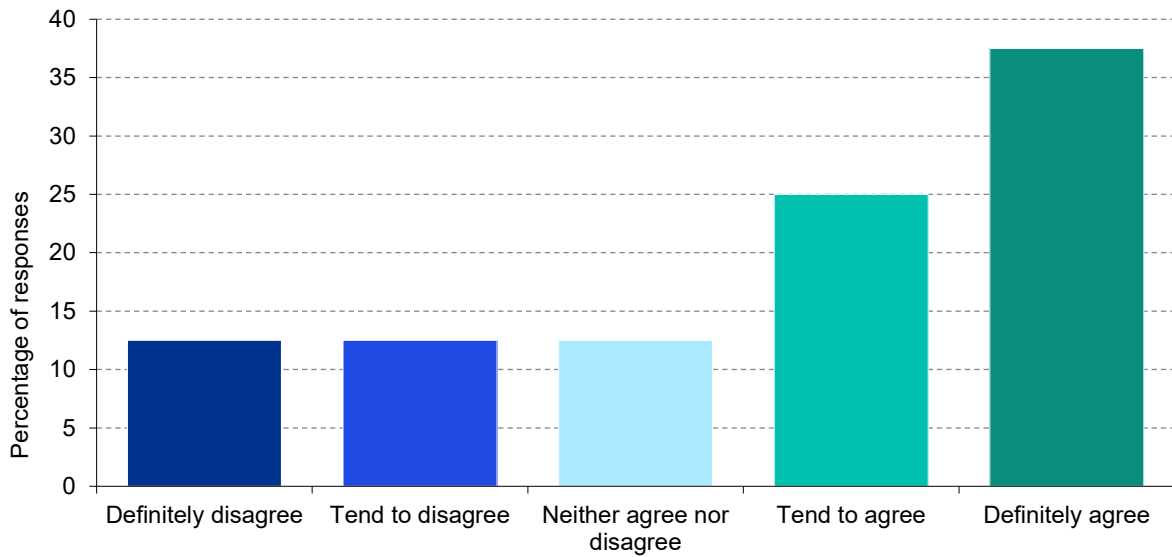
- DCMS/BDUK Superfast Broadband Programme;
- the Local Full Fibre Networks (LFFN) Programme;
- the Open Networks Ecosystem Competition (ONE Competition);
- the Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator (DCIA) programme; and
- 5G Innovation Regions programme.

In contrast to the finding with the 5GIR programme, both the unsuccessful applicants that responded to the SIPP Survey had previously received funding from similar DSIT/DCMS programmes in the past compared to 33% of successful applicants (i.e. 2 out of the 6 successful SIPP applicants).

SIPP Survey respondents were also asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

- *“This method of funding was an important factor in my decision to apply for this programme.”*

**Figure 15: To what extent did the applicant agree or disagree with the following statement? “This method of funding was an important factor in my decision to apply for SIPP.” (n=8)**

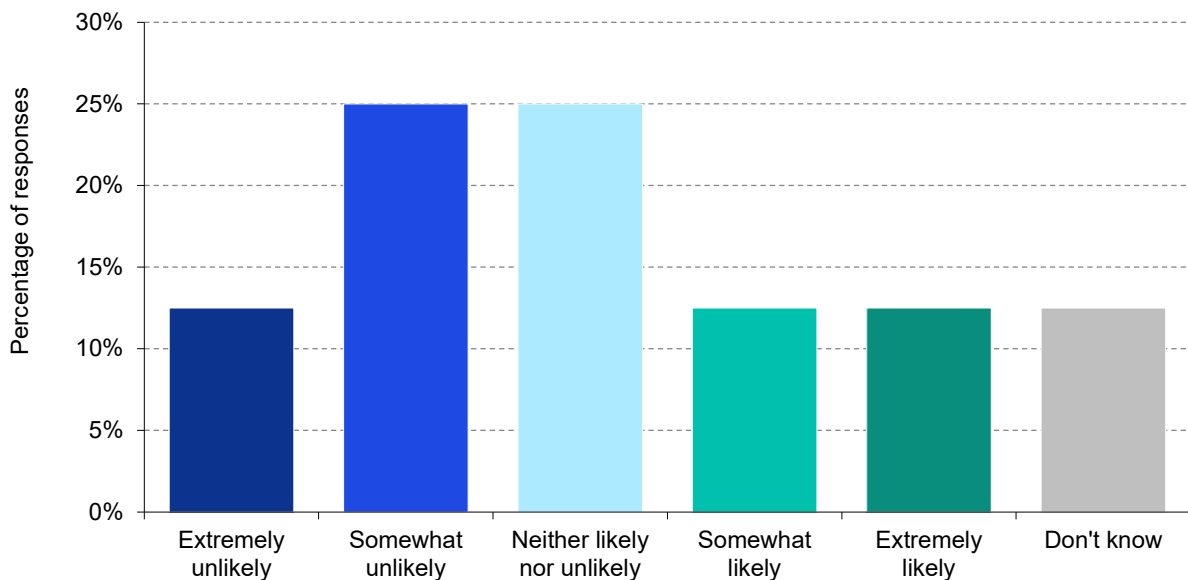


Source: SIPP Survey

Figure 15 shows that over 60% of respondents agreed that the method of funding was an important factor in their decision to apply for the SIPP.

Finally, SIPP Survey respondents were asked to indicate how likely is it that they would have still applied for SIPP if a more traditional funding method had been used.

**Figure 16: If a more traditional method of funding had been used for this programme, how likely is it that you would have still applied for SIPP? (n=8)**



Source: SIPP Survey

In contrast with the results for the 5GIR programme, the results in Figure 16 above show that only one quarter said they would likely have applied to the programme if the more traditional method of funding

had been used. Whilst a specific funding question was not asked in the All LA Survey, of respondents to the survey who did not apply for SIPP, 84% reported that they were not aware of SIPP and so would not have been aware of the attractiveness or otherwise of the funding mechanism.

### 4.3.6 SIPP – DSIT lessons learned

#### 4.3.6.1 Effectiveness of the SIPP application process

When asked about potential improvements to the SIPP application process, DSIT officials raised concerns about the match funding element of SIPP. They noted that the requirement for match funding could have discouraged some LAs from applying and had the potential to hinder the delivery of the programme. As a result, using a more flexible approach to match funding, where possible, in future programmes might encourage more applications and make the delivery of similar programmes more straight forward.

#### 4.3.6.2 Design of SIPP

When asked for their views on potential improvements to the design of SIPP, DSIT officials highlighted several areas:

- **Business case/objectives:** officials considered the original business case for the programme to have been too high-level, which did not effectively support the design of the programme. The lack of detail in the business case was considered to have led to less prescriptive, less clear guidance for SIPP than would otherwise have been the case. Indeed, officials reported that some LAs were unclear about the programme's expected outcomes when drafting their applications. DSIT officials also reported that this lack of initial clarity from the business case extended to the guidance around funding and the restrictions (particularly match-funding) around the funding of the programme – which, again, made it difficult for the guidance to be as clear as the DSIT team would have liked. Similar comments on a lack of clarity in the guidance around the objectives of the programme were made by some respondents to the SIPP Survey. This suggests that for future programmes, ensuring there is clarity around the objectives of the programme at the outset will help in developing clear guidance, enabling LAs (or other applicants) to make effective applications.
- **Match funding:** officials felt that the match funding requirement of the programme discouraged some LAs from applying. This was also referred to in survey responses, with one of the most common points raised in the free-text comments to the SIPP Survey concerning the lack of clarity over the match-funding element of the programme. Using a more flexible approach to match funding, where possible, in future programmes might encourage more applications and make the delivery of similar programmes more straight forward.

## 4.4 Concluding remarks

This report sets out the findings of the first element of the process evaluation – relating specifically to the application process. The agreed evaluation research question, as detailed in the scoping report, for this element of the process evaluation is:

*What went well and what could be improved with regard to the 5GIR/SIPP programmes, specifically in relation to the application process (from the point of view of LAs and DSIT)?*

The evidence and views gathered from DSIT officials, applicants and other LAs as part of this element of the process evaluation suggest that the programmes were broadly successful in generating the levels of interest and quality of applications hoped for, but that there are opportunities to further extend the reach of these kinds of programmes in the future. In particular for SIPP the reach and quality of applications was weaker than that achieved for the 5GIR programme, possibly reflecting the more constrained approach to advertising the SIPP opportunity (as compared to the approach to advertising the 5GIR opportunity).

Responses from applicants suggest that the funding mechanisms for each programme were important – in the case of 5GIR, potentially encouraging responses, whilst for SIPP the match funding requirement may have discouraged potential applicants.

Finally, applicants to both programmes reported that they would have benefitted from more time to complete the application process and some non-applicants cited a lack of time as the main reason for them not applying. However, it is recognised that timescales for programme delivery were out of the control of programme delivery teams in these instances, being driven by the spending review cycle.

These findings provide insights that can feed into future programme design and will be added to through the second part of the process evaluation – relating to the delivery process for each programme – which will be completed in spring 2025.