

<b>Committee:</b> Policy and Resources Committee	<b>Date:</b> 23 June 2015
<b>Subject:</b> Coexist House – Incorporation of a new charitable company	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> The Town Clerk	<b>For Decision</b>
<b><u>Summary</u></b>	
<p>This report informs members of progress of the “Coexist House” initiative which aims to create a centre for multi-faith understanding and education to be delivered through a new charitable company. The initiative is being developed by a Co-exist House Advisory Board. The City Corporation’s relationship with the initiative has, to-date, been led by the Court of Aldermen and the City of London Corporation has been represented on that Board by Alderman Sir Roger Gifford.</p>	
<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>	
<p>It is recommended that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Members note the ambitions for Coexist House and that the charitable company will shortly be incorporated.</li> <li>2. Members endorse the formation of the company.</li> </ol>	

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. On 12 July 2011 The General Purposes (GP) Committee of the Court of Aldermen considered a request from the Co-exist Foundation and the University of Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme to support an inter-faith initiative, Coexist House which had a vision to create in London "*one of the most significant interfaith centres in the world*" for the purposes of deepening understanding of different religions amongst secular and religious audiences.
2. The Cambridge University Inter-Faith Programme undertakes high quality academic research around the “Abrahamic faiths” of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Coexist Foundation is a charity devoted to the improvement of inter-faith relations and was incorporated in 2006. The Coexist Foundation was the brainchild of Dr David Ford, Regius

Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge and founder of Cambridge University's Inter-Faith Programme.

3. The GP Committee of Aldermen agreed that the City of London Corporation should join an Advisory Board for the project. Alderman, Sir Roger Gifford was nominated by the GP Committee of Aldermen as the City of London's representative. The other institutions represented on that Board are the University of Cambridge, the Victoria and Albert Museum (the V&A), the Honourable Society of The Inner Temple and the Coexist Foundation.
4. On 29 October 2013, the GP Committee of Aldermen considered a report from the Private Secretary and agreed that - the City Corporation continue its support for the project; the Advisory Board be reconstituted as a company limited by guarantee and seek charitable status; and that Alderman Gifford continue for the time being as the City Corporation's representative. These recommendations were agreed and authority delegated to the Comptroller and City Solicitor to negotiate and agree the relevant legal documentation to establish the charitable company. The Comptroller and City Solicitor duly provided comments on the draft legal documentation.
5. We have recently been advised by Cambridge University and the Coexist Foundation that the intention now is that the company be incorporated this month, with the application to the Charity Commission for registration as a charity to follow thereafter.
6. The vision for the project remains, that is to create a landmark learning institution and centre in London dedicated to promoting understanding of religion in the United Kingdom and beyond, to encourage respect and tolerance for religious belief and practise, to engage a broad audience (secular and religious) through innovative programmes and engagement, and to challenge religious ignorance and prejudice at all levels of society.

### **Support for Co-exist House**

7. The proposals for Coexist House have received cross-party political support, as well as being welcomed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London, the Chief Rabbi, the Attorney General, Princess Badiya bint El Hassan of Jordan and the Prince of Wales. Leading academics and other faith and City leaders have also welcomed the project.
8. The partner organisations on the Advisory Board for the Coexist House project have made significant contributions to support the initiative thus

far. £200,000 was raised from a number of benefactors following a Mansion House event in October 2013 during Alderman Sir Roger Gifford's tenure as Lord Mayor. The Coexist Foundation has committed £150,000 for the next three years, Cambridge University and the Inner Temple are committing similar sums, and whilst the V&A has not committed finances it has pledged in-kind support.

## **Proposals**

9. It is intended that the five members of the Coexist Advisory Board, including the City Corporation, form the company and be named as Founding Members. As a company limited by guarantee the liability of all of its members would be limited to £10 each. As a corporate Member of the company the City Corporation would act through a nominee, in the alternative the City Corporation would have the right to appoint an individual to be the Member of the company. The City Corporation would also have the right to nominate a Trustee to serve on the Board of Trustees. Consistent with the decision of the GP Committee in 2013 the City Corporation's nominee in both instances is proposed to be Alderman, Sir Roger Gifford. The new company will then focus on bringing its vision to fruition.

## **Conclusion**

- 23 The Bishop of London stated that "*London is the only place that Coexist House could happen as it has the most diverse population in the world*". The City Corporation's involvement in this project demonstrates a leadership role in supporting community cohesion within London and more generally.

## **Contact**

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