

Committee: Public Relations and Economic Development Sub-Committee	Dated: 19 October 2015
Subject: City of London Corporation – Annual Party Conference Activities	Public
Report of: Director of Public Relations	For Decision

Summary

Every autumn the UK political parties hold annual conferences to debate issues, set out policy priorities, and engage with key stakeholders and party activists. The 2015 party conferences provided the City Corporation with an opportunity to engage with the main political parties following the General Election, by promoting its work among key political audiences; developing and strengthening the political contact programme with local and national politicians; and enhancing internal understanding of the likely policy evolution of the different parties. In 2015, the City Corporation organised a high-quality programme of activities at the annual conferences of the three main UK parties, including fringe meetings and policy-focused dinners. In addition, a smaller policy focused lunch will be held at the Scottish National Party (SNP) Conference. Planning has now also begun for the 2016 party conferences.

Recommendation(s)

The Sub-Committee is recommended to:

- (i) note the information about the City Corporation’s activities in 2015; and
- (ii) agree to the general approach set out for the delivery of the City Corporation’s activities in 2016.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London Corporation hosts events at the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative Party conferences every year. This traditionally entails a public fringe meeting early on the Monday evening followed shortly afterwards by a private dinner. These events provide the City

Corporation with a crucial opportunity to engage with key political audiences.

2. The fringe meetings have a set theme which is addressed by a group of panellists typically consisting of leading journalists, high-profile MPs, Peers, representatives from think tanks and figures from the business community. They are typically attended by around 50-100 people, ranging from policy and industry experts, Councillors, MPs, Peers and Party members. Although they have a set theme, they usually cover a broad spectrum of topics such as the economy, international affairs, transport, housing, employment and education.
3. The dinners take the form of private discussions, sometimes with a set theme and a guest speaker. Attendees include London based Councillors, Assembly Members, Members of Parliament, Members of the European Parliament, Peers, government and opposition front bench spokespersons, and senior figures from think tanks and the business community.

Current Position

4. This year's party conferences were particularly important as they took place in the aftermath of the 2015 General Election, which resulted in the formation of the first ever majority Conservative Government since 1992; the emergence of the SNP as the third largest party in the House of Commons; and leadership elections within the Labour and Liberal Democrat Parties. This year's conferences were also particularly important, due to the on-going candidate selections that have been taking place within the three main political parties ahead of the 2016 London Mayoral Election. The City Corporation participated in the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative annual party conferences. It will also be attending the SNP annual party conference.
5. Liberal Democrat Conference – Bournemouth – 21 September
The fringe meeting at Liberal Democrat conference was organised in partnership with CentreForum; an independent, liberal think tank seeking to develop evidence based, long term policy solutions to the problems facing Britain. The meeting took place in the Mirabelle room at the Royal Bath Hotel, and its theme was a liberal agenda for London.

Title: A liberal agenda for London – what should it include?

Chair: Duncan Greenland CBE (Trustee, CentreForum)

Panellists: Rt Hon Tom Brake MP (Commons Chief Whip and Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs); Caroline Pidgeon AM MBE (Leader

of the Liberal Democrat Group in the London Assembly and London Mayoral Candidate);
Kat Hanna (Research Manager at the Centre for London); and Mark Boleat (Policy Chairman, City of London Corporation)

The fringe meeting was attended by approximately 80 people and produced a good discussion on housing, transport, immigration, and the upcoming referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union (EU). The Royal Bath Hotel proved to be a suitable venue and CentreForum were once again an effective partner organisation with which to work.

The private dinner at Liberal Democrat conference was also held at the Royal Bath Hotel. The food service was good and the large boardroom style table worked well. After the main course a general discussion took place focusing on education and skills, housing, transport and the upcoming referendum on Britain's membership of the EU.

Key guests attending the dinner included:

- Cllr Ruth Dombey (Leader, London Borough of Sutton)
- Baroness Doocey OBE (Spokesperson for Media Sport and Cultural Participation)
- Rt Hon Sir Simon Hughes (former MP for Bermondsey and Southwark, and Minister for Justice)
- Baroness Ludford of Clerkenwell (Spokesperson for Europe)
- James Kempton (Board Member, Ofsted)
- Lord Newby of Rothwell (Lords Chief Whip)
- Caroline Pidgeon AM (Leader of the London Assembly Liberal Democrat Group and London Mayoral Candidate)
- Terry Stacy MBE (Political Adviser to the Liberal Democrat Group on London Councils)
- Mike Tuffrey (Chair, London Liberal Democrats)

6. Labour Party Conference – Brighton – 28 September

The fringe meeting at Labour conference was organised in conjunction with Policy Network, a think tank which focuses primarily on promoting and developing progressive politics and social democratic renewal; it was held in the Old Ship Hotel. The theme was securing Britain and Europe's economic future.

Title: Securing Britain and Europe's Economic Future

Chair: Anna Edwards (Bloomberg)

Panellists: Pat McFadden MP (Shadow Minister for Europe); Lord (Peter) Mandelson (Former Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and

Skills, First Secretary of State, and EU Trade Commissioner); Chuka Umunna MP (Former Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills); John Cridland (Director General of the CBI); and Mark Boleat (Policy Chairman, City of London Corporation)

The meeting was very well attended (over 100 people), and a full discussion on the challenges facing Britain and Europe took place, with a range of contributions from the panellists in addition to comments made by the audience. Bloomberg recorded the meeting and streamed it live to their website.

The dinner at Labour conference was held in the Dome Room at the Hotel and Pub du Vin. Over 50 guests attended, where around 60 were expected. There were a number of last-minute cancellations and a few guests who had previously confirmed their attendance that day did not show up in the end. The acoustics in the room were very good and the food service was prompt. The Policy Chairman made some brief remarks.

Key guests attending the dinner included:

- Baroness Blackstone of Stoke Newington (Former Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts)
- Lyn Brown MP (MP for East Ham, Shadow Minister for Home Affairs)
- Sir Steve Bullock (Mayor of Lewisham)
- Lord Harris of Haringey (Chair of Police APG)
- Dr Rupa Huq MP (MP for Ealing Central and Acton, former Deputy Mayor of the London Borough of Ealing)
- Cllr Peter John (Leader of London Borough of Southwark)
- Cllr Claire Kober (Deputy Chair, London Councils)
- Peter Kyle MP (MP for Hove)
- John O'Brien (Chief Executive of London Councils)
- Chi Onwurah MP (MP for Newcastle upon Tyne Central and Shadow Minister for the Digital Economy)
- Cllr Lib Peck (Leader of London Borough of Lambeth)
- Toby Perkins (MP for Chesterfield, Shadow Defence Minister)
- Jules Pipe (Mayor of Hackney and Chair of London Councils)
- Ben Rogers (Director, Centre for London)
- Rt. Hon. Stephen Timms MP (MP for East Ham, former Chief Secretary to the Treasury)
- Cllr Richard Watts (Leader of London Borough of Islington)
- Catherine West MP (MP for Hornsey and Wood Green, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs)

7. Conservative Party Conference – Manchester – 5 October

The fringe meeting at the Conservative conference was organised in conjunction with the Centre for Policy Studies; an independent think tank which develops and promotes policies to limit the role of the state, to encourage enterprise and to enable the institutions of society. It was held in the Reception Room at Manchester Town Hall. The theme was the UK's competitiveness.

Title: Making the UK the world's most competitive economy

Chair: Tim Knox (Director General, Centre for Policy Studies)

Panellists: Harriett Baldwin MP (Economic Secretary to the Treasury); Roger Bootle (Managing Director, Capital Economics); James Forsyth (Political Editor, Spectator); and Mark Boleat (Policy Chairman, City of London Corporation)

The fringe meeting was attended by approximately 40 people, though a significant proportion of these were City Corporation representatives. The meeting produced a wide-ranging discussion. Manchester Town Hall proved a good venue for the fringe and the CPS a good partner organisation. The attendance at the fringe was disappointing, this could be due to a number of factors including location/distance and the amount of time it took to re-enter the secure zone. Therefore, consideration should perhaps be given in the future to holding fringe events at the Conservative conference within the secure zone.

The dinner at Conservative conference was held in the atrium at Manchester Art Gallery and was attended by over 80 guests. The event was preceded by a drinks reception held upstairs in the galleries. The food service was good and due to the height of the room audio equipment was required for Mark Boleat's and David Lidington's remarks after the meal. As the Conservatives are now the single largest party in the House of Commons and have formed a majority government, the number of attendees at this private dinner was greater than those held at the other conferences.

Key guests attending the dinner included:

- Rt Hon Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Transport Minister)
- Tony Arbour AM (AM for South West, Deputy Chairman of London Assembly)
- Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman of London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority)
- Kemi Badenoch AM (Londonwide AM)
- Crispin Blunt MP (MP for Reigate; Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee)

- Lady Victoria Borwick MP (MP for Kensington & Chelsea, former Deputy Mayor of London)
- Alun Cairns MP (MP for Vale of Glamorgan; Wales Minister)
- Jacqueline Foster MEP (MEP for North West)
- Marcus Fysh MP (MP for Yeovil)
- Stephen Greenhalgh (Deputy Mayor for Policing & Crime)
- Ravi Govindia (Leader of Wandsworth Council)
- Rt Hon John Hayes MP (MP for South Holland & Deepings; Security Minister)
- Simon Hoare MP (MP for North Dorset)
- Lord Holmes of Richmond (Former Paralympian and director at LOCOG)
- Rt Hon David Lidington MP (MP for Aylesbury, Minister of State for Europe)
- Jack Lopresti MP (MP for Filton & Bradley Stoke)
- Rt Hon Anne Milton MP (MP for Guildford; Deputy Chief Whip)
- James Morris MP (MP for Halesowen and Rowley Regis)
- Bob Neill MP (MP for Bromley & Chislehurst; Chair of Justice Committee, Co-chair of APPG London)
- Chris Philp MP (MP for Croydon South)
- Philippa Roe (Leader of Westminster City Council)
- Veronica Wadley (Senior Advisor to Mayor for Team London, Volunteering, Charities and Sponsorship)

8. SNP Conference – 16 October – Aberdeen

The private roundtable lunch at the SNP conference is being organised in partnership with the Institute for Public Policy Research (Scotland) – an independent progressive think tank which produces rigorous and independent policy research, covering the full range of local and national policy debates. It will be held in Room 9 at the Aberdeen Exhibition Centre. The theme is how can the Scottish government help businesses in Scotland boost productivity? The lunch will be chaired by Russell Gunson (Director, IPPR Scotland), with introductory remarks by Roseanna Cunningham MSP (MSP for Perthshire South and Kinross-shire, Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training) and Mark Boleat (Policy Chairman, City of London Corporation). It will be attended by a small group of senior Scottish business figures, journalists and politicians.

Options

9. Members are asked to decide whether the current format of fringe meetings and private dinners should continue to be included as part of the

City Corporation's activities at the 2016 party conferences and throughout the next Parliament.

Proposals

10. It is particularly important for the City Corporation to participate in the 2016 party conferences with elections for Mayor of London, the London Assembly, English local government, Scottish Parliament, and Police and Crime Commissioners due to be held during the year. The referendum on UK membership of the European Union could potentially also take place in 2016. It is therefore proposed that the City Corporation continue to take part in the annual conferences of the main political parties.
11. Preparations are already underway for the 2016 party conference season with plans for the City Corporation's activities already being put in place (subject to the decision of your Sub-Committee). The Liberal Democrat conference will be held in Brighton. The current plan is to use the Old Ship Hotel for a fringe meeting and the Hotel & Pub du Vin for the dinner. The Labour Party will be holding its conference in Liverpool, whilst the Conservative Party is holding its conference in Birmingham. Officers will shortly be travelling to Liverpool and Birmingham to view and determine suitable venues for the City Corporation's events. The location for the SNP conference in 2016 is yet to be confirmed.
12. It is proposed to review the number of attendees at City Corporation dinners at all three conferences; the objective of this review will be to facilitate the best possible policy discussion and political contact for Members, especially to further engage with the City Corporation's key audiences of London politicians, policymakers, opinion formers and business leaders.
13. Members play a pivotal role as representatives and hosts at the City Corporation's party conference activities, though this is balanced by the continuing desire that expenditure on activities is as cost-effective as possible. In 2015 attendance was open to all Members of the PR-ED Sub-Committee, while, as in previous years, other Members attending party conferences in a separate capacity were also welcome to attend the dinner.
14. Following your Committee's decision in 2014, changes were made to the way in which travel arrangements for Members were booked. This year, Members were asked to book their own advance (1st class) train ticket, with a fixed time, and reclaim the cost through an expenses claim. The purpose of this was to reduce costs by taking advantage of the significant price gap that now exists in the cost of advance tickets booked for a fixed

date and time, as compared to open tickets. It is proposed this system continue to be used.

15. In order to continue to reduce costs, it is also proposed for 2016 and beyond, that the City Corporation only book a two day standard commercial observer pass for Members or Officers attending any of the annual political party conferences. Members or Officers wishing to attend a conference for longer periods or requiring a pass with additional premiums access, will, under this proposal, need to pay for these separately.
16. It is proposed the City Corporation continue to avoid a number of other activities which are available at the party conferences because they do not present sufficient value-for-money or adequate means to engage with key audiences. Such activities include:
 - a) *Exhibition stands*. A number of organisations choose to have a stand in the exhibition space, though the numbers doing so has recently declined significantly due to the prohibitive cost and negligible benefits (the City Corporation has never had a stand).
 - b) *Sponsorship of a Reception*. A variety of receptions take place during the party conferences for which there are sponsorship opportunities. The City Corporation has chosen not to sponsor or organise receptions due to the associated high costs and desire instead to promote discussion on policy issues relevant to London.
 - c) *Advertising*. The Party Conferences offer a variety of opportunities to advertise in both online and printed publications. This again carries high costs.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

17. The City Corporations participation in the party conferences fits in with our corporate policies and objectives of promoting and enhancing the City of London as the world's leading international financial and business centre, as set out in the Corporate Plan and the Communications Strategy. More specifically, it helps to meet the following Key Policy Priorities of the Corporate Plan; KPP1- Supporting and promoting the UK financial based services sector throughout the world for the benefit of the wider UK economy, and KPP3 - Engaging with London and national government on key issues of concern to our communities such as transport, housing and public health. It also helps the work of the City Corporation's political contact and events programme across the mainstream domestic political spectrum, as set out under Key Objective number 3 of current PR Business Plan.

Conclusion

18. The party conferences remain a vital and effective way of engaging with a wide range of key political audiences, including leading politicians and decision makers. The 2015 party conference season was broadly successful for the City Corporation, owing to the opportunities offered by both the fringe meetings and dinners to engage with key political audiences.

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