

<b>Committee(s):</b> Policy and Resources Committee – For information	<b>Date(s):</b> 09/07/2020
<b>Subject:</b> 2020 Party Conferences and Think Tank Engagement – Covid-19 update	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Bob Roberts, Director of Communications	<b>For Information</b>
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### Summary

Following the decision of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties to cancel their autumn party conferences due to concerns regarding the rules governing mass public events and social distancing, the two parties have instead promised to hold similar events online, albeit with a revised format and purpose. The Conservative Party has not yet confirmed if its October conference will still go ahead as planned, but it is likely they will follow the decision of the other parties. In addition, the Green Party has agreed to hold its entire conference online in October, and there are currently no details of the date and location of the Scottish National Party autumn conference.

Since the party conferences are a significant focus for the City of London Corporation's engagement with each of the major political parties, via the organisation of events including dinners, policy debates and 1:1 meetings, this paper sets out the alternative arrangements made to ensure the Corporation maintains its effective engagement with each party.

This paper also provides an update on the ongoing engagement the Corporation has with think tanks and the changes to this during the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the actions taken to recover funds for the initial programme of physical events, and to reconvene these events in a virtual format at the time of each of the reconstituted conferences.
- Note the plans to reconvene some of the other events in a physical format later once restrictions on social distancing have been lifted or significantly amended in order to allow larger gatherings.

- Note the ongoing engagement with cross-party and non-partisan think tanks.

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. In May 2020, the Labour and the Liberal Democrat parties decided to cancel their 2020 autumn party conferences due to the ongoing lockdown and restrictions on mass gatherings. Both parties have indicated they will reconvene these events on a virtual platform, but the revised format of each event is yet to be announced. Due to technical challenges such as the difficulty of accrediting delegates and enabling robust voting process there is no guarantee that either of these events will directly replicate their physical equivalents. They are instead more likely to be gatherings focussed on general policy discussion with speeches rather than policy making but further detail on the format and purpose has yet to be announced.
2. The Conservative Party has not yet officially cancelled its autumn conference and varying sources of intelligence have indicated that a decision may not be taken until July or even September.
3. There is likely to be a fringe element to each conference to enable third party organisations such as the Corporation to host policy focussed panel discussions. We are waiting on further detail on what form these will take. However, other events such as the stakeholder dinners the Corporation also hosts at each conference are unlikely to work effectively in a virtual format and so it is proposed to follow alternative arrangements in London at a later date once restrictions have been lifted or reduced.

### **Labour Party Conference, Liverpool, 19 - 23 September 2020**

4. The Labour Party Conference was to be held in Liverpool and has been formally cancelled following a decision of the party's national executive committee. An online conference is likely to consist of policy discussion and keynote speeches with further detail on the exact format to be released in the future.

### *Roundtable*

5. Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, the Corporation was due to hold a private roundtable at the conference with a centre-left think tank partner, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), on the green agenda and a just transition. Following cancellation, the IPPR have proposed to hold a virtual private roundtable to coincide with the likely online fringe programme of events that may be held in alongside the formal conference.
6. The roundtable will still include the Chair of Policy and Resources, a frontbench spokesperson, other MPs, local politicians, policy makers and industry figures, with a total of 20-25 attendees. Due to the event being held virtually, the IPPR's

price for organising the event has been reduced and includes all online platform costs, organisation of logistics, marketing and advertising.

#### *Dinner*

7. The Labour Party Conference dinner was due to be held on Monday 21 September in the City's Liver Building. The venue has agreed to carry-over the deposit already paid to cover a similar event for the next time Labour Conference is held in Liverpool. This has been provisionally arranged for September 2022.

#### *Hotels*

8. There were two separate sets of hotel bookings in Liverpool. The deposit paid for the first set of bookings covers the 25% cancellation fee for cancelling more than 12 weeks prior to the event. Final confirmation of the cancellation of this booking has been received. The second set of bookings were made via an online portal and this is eligible for a full refund if cancelled before the day of check in so all monies paid for this booking will be returned.

### **Liberal Democrat Party Conference, Brighton, 26 – 29 September 2020**

9. Following a decision of the party's board and conference committee the event which was due held in Brighton has been moved online. It is billed by the party as being as big an event as the usual autumn conference but with increased capacity for wider member participation. The exact format and timing of the event is still subject to further detail.

#### *Roundtable*

10. The Corporation's original plan was to hold a private roundtable with a think-tank partner, the Social Market Foundation (SMF) on the future of the UK creative industries. Following the reformation of the conference, the SMF have proposed holding a virtual private roundtable to coincide with the wider conference online events programme.
11. The roundtable will consist of about ten participants, including the Chair of Policy and Resources, politicians and figures from the industry. The SMF have reduced the price for organising the event, but note that as discussions with the Liberal Democrats are ongoing about the form the online fringe programme will take, there may be additional costs to advertise the event as part of the official programme.

#### *Dinner*

12. The Liberal Democrat conference dinner was due to be held on Monday 28 September. This was part of the block hotel booking across all three conferences and the deposit already paid covers the cancellation fee. Confirmation of the cancellation of the booking has been received.

#### *Hotels*

13. The hotel bookings were part of the block booking across all three conferences and the deposit paid will cover the cancellation fee of 25% more than 12 weeks prior to check in. Confirmation of the cancellation has been received.

## **Conservative Party Conference, Birmingham 4 – 7 October 2020**

14. The Conservative Party Conference is still scheduled to be held in Birmingham and unlike the other parties they have not yet formally cancelled the event, however some of the organisation of the event is on hold. A formal announcement on what will be happening is awaited with indication of news in July or even as late as September according to some sources.

### *Roundtable*

15. The original plan was to hold a private roundtable at the conference with a think tank partner, the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), on trade deals and global market access. While we await a decision on whether the conference will go ahead in a physical form, a proposal for a virtual event has been requested from the CPS.

### *Open Fringe*

16. The Corporation was also planning to hold an open public fringe with a separate think tank partner, Onward, on infrastructure spending and the levelling-up agenda. A proposal for a virtual event has also been received from Onward.

### *Dinner*

17. The conference dinner is due to be held on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> October in Birmingham Town Hall. Discussions have been held with the venue and provisional arrangements made to carry-over if necessary, and the deposit paid could cover a similar event the next time the conference is held in Birmingham, likely to be October 2022.

### *Hotels*

18. Bookings had been made as part of the block bookings across all three conferences. Contact has been made to discuss the possibility of cancelling the bookings should the conference be cancelled. A 25% cancellation charge will be applicable more than 12 weeks before check in, 50% more than 8 weeks before check in, 75% more than 4 weeks before check in, and 100% less than 4 weeks before check in.

## **Scottish National Party (SNP) Conference, October 2020 (time and location tbc)**

19. Building on the Corporation's attendance at the SNP conference for the past five years, Parliamentary events with the party's Westminster group and meetings with the First Minister, we plan to organise for the Chairman of Policy and Resources to attend the next major SNP conference. Usually this is held in October, but details of the venue and the exact date are not yet available. Once details are published a physical or virtual event, we will seek to work again with partners such as TheCityUK to arrange a speaking platform.

## **Future alternative arrangements – 2021 spring conferences and London based dinners**

20. While it is possible to reconstitute the policy-based roundtables and open fringe meetings into online based events, it is not possible with the dinners. Therefore,

subject to Government rules and guidelines on social distancing and holding mass events, it may be possible to reconvene three or more similar dinners at the Guildhall or elsewhere with each party's spokespeople, MPs and associated stakeholders. In addition, each party has also suggested they may be able to hold an enhanced party conference around the time of their usually smaller Spring 2021 gatherings. If this is likely, further proposals for events and engagement activities will be brought to a future meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee.

### **Think tank engagement**

21. In April 2020, the Policy and Resources committee agreed under the urgency procedure to revise the Corporation's corporate membership of a range of policy and financially focussed think tanks. Since then the Corporate Affairs team has been renewing contacts with each think tank, to both ensure we receive value for money for each membership, and to discuss any other projects and events that may be of mutual interest. In addition to annual membership, the Corporation also works with think tanks on ad-hoc policy projects usually funded via the policy initiatives fund, and through events held at the party conferences, in the Guildhall and elsewhere.
22. The ongoing Covid-19 outbreak means that several events the Corporation was due to host with our think tank partners have had to be postponed or moved to a virtual platform. This includes the CPS Margaret Thatcher Conference, the Centre for the Study of Financial Innovation (CSFI) annual City debate, and the Women in Finance Charter Review with New Financial and HM Treasury.
23. A substantial piece of work continues with the IPPR through the Corporation's sponsorship and membership of their Environmental Justice Commission (EJC). The EJC published its interim report last month, and the work will continue with the final report due to be published early in 2021. Alderman Alison Gowman often attends the EJC meetings on behalf of the Chair of Policy and Resources and the Corporation continues to work to influence this research. The work of the EJC is likely to be increasingly influential over the coming months as national policy attention turns to a green recovery from Covid-19.
24. The Corporation has supported an Arts and Culture paper being written by the Fabian Society which will be ready for publication over the summer.
25. Following a decision of the Policy and Resources Committee in January 2020 the Corporation is supporting the New Local Government Network (NLGN) on its 'Community Mobilisation' project and report. This project focusses on how best communities can be engaged to support projects in their areas and how local authorities can be an enabler. After feedback from the Corporation and City Bridge Trust the Corporation and the NLGN are currently looking at a suitable launch date – which has been slightly delayed due to the current lockdown - for the report and distribution to interested stakeholders.
26. The Corporation has also been working with the Centre for London on their research project 'London 2050', which outlines their vision for developments in

London in the next 30 years. The Corporation is a member of the advisory board for this project.

27. The Covid-19 outbreak has meant think-tanks have not had the usual capacity to develop opportunities for engagement, particularly mass public events. Discussions with the think tanks will continue as circumstances change, and proposals for further engagement opportunities and policy projects, which the Corporation could sponsor, will be brought to the Committee for consideration at a future meeting.

## **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

28. Continuing to organise and sponsor events associated with the party political conferences, and also working with the think tanks and other third party organisations to produce events and associated policy reports provides an opportunity for the Corporation to engage with key audiences on important global, national and local government issues and to demonstrate the Corporation's involvement in relevant debates. Sponsorship and political engagement would also help deliver outcomes 2 – 10 of the 2018-23 Corporate Plan.

## **Implications**

29. The Corporate Affairs unit has an established budget for all party conference related activity. Any think-tank memberships and sponsorship of ad-hoc policy projects are currently funded via the Policy Initiatives Fund according to decisions of the Policy and Resources Committee.

## **Conclusion**

30. Policy and Resources Committee are asked to note the report comprising an update on revisions to the Corporation's party conference programme following the changes introduced by the Covid-19 pandemic, and an update on the Corporation's engagement with think tanks.

## **Appendices**

None

## **Background Papers**

- Report to the Policy and Resources Committee, "Think Tank Review and Memberships, 2020-21", 16 April 2020

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