

Committee(s): Public Relations Sub (Policy & Resources) Committee – For information	Dated: 18/10/2021
Subject: Parliamentary Team Update	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	6,7,8,9,11
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N/A
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of: Paul Double, City Remembrancer	For Information
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Summary

This summary updates Members on the main elements of the Parliamentary Team’s previous and planned activity in support of the City of London Corporation’s political and Parliamentary engagement since the last formal update in April 2021. An informal note was sent to the members of the subcommittee in July, providing an interim update.

Recommendation(s)

Members are recommended to note the report.

Main Report

Legislative Programme Update

1. Major legislative developments since the Queen’s Speech include the introduction of the **Health and Social Care Levy Bill**, which passed all its stages in the Commons in one day, before being passed to the House of Lords. The Bill attracted political controversy and puts into effect the increase in National Insurance contributions announced by the Prime Minister in September to fund health and social care services. The Bill is almost certain to pass when Parliament resumes following the Conference recess.
2. Details on the progress of Bills with particular relevance to City Corporation interests are set out below.
3. **Judicial Review and Courts Bill** - The Bill contains provisions which prospectively remove the limitations placed on the use of the buildings currently used for the Magistrates’ and Mayor’s Court, this being linked to the development of the new court centre in Fleet Street. The main emphasis of the bill is however on the reform of judicial review. This will be of significance to

public bodies generally (including the to the Corporation when acting in that capacity). The Bill is due to have its Second Reading in the Commons later this month. Through a separate piece of legislation introduced in the Lords (the **Public Service Pensions and Judicial Offices Bill**) the judicial retirement age will increase to 75 (from the current 70 years old). The Bill will be considered at Committee in the upper House this month.

4. **Elections Bill** – The Bill proposes changes to election law, introducing voter ID in parliamentary and local elections in England, removing the 15 year limit on overseas voters in UK parliamentary elections, and changing the ability for EU citizens to vote in local elections in England and Northern Ireland. The Bill is also being used to introduce a “first past the post” system for the election of all Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC), Combined Authority Mayors, and the Mayor of London. Changes at the level of parliamentary elections will apply generally. In relation to ward elections, changes to rules on limiting the number of proxy votes an individual may cast, requirements to show the originator of campaigning digital advertising, and stiffer penalties for intimidation are drafted so as to apply to the City Corporation as well as conventional local government areas. The application of the Bill’s provisions removing the entitlement of European Union citizens to stand and vote in local elections to the City’s ward elections has yet to be determined. The Bill is currently at Committee stage in the Commons.
5. **Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill** – The Bill’s lengthy provisions cover a wide range of matters, including the extraction of information from electronic devices; criminal damage to memorials; public order; unauthorised encampments; road traffic offences; the sentencing and release of offenders; and court procedure. The Bill recently received its Second Reading in the Lords and is now progressing through Committee stage. At Second Reading, former Lord Chancellor and opposition spokesperson Lord Falconer of Thoroton criticised the wide ranging nature of the Bill, arguing it did not allow for sufficient parliamentary scrutiny.
6. **Professional Qualifications Bill [HL]** – The Professional Qualifications Bill was introduced in the Lords and has stalled prior to Report stage in the upper House. The Bill creates regulation-making powers designed to implement a new framework for the recognition of overseas professional qualifications in the UK, replacing existing EU-derived law in this area. The Bill also includes provisions for the implementation of international agreements on the recognition of professional qualifications as well as creating powers to authorise regulators in the UK to enter into regulator recognition agreements with regulators overseas. Despite support across the House for an updated framework to recognise overseas qualifications, Peers have questioned the quality of the drafting of the Bill, expressing disappointment at its “skeletal” nature, handing powers to Ministers rather than placing them in primary legislation. Some opposition peers have questioned the Government’s ability to take the Bill through the House.
7. **Environment Bill** – The Environment Bill amends existing environmental legislation and introduces new measures on a range of environmental policy

areas. The Bill requires the Government to set and achieve at least one target in four priority areas: air quality; biodiversity; water; resource efficiency and waste reduction, as well as setting a target for fine particulate matter or “PM2.5”. The Bill has made slow passage through both Houses, suffering a number of delays and having to be carried over between parliamentary sessions. The Bill currently awaits Third Reading in the Lords, though has been subject to a number of successful opposition amendments which the Commons is likely to try to remove.

8. The City Corporation has been active on the Bill through amendments tabled by Lord Tope which would create discretionary powers for local authorities to control emissions from combustion plant where the air quality in their area exceeds World Health Organization Guidelines, by declaring their area an ‘air quality improvement area’. These provisions mirror a Private Member’s Bill put forward by Lord Tope to give these powers to local authorities in London. The amendments were not pushed to a vote. The Government’s response, which included reference to a proposed consultation, will be used to inform further activity in support of the proposals.
9. The Government has also progressed legislation to implement the recommendations of the Hackitt Report into building fire safety (the **Building Safety Bill**), to reverse the introduction of fixed-term Parliaments (the **Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Bill**) and to strengthen protections on freedom of speech at universities (the **Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill**). The Government’s reform of higher technical education, including introducing the lifelong loan entitlement, (the **Skills and Post-16 Education Bill**) is scheduled to be passed to the Commons upon completing its stages in the Lords in October.

GLA and the Devolved Institutions

10. Managing Director of the Bridge House Estates, David Farnsworth, and John Stevenson of the Port of London Authority gave evidence to the London Assembly’s Transport Committee on London’s river crossings, alongside a panel of other witnesses. Topics discussed include bridge maintenance, coordination with relevant bodies/authorities during bridge closures, and the continued closure of Hammersmith Bridge. Sian Berry (Green) asked if Bridge House Estates would be interested in taking on more bridges, to which Farnsworth outlined the limitations of the charity’s objectives.
11. The Policy Chair held an introductory meeting with new Liberal Democrat Assembly Member Hina Bokhari.

Conferences

12. As usual, representatives of the Office attended the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative annual party conferences, attending a wide range of main-stage and fringe events over the four days of each. While the Liberal Democrats

chose to host their conference online, both Labour and Conservative conferences were held in person, in Brighton and Manchester respectively. The SNP's Annual National Conference will be held in November, following a smaller National Conference, focusing on independence, the 2022 council elections, and climate change, was held in September. Notes on the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative Conferences, produced in collaboration with Corporate Affairs, was sent to members of the Sub Committee shortly after their conclusion.

13. Liberal Democrat Conference saw the party announce their intention to attack the "Blue Wall" of Conservative seats following their unexpected win in the Chesham and Amersham by-election earlier in the year. In his leader's speech, Sir Ed Davey urged members to take inspiration from former leader Paddy Ashdown who responded to John Major's win in the 1992 election with a call to win "the battle of ideas". Davey also called for greater education catch-up funding following the pandemic and drew on his personal experience as a carer to attack the Prime Minister's "claim to have fixed the crisis in social care." Elsewhere, Conference passed a motion supporting President Biden's campaign for a global minimum corporation tax rate of 21%, floated at the G7 Summit in Cornwall in June. The motion also calls for closing loopholes that enable tech companies to pay little tax and for the Digital Service Tax to be retained.
14. Headlines from Labour's conference focused on clashes between party factions and changes to party rules regarding the selection of party leader and deselection of constituency MPs. Keir Starmer's first conference address as leader was subject to a number of heckles but was generally well received. Key announcements included proposals to scrap business rates, raise the digital services tax from 2% to 12%, and boost "boots on the ground" policing.
15. Most action at Conservative Party Conference was to be found in fringe events, with no major policy announcements from Cabinet speakers. Outside of the main hall, discussion concentrated on the Government's approach to "levelling up" as well as the environment in the build up to the COP 26 conference. The role of private finance in funding infrastructure projects and achieving net zero was explored. Financial services also featured, through events sponsored by the City Corporation, TCUK and the new party grouping Conservatives in the City.

State of the Parties

16. The return of Parliament following party conference season will be instructive as to the prospects of the Government and opposition parties over the coming year. For Conservative and Labour Members elected in 2019, this was the first in-person conference they have attended since their election, providing an opportunity to deepen ties with their colleagues and the party faithful. For Liberal Democrat and SNP MPs, whose parties held entirely virtual conferences, the experience may be different, though it cannot be doubted that the return of a nearly normal Parliament (and its many tearooms, restaurants and bars) will make a considerable difference.

17. However, the return to an in-person Parliament does not necessarily mean plain sailing for the two main parties. The Prime Minister has shown his ability to make hard decisions in introducing a rise in National Insurance Contributions and conducting a ruthless reshuffle. Hard decisions are likely to have to be made again in the Budget and Spending Review on 27 October. As part of the review, the Treasury has asked that departments identify “at least 5% of savings and efficiencies from their day-to-day budgets”, leaving MPs wondering how much action will be taken to repair the significant dent in public finances caused by the pandemic. Comments reported in the press from Leader of the House of Commons Jacob Rees-Mogg that the country is as “highly taxed as we can afford” indicate a level of discontent with the Treasury’s approach to restoring its finances. Furthermore, the financial services sector will be looking for developments on the Spring Budget’s announcement that the bank surcharge will be reviewed in light of planned increases in corporation tax. Likewise, it remains to be seen if the Government will make tough decisions now sitting within the new Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, particularly around planning reform, after rumours this ambition has been dropped.
18. For Labour, Starmer will continue his near-Sisyphean task of reforming the party and place it on track to enter Government. The next few months will see Starmer try to articulate his own approach, building on his 11,500 word pamphlet “The Road Ahead”. Attempts at Conference to shore up the party’s stance on law and order and policy announcements such as phasing out business rates in favour of greater taxes on large tech companies may form part of this project.
19. Other parties may see some opportunity over the autumn. SNP calls for an independence referendum are likely to crescendo over the next few months, contingent that the COVID-19 recovery continues on an even keel, satisfying a restless activist element within the party to quicken the march to independence. The Liberal Democrats are unlikely to quickly forget their famous Chesham and Amersham by-election victory, and will seek to find their new niche in sapping liberal Conservative voters as the Government seeks to exploit “culture war” issues. The new co-leaders of the Green Party, Carla Denyer and Adrian Ramsey, will seek to build on gains in the local elections but face challenges in how closely the party will affiliate with protest groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Insulate Britain - groups which may alienate some voters but also energise their base supporters. While they did not achieve what some commentators predicted, the success of the Greens in the German federal election may provide a model for the party.

Forward Look

20. The Parliamentary Team is in the process of resuming face to face engagement activities in line with changing Government guidance and the resumption of guest access to the parliamentary estate. During the summer recess, officers held face to face meetings with representatives from a number of All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), including the APPGs on ESG, the Rule of Law

and Insurance and Financial Services, as well as those responsible for parliamentary engagement at the Bar Council and UK Finance. Proposals for a joint roundtable with the APPG Insurance and Financial Services on the theme of competitiveness, and a backbench parliamentary debate on the importance of the UK's legal sector were discussed. Opportunities will be taken to highlight City Corporation interests through meetings held jointly with the Industry and Parliament Trust.

21. Priorities for upcoming engagement include preparations to give oral evidence and further promotion of the inclusion of fraud in the Online Safety Bill, continued amplification of City Corporation work at COP 26, and the resumption of face to face engagement.
22. Greater recognition of fraud in the Draft Online Safety Bill is a long-term objective for the Office. Working with City of London Police colleagues, the Office has secured an opportunity for a City Police representative to give evidence to the Joint Committee on the Draft Online Safety Bill as part of their pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill. This follows the submission of written evidence to the Committee calling for greater recognition of fraud as an online harm. The Bill establishes a new regulatory framework to tackle harmful content online, including certain user-generated fraud. The City Corporation and City Police, alongside stakeholders such as UK Finance, are seeking to expand the scope of the Bill to tackle fraud via other means such as advertising, emails or cloned websites. The Office will work with the City Police in preparation for the oral evidence session. Separately, City MP Nickie Aiken has expressed her support for the inclusion of more forms of fraud within the Bill, building on the Westminster Hall debate she led on online fraud earlier in the year. The Office provided Mrs Aiken with notes ahead of a meeting with the Chair of the Joint Committee, Damian Collins MP. Furthermore, a related written submission was made to the DCMS Sub-committee on Online Harms and Disinformation.
23. Given the Bill is currently at pre-legislative scrutiny stage, further possibilities for engagement remain when the final Bill is eventually brought to the House. At this stage, work will focus on encouraging the Joint Committee to recommend the inclusion of more forms of fraud within the Bill to the Government. Should the committee not recommend this, or the Government not accept this recommendation, other avenues can be explored when the Bill is brought to the House.
24. Promotion of the City Corporation's work in convening the financial services sector at COP 26 continues. City MP Nickie Aiken tabled a parliamentary question to the COP 26 President in which, if successful in the ballot, she will raise the role of private finance in promoting a green recovery. Furthermore, the Office will prepare a briefing ahead of an upcoming Commons general debate on the Conference on 21 October, and the Lord Mayor will speak at an event run jointly with the Industry and Parliament Trust on the theme "COP 26: The Future for Green Finance", on the 26 October.
25. On a similar theme, the Office has also supported promotion of the City Corporation commissioned report "International Trade in Environmental

Services: Barriers to trade and recent approaches to liberalisation”. The report has been provided to the International Trade Committee following their inquiry into COP 26 and international trade, the APPG on Trade and Export Promotion as part of their call for evidence on aligning trade rules to meet climate and environmental goals, and the APPG on ESG.

26. Early in the summer recess, Nickie Aiken visited Guildhall and a number of other City Corporation sites as part of day-long engagement organised in collaboration with Corporate Affairs. Mrs Aiken met a number of Members and visited the Barbican, Smithfield Market, City of London Police headquarters and the site of the Salisbury Square development.
27. In line with the relaxation of restrictions on the parliamentary estate, future parliamentary events and meetings will take place in person by default. Catch up meetings will be sought with key stakeholders and plans will be taken forward for in-person events and/or roundtables with relevant All Party Groups. Following the gradual reopening of international travel, the Office will give consideration to resuming the Lord Mayor’s regular engagement with country or region focused All Party Groups. Additionally, the House of Commons Terrace has been secured for the June 2022 Parliamentary Terrace reception, sponsored by the City’s MP.
28. The Office will monitor for any developments on the 2023 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies. The secondary consultation on parliamentary boundaries is due to take place in early 2021. Over the summer the Office compiled and submitted a response to the Commission’s initial proposals, which saw the Cities of London and Westminster constituency broken up and the City of London form a new constituency with Islington named “The City of London and Islington South.” The response objected to this proposal on various grounds, including the historical, commercial, community and cultural links between the City and Westminster.
29. Discussions are ongoing with the City’s MP regarding Section 618 of the Housing Act 1985, which disqualifies City Corporation members who live in Common Council owned properties from voting on housing matters. A legislative vehicle for the repeal of this provision is being sought.
30. The Office will continue to engage with parliamentarians to advocate for the UK’s accession to the Lugano Convention. While UK accession is not in the gift of parliamentarians, work will continue to raise awareness of this matter.
31. Intensive work has continued on the preparation for submitting a private Bill to re-locate City wholesale markets. Team members have worked very closely with the Markets Project team and other officers from across the Corporation on the scope of the Bill, the interaction with existing market arrangements, the requirements of the future market, the relationship with key politicians at a local, regional and national level, and on communications and engagement. Officers are working on the deposit of a Bill at the end of next month.

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