

Committee:	Date:
Policy & Resources Committee	8 June 2023
Subject: Funding for Livery Committee website	
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 4 & 9
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Y
If so, how much?	£60k (£20k p.a. for three years)
What is the source of Funding?	Policy Initiatives Fund (multi-year allocation)
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Y
Report of: Deputy Town Clerk	For Decision
Report author: Greg Moore – Assistant Town Clerk	

Summary

The Livery Committee is the sole committee of Common Hall, one of the City Corporation's executive bodies. The Committee is charged with overseeing arrangements at Common Hall for the elections of Lord Mayor, Sheriffs, and other officers, and to act as a conduit for communications between the City Corporation and the Livery, as well as within and across the Livery itself.

In fulfilling their brief in terms of communication, the Committee runs a dedicated website. Since its launch in 2020, the website has proven to be an efficient and widely-used resource, with its demonstrable popularity evidenced by website viewing figures and strong anecdotal feedback. The City Corporation has contributed financially to both the launch and the running costs; the remaining funds to-date have been sourced via the Fellowship of Clerks, which has sought voluntary contributions from Livery Companies each year.

It is now proposed that a new funding model be adopted which would allow for longer-term financial stability, whilst at the same time a business plan is developed to help ensure the website ultimately becomes self-sustaining, going forward.

Recommendation: That an award of £20,000 per annum, charged to the Policy Initiatives Fund, be made for a three-year period (financial years 2024/5-2026/27) to pay for the administration of the Livery Committee website.

Main Report

Background

1. The Livery Committee is a committee of Common Hall, established formally by that body and in existence since 1864. Whilst administered by the City

Corporation in day-to-day terms, it is independent of the Court of Common Council and the Court of Aldermen. It is responsible for overseeing arrangements for Common Hall and the elections of Lord Mayor, Sheriffs, and other key Corporation officers thereat, and also for acting as a conduit for communications between the City Corporation and the Livery, sharing best practice amongst Companies and seeking to provide support to the Livery wherever helpful and desired (whilst respecting the sovereignty of each Company).

2. In discharging its obligations in respect of communications, the Committee has created a website, launched in 2020, with City Corporation support. The website builds upon a previous offering which was run and operated pro-bono by a former Chairman of the Committee.
3. Following the preparation in 2019 of a design brief for the Livery Committee's proposed new website, a tender exercise was carried out by the Corporation's Procurement Section. Nine tenders were received and subsequently evaluated against a set of criteria recommended at that time by the City's Procurement Team. Following consideration by the Livery Committee, as well as the panel of individuals who had assisted in the preparation of the design brief, the tender was awarded to Cooper Repco Ltd for the creation of the new website. Cooper Repco subsequently also accepted the remunerated position of webmaster to maintain the site.
4. The new website was launched on 1 September 2020 and gives visitors access to a wide range of material, including Livery-related news and events, a database listing all Livery companies, their Masters/Prime Wardens/Upper Bailiff and contact details. There is also an additional resource in the form of a separate, password-protected section for Livery Clerks, which contains restricted information. The Corporation part-funded the launch of the website and has continued to fund, in part, the webmaster position, alongside voluntary contributions from the Livery.
5. In its first 12 months the website logged 79,280 page views from 19,046 visitors. In its first full calendar year (Jan 2021–Dec 2021) it logged 107,300 page views from 28,320 visitors. Digital footfall to the website has continued to grow as awareness of the site has spread and, for the 2022 calendar year, it returned a 63% increase in visitor numbers and a 44% increase in page views with 46,900 visitors and 154,400 page views. September 2022 was the first month to exceed 14,000 page views, and with the exception of December, this figure has been exceeded every month since.
6. The website has been of particular benefit to the Corporation in promulgating to the Livery information about significant events. In September and November 2022, figures were elevated because of the death of Her Late Majesty the Queen and the Lord Mayor's Show respectively, with the Lord Mayor's Show day achieving the highest single-day viewing figure to date.

Issue

7. Despite the success of the website, there is insufficient capacity amongst the Livery to sustain their current level of voluntary funding.

8. Given the inextricable link between the Livery and the Corporation, it has been suggested it would be beneficial to the Corporation to have more editorial control, to ensure continued alignment of messaging.
9. It is important to recognise that the City Corporation has three executive bodies, with three different electorates.
10. One of these executive bodies is Common Hall and the statutory electorate for this is the Livery; however, support for this executive body and this electorate has, in recent years, been minimal: there is no dedicated post or resourcing made available for it and it has, instead, been absorbed as and where capacity allows, which is not a prudent or sustainable long-term position.
11. In light of this, taking into account the increased visibility of the activities of both the Livery and the City of London as a result of the popularity of the website, it is proposed that the Corporation takes on the running costs of approximately £20,000 per annum for the next three years.
12. During this three-year period, work will be undertaken to consider the possible commercialisation of the website, including through advertising opportunities or by inviting sponsorship from appropriate City businesses, in order to make the website self-sustaining in the longer term.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

13. *Financial implications* – an allocation of £20k per annum for three years, amounting to a total £60k contribution. This would be met from the multi-year PIF budgets, which at the time of writing has uncommitted balances of £200k, £550k, and £550k across the three financial years in question. This is intended to facilitate the website's evolution towards a self-sustaining funding model, thereby minimising or removing ongoing Corporation financial support obligations.
14. *Strategic implications* – the website supports the Corporate Plan's ambitions for the City to be digitally and physically well-connected and responsive to its stakeholders by acting as a core mechanism for engagement with a key constituency. Taking on funding responsibility for the short to medium term will provide an opportunity to ensure greater editorial control, alignment, and coherency of message and support the promotion of high-priority corporate events such as Common Hall and the Lord Mayor's Show.
15. *Resource implications* – there are no direct resourcing implications as the funding would include monies for the ongoing maintenance of the site. However, it should be noted that your Committee may be asked to give longer-term consideration in due course to appropriate resourcing arrangements for Common Hall and Livery support.
16. *Risk implications* – should funding not be agreed, the ongoing financial viability of the website is at risk. This would in turn generate reputational risks associated with the loss of a valued resource and lack of support for a statutory electorate.

17. *Equalities implications* – N/A.
18. *Climate implications* – N/A directly; however, the website has proven useful in promoting the Corporation's Climate Action Strategy and the Livery's Climate Action Group, thereby assisting in promoting coordinated endeavours in this area.
19. *Security implications* – N/A.

Conclusion

20. Approval is sought for PIF funding of £20,000 per annum for a three-year period (financial years 2024-2027), so that the Corporation may continue to benefit from the website whilst a longer-term funding strategy is developed to help ensure financial stability for the ongoing operation of the website.