

Committee(s): Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee – For Information	Dated: 15 November 2023
Subject: Political Party Conference – Initial Summary Report	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	Corporate Plan Outcomes 2-10
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
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: Emily Tofield, Executive Director, Corporate Communications and External Affairs	For Discussion
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Summary

1. This report details and initial summary of the impact of the City of London Corporation programme and engagement at all the main political party conferences in September and October 2023. As with previous conference programmes, this work was led by the Corporate Affairs Team, with input from other relevant teams. Learnings from this year’s programme will be incorporated into recommendations for the 2024 programme.
2. A targeted and planned presence at the party conferences is an important opportunity for the City Corporation to build understanding of the scale, value and impact of its work across the financial and professional services (FPS) sector, across London and the wider UK.
3. Given the audiences present, conferences are significant moments for promoting the positive benefits which could be realised if recommendations in major City Corporation reports are implemented. They are also an important way of cementing and building relationships with key political figures at many levels, as well as business and industry stakeholders, and political media to ensure the City Corporation is always looking increase its reach and build reputation and profile with target audiences.
4. In a pre-election year, with a focus on the economy, the overarching 2023 conference objective was to explain and build understanding across the political spectrum of the City Corporation’s unique convening power with business and the key supporting and partnership role the City Corporation plays in delivering economic growth for the nation.

5. In addition, in 2023, the City Corporation had specific and ambitious objectives for the party conference season focused on building awareness and support across the political parties, wider industry, regulators, and amongst future policy makers for the big moves set out in the recent *Vision for Economic Growth – a roadmap to prosperity* report. As this paper (as well as ongoing evaluation) demonstrates, these objectives were achieved. Feedback overall has been very positive, and support continues to grow. As per point one, there have been wider learnings which will be fed into future conference programmes. Insights and intelligence gained as part of the events and wider meetings programme have also been invaluable to inform our future engagement programme in this area.
6. Overall, party conferences remain a significant opportunity for the City Corporation to highlight the breadth and impact of its work, build profile by participating in debates on issues affecting the sector and the country, and focus on relationship building for the City – both now and for the future. In this context, there remains a clear case for investment in the City Corporation’s party conference activity. However, the exact composition of activity and how budget is deployed should be considered for future years – with a recommendation that more of focus and necessary investment is given to Business Day at both the Conservative and Labour party conferences and higher-profile partnerships/packages should be considered (subject to funding) in line with our role as the lead convening partners for the Financial and Professional Services Sector.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the initial summary report.
- Note the recommendation that more focus is given to Business Day, in particular at Labour and Conservatives and agree to, as a minimum, Policy Chairman presence at Business Day at these conferences in 2024.
- Consider the Policy Chairman representation at SNP; and agree that possible alternatives can be considered for 2024.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London Corporation has attended the major party conferences every year since 1994, with the level of involvement and visibility (and numbers of attendees) increasing over time. Traditionally, Members of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee are invited to attend the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative party conferences, with the Policy Chairman additionally attending the Scottish National Party (SNP) conference.
2. The party conferences provide an important opportunity for City Corporation Members and officers to engage with the most relevant stakeholders across the political spectrum, to communicate our key messages and to build relationships with other influential conference attendees.

3. Led by the Corporate Affairs Team, the City Corporation increased its party conference activity for 2023, holding City Corporation private roundtables, panel open fringe events and dinners at the conferences of the Conservative and Labour conferences. The City Corporation also held a private roundtable and dinner at the Liberal Democrat conference and a panel event at the SNP conference.
4. The increased activity was due to a General Election being held before January 2025. The planned programme provided opportunities to engage policymakers across the political spectrum, helping to ensure there is cross-party understanding of what the City Corporation does, its specific and unique role in supporting the financial and professional services sector, the benefits it can bring to the nation and wider society, and the role it can play in supporting future policy development and its delivery. The team also organised and supported a series of bilaterals at each conference and worked with the media team on a full press programme.
5. A significant portion of the Corporate Affairs Team budget is used to organise the party conference activity and facilitate the political engagement of the Policy Chairman, whilst ensuring in the current model that a growing number of Members can also participate. Additionally, for the first time this year, there was increased desire from officers across a number of teams to attend beyond the dinner as has been the practice in previous years.
6. For all conferences, the Corporate Affairs Team works with teams across the organisation, including the Media Team, the Remembrancer's department and Innovation and Growth.

Party Conference 2023 Objectives

7. As well as our broader conference objectives, our main 2023 objective was to promote and influence key actors regarding the recently published City Corporation report, *Vision for Economic Growth*, as well as to strengthen relationships with key influencers and policy makers in the areas covered by the report. All the roundtables, panels and dinners provided opportunities to promote and explain the report's 'big moves', as well as the current and future benefits that a globally competitive financial and professional services sector could continue to bring to the country. Target audiences included senior politicians, policymakers, political advisers, regulators and wider business audiences.
8. Party conference engagement also provided an opportunity to continue the momentum of messaging reiteration with industry stakeholders, already mapped out in our post-launch stakeholder engagement plan. Additional objectives for the conference programme included building and strengthening relationships with politicians and their current and potential future advisers in the Government and the Shadow Cabinet. The City Corporation events gave the Policy Chairman and Members the opportunity to speak to various political stakeholders, including:

- a) Liberal Democrat Business and Treasury Spokespeople
 - b) Treasury ministers
 - c) Science, Innovation and Technology minister
 - d) Business and International Trade ministers
 - e) Shadow Treasury ministers
 - f) Science, Innovation and Technology shadow ministers
 - g) Culture Media and Sport Shadow ministers
 - h) London MPs
 - i) London-wide Local Government representatives
 - j) Prospective Parliamentary Candidates.
9. These connections and conversations are being followed-up and will be built upon over the course of the year to cement existing relationships and build new ones.
10. Working alongside the Media Team, as part of a new approach to maximising impact and achieve greater press coverage for the City Corporation during this period, proactive media plans were put in place throughout the conference season. This included proactive outreach to the media ahead of each conference and event to set up interviews, introductions and briefings; having a dedicated team at Guildhall to watch and analyse the speeches and draft up proactive responses to release in a timely manner; and, when appropriate, inviting media to our engagements. This approach delivered a significant increase in media coverage compared to previous years, including from political editors.
11. Members and officers attend selected fringe meetings allowing for intelligence gathering on the political environment and issues of importance to the City Corporation. Where relevant, this has also allowed Members to highlight City Corporation messaging in line with the comprehensive briefing provided to all attendees by the Corporate Affairs Team.

Fringe Events

1. The Corporate Affairs Team led, secured and delivered six fringe events. Four were particularly successful in hitting City Corporation objectives. We are already exploring stronger partnerships for at least one of the others and conversations got underway immediately to look at costs and options for 2024. For one of the events, we have been clear it didn't meet our standards and have asked for a refund.
2. It is of the utmost importance that the City Corporation continues to receive value for money and, to ensure the success of future events, our recommendation is that for 2024 in certain instances we look at new partners to facilitate the highest level of political engagement across all fringe events. As a matter of course, the Corporate Affairs Team reviews partners each of year. Consideration may want to be given to how the costs are balanced across the programme, with more of the budget being able to be allocated to a stronger, strategic partner.

3. It is recommended that the City Corporation continue to look at impactful packages for partnerships, including the possibility of advertising. It is worth noting that FPS trade associations were partnering with more expensive partners and taking out full page advertising in the conference editions of major national publications.
4. As the cost is likely to be increased, subject to approval, this could require a review of the number of Members that attend, or the number of passes that are purchased for Members.

Political & Industry Dinners

1. The City Corporation dinners at party conference continue to have an impact and provide an important platform for communicating our key messages and demonstrating the pivotal role the City Corporation plays in convening the sector and the City audience together.
2. The Corporate Affairs Team worked to curate and maintain a high calibre of attendees and confirm an influential, interesting external speaker for each event. It is worth noting, even with many competing events occurring on the Monday evening, requests to attend and responses were high for all party conference dinners. In particular, the Labour Party Conference dinner was oversubscribed, with a waiting list, despite us not revealing our speaker.
3. The party conference dinner and reception at Liberal Democrat conference had approximately 45 guests attending, made up of London MPs, Assembly Members, councillors and representatives from the financial and professional services sector. Lord Fox was the keynote speaker, and the guests also heard from the Policy Chairman.
4. The party conference dinner and reception at Conservative party conference had approximately 100 guests attending, again made up of London MPs, Assembly Members and councillors and representatives from the financial and professional services sector. Lord Johnson, Minister for Investment, was the keynote speaker, and the guests also heard from the Policy Chairman. Again, the number of attendees at the dinner was slightly higher than the previous year.
5. The City Corporation's dinner and reception at Labour party conference was attended by approximately 130 guests, made up of MPs, Assembly Members, London councillors, senior journalists and political editors, and representatives from the financial and professional services sector. Following a speech from the Policy Chairman, the keynote speaker was Lord Mandelson, one of the party's most well-known and significant figures. Other notable attendees included prominent media attendees, such as the BBC's Political Editor, who wrote about the speech, and leaders of several London Boroughs. The number of attendees at the dinner was significantly higher than the previous year when there were 110 attendees.

6. The dinner events all provided platforms for the promotion of City Corporation Vision for Economic Growth messaging with attendees in the room through the Policy Chairman's remarks, as well as through the press release and media activity, and the conversations at the dinner. The messaging had been shared previously with all SLT officers and all elected members.
7. Feedback from the dinners has been overwhelmingly positive, with various commentary and responses coming back to the Corporate Affairs Team, and others, about the value that attendees found in attending and the level of interest in the speakers.

Member Attendance

1. This year's Liberal Democrat party conference was held in Bournemouth from 23 – 26 September. A total of six (6) members of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee attended the conference (7 member passes purchased). In 2022, for comparison, five (5) members attended.
2. This year's Conservative party conference was held in Manchester from 1 – 4 October. A total of 12 Members of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee attended the conference (12 member passes purchased). In 2022, for comparison, ten (10) members attended.
8. This year's Labour party conference was held in Liverpool from 8 – 11 October. A total of 11 Members of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee attended the conference (13 passes purchased for members). In 2022, for comparison, nine (9) members attended.
3. Members had the opportunity to attend fringe events and receptions organised by external partners during the conference, allowing them to engage with a wide range of other key political and business figures. Feedback has been received by Members, indicating they attended a total of 25+ external fringe meetings and events. Members also reported on one-to-one conversations they had held with Ministers, MPs, Ambassadors and key business stakeholders during the conference.
4. The Policy Chairman did not have an accreditation for Business Day for the party conferences in 2023 and our recommendation is that this is prioritised for 2024.

Scottish National Party (SNP) Conference

1. This year's SNP conference was held in Aberdeen from Sunday 15 October to Tuesday 17 October 2023. The Policy Chairman attended with one Corporate Affairs Officer and the City Corporation sponsored a panel event jointly with TheCityUK.
2. Given the changing political environment, it is important to keep the City Corporation party conference programme under annual review. As per our recommendation, it is worth considering if Policy Chairman representation at

SNP is needed next year. Alternatives could include monitoring and gathering intelligence at Officer level, or signalling to a partner that their representation is required in 2024. This decision may also be impacted by upcoming political events, which the Corporate Affairs Team will continue to monitor.

Media Impact

1. Working alongside the Media Team, it was an objective for 2023 to achieve a significant uptick in our media impact and coverage.
2. The Policy Chairman shared social media posts on X (formerly known as Twitter) and LinkedIn with various politicians following City Corporation events at the conference. Many of the photos feature the published Vision for Economic Growth report, providing further wider political endorsement of the work.
3. Taking a proactive approach to media scheduling, the Policy Chairman featured in a live radio and television interview on Bloomberg TV and Radio discussing the importance of a financial services strategy to the UK economy and how our latest report Vision for Economic Growth could offer this. The Policy Chairman was also interviewed by Ian King on his flagship business show on Sky News immediately following the Chancellor's speech, which is a prime spot for business reaction. The Policy Chairman featured in the Daily Express' report at party conference following a meeting with the newspaper's Political Editor. The article covered the City Corporation's position on business performance following Brexit.
4. It is key that the City Corporation is mentioned in renowned UK political coverage to highlight its pivotal role in financial services to a political audience. Despite the news being heavily focused on other topics, following a proactive approach from the Media team, the following coverage was secured:
 - a. The City Corporation's Labour conference dinner was mentioned in Politico's London Playbook. This is the leading politics newsletter in the UK, so profile here supports the City Corporation's objective for widespread and leading coverage.
 - b. The Guardian featured an article on Lord Mandelson's speech at the City Corporation dinner. This is a good opportunity to position the City Corporation's business and economic objectives with leading political figures and supports our media prominence.
 - c. Chris Mason, the BBC Political Editor, wrote up Lord Mandelson's speech at the City Corporation dinner. Given Mason's prominence in the UK political ecosystem, featuring in his round-up was a good opportunity to reach a wider range of audiences, including political and policy influencers.
 - d. Vice Policy Chairman, Tijs Broeke, was interviewed live on radio for the BBC radio's flagship business show, Wake Up to Money. This provided a good opportunity to discuss what the City Corporation wants to see from a possible Labour Government and respond to the Shadow Chancellor's Rachel Reeves' speech.

- e. Politics Home – Political Editor, Adam Payne, also attended the Labour conference dinner and did a write up outlining how Sir Keir Starmer has reshaped the party’s relationship with businesses.

Forward Look

5. The dates for most party conferences have been released for the 2024 party conference season. These are:
 - Liberal Democrat Party Conference - 14-17 September 2024, Brighton
 - Labour Party Conference - 21-25 September 2024, Liverpool
 - Conservative Party Conference - 29th September - 2nd October 2024, Birmingham
6. The Corporate Affairs Team will further analyse the options available for 2024 and continue to monitor political developments around the General Election which will have an impact on party conference season.
7. It is recommended that the Corporate Affairs Team continue to plan as it has planned in previous years, taking the recommendations in this paper into account, whilst continuing to monitor the situation.

Key Data

None

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

8. Engaging with political stakeholders through organising events associated with the party political conferences. Events which engage with key audiences on important global, national and local government issues and to demonstrate the Corporation’s involvement in relevant debates. Targeted partnerships and political engagement would also help deliver outcomes 2 – 10 of the 2018-23 Corporate Plan.

Financial implications

9. The Corporate Affairs Team has an established budget for all party conference related activity. As of 1 November, there was £126,709 in processed expenditure on this year’s conferences, including all passes, the majority of hotel stays, event costs and partnerships. This figure is expected to fluctuate as final costs are reconciled.

Resource implications

None

Legal implications

None

Risk implications

None

Equalities implications

None

Climate implications

None

Security implications

None

Conclusion

10. In 2023, the City Corporation had ambitious objectives for the party conference season, including a specific focus on the recent *Vision for Economic Growth* report. These objectives were achieved, and feedback has overall been very positive. Out of the nine events held across the entire party conference season, seven were particularly successful.
11. The party conferences provide an important annual opportunity for the City Corporation to engage extensively with a number of senior political and business figures all in one location and in a short space of time. This has been particularly important this year given that there will be a General Election taking place in 2024.
12. The City Corporation events tend to draw significant numbers of attendees and allow for our messaging on key topics to be heard by influential policymakers, though this year saw some lack of consistency at Labour and SNP roundtables. Partners should continue to be carefully considered. Our dinners in particular form a key part of the party conference calendar for the financial and professional services sector. While there are many competing events on the Monday evenings, our attendance at the dinners continues to be strong, with a varied audience across national and local government, industry, third party organisations and regulators.
13. The political engagement completed at the party conferences will be further strengthened by the follow-up which has already commenced, and by senior Members continuing to build relationships, organised by the Corporate Affairs Team.
14. A significant portion of the Corporate Affairs Team budget is used to facilitate the activity at the party conferences, and it will continue to ensure it uses a Value for Money approach to activity, analysing the various opportunities available.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None

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