

Committee(s): Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub-Committee	Dated: 15 November 2023
Subject: Update on Think Tank Memberships 2023 - 2024	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 of Corporate Communications and External Affairs	For Decision
Report author: Kristy Sandino, Assistant Director, Corporate Affairs	

Summary

As part of the City of London Corporation's wider corporate affairs engagement programme, the Corporate Affairs Team leads on driving forward the strategic relationships the City Corporation holds with think tanks on an annual basis, including funding, coordination and review of the relationships.

The City Corporation has corporate membership of eight think tanks in 2023-2024. In addition, we also work with a number of others across the political and policy spectrum on a variety of projects and events in accordance with our strategic priorities.

A wider review of the City Corporation external strategic partnerships is needed and a broader review of our partnerships, as they related to Communications and Corporate Affairs is recommended. As this is undertaken, the Corporate Affairs Team will continue to ensure that the City Corporation's engagement with think tanks is organised in a targeted way in order to ensure that we continue to work with the most influential organisations with a mind to the necessary balance required.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the existing partnerships and engagement with think tanks.
- Agree to wider review of the City Corporation partnerships in relations to Communications and Corporate Affairs, with a view to taking a further paper to the Subcommittee and Policy and Resources in early 2024.

Main Report

Background

1. As part of the City of London Corporation's wider engagement programme, the Corporate Affairs Team leads on the strategic relationships the City Corporation holds with assorted think tanks.
2. The City Corporation's engagement with think tanks is beneficial to the organisation for a variety of reasons. Think tanks play a key role in making and influencing global, regional and national policy. Engaging with think tanks also provides key opportunities for Members and Officers to engage in different discussions with influential stakeholders, so it remains pivotal for the organisation to engage with them on a regular basis.
3. Engagement is centred on mapping the City's interests and those of the think tanks, as well as a think tanks level of influence, to identify opportunities for shaping policymaking and strategic collaboration. The Corporate Affairs Team aims to ensure that a political balance is maintained across the organisations we engage with each year. It has been noted by the Subcommittee that there is a need to engage with a broader array of think tanks across the political spectrum and the Corporate Affairs Team has been aiming to do so across the year.
4. For the purpose of this report, the term "think tank" denotes academic think tanks, self-styled research and policy institutes and charities with a key policy function. These organisations traditionally seek to play a key role in making and influencing global, regional and national policy.
5. Outside of membership, the City Corporation also benefits from working with think tanks on specific areas throughout the year, particularly projects and events in accordance with our priorities, and including events held at the party conferences. This gives flexibility and allows us to work across the political spectrum, with think tanks who have the ear of the government or opposition.
6. The agreed approach that has been adopted regarding the City Corporation's work and relationships with think tanks is to:
 - a. Ensure we are working with the most influential think tanks at a given time;
 - b. Be agile and open-minded by considering unsolicited ideas;
 - c. Ensure we work with a broad political and thematic balance of think tanks;
 - d. Insist on excellence as a collaborative delivery partner and in the quality of their product; and
 - e. Ensure that we are getting the best value for money.

Current Position

7. The City Corporation is currently a corporate member of eight think tanks:

- a. Chatham House – including membership of one of their research programmes
 - b. Local Government Information Unit (LGiU)
 - c. New Financial – including our sponsorship of the Women in Finance Charter
 - d. New Local (formerly New Local Government Network)
 - e. Onward
 - f. Whitehall and Industry Group (WIG)
 - g. International Business and Diplomatic Exchange.
8. Our corporate memberships afford the City Corporation different opportunities, dependent on the organisation. Details are provided below.
- a. Chatham House's stated mission is to help governments and societies build a sustainably secure, prosperous and just world. Since March 2023, Members and Officers have engaged on 17 events and sessions, ranging from a session on UK/China relations to Global AI governance to a Sustainability conference. Our membership also affords us the opportunity for Member Briefings on specific topics, with one being held on Ukraine in March 2023.
 - b. The Local Government Intelligence Unit (LGIU) is a not-for-profit, non-partisan membership organisation. It exists for local government or anyone with an interest in local democracy and finding local solutions to global challenges. Earlier this year, the Corporate Affairs Team contacted 23 City Corporation colleagues who are known to use the services provided by LGIU. On the whole, responses as to the usefulness of the service were positive and no one responded with overt criticism of the service or its overall usefulness. Officers indicated that LGIU policy briefings were helpful for background knowledge on policy issues related to their roles.
 - c. New Financial is a think tank launched in 2014 that believes capital markets can and should be a force for economic and social good. Our membership allows Member and Officer attendance at various events and policy roundtables throughout the course of the year. This also included New Financial organising and holding a roundtable on policy development associated with the Vision for Economic Growth report, as well as chairing the launch of event.
 - d. New Local is an independent think tank and network with a specific focus on transforming public services and unlocking community power. The membership offer includes events, session, briefings, tools and reports. The Chief Strategy Officer is a mentor with the Next Gen Academy and officers have attended sessions over the course of the year on various topics. One of the benefits of the membership is for a more substantive workshop for a team or leadership team once a year as New Local can design and lead a workshop on a topic – this can be on anything from design skills, how to be more community led as an organisation. Officers are in discussion about the best use of this sessions and Members are encouraged to feed in views.
 - e. Onward is a centre-right think tank with a stated mission to develop bold and practical ideas to boost economic opportunity, build national

resilience, and strengthen communities across all parts of the UK. The City Corporation holds a Business Forum membership, which allows us access to their reports and events held across the year. These events range from roundtables with senior political stakeholders to report launches and private dinners. The Forum membership also allows for a discount on Onward's party conference pricing.

- f. Whitehall and Industry Group (WIG) aims to build understanding and co-operation between government, business and the voluntary sector. Our membership gives us access to an assortment of events with government and private sector stakeholders. Since April 2023, officers have engaged with 25 events, such as lunchtime briefings with Director Generals in government and private roundtables with policy officials.
 - g. International Business and Diplomatic Exchange (IBDE) is a London-based not-for-profit, non-political membership organisation promoting international trade and investment flows in various sectors, as well as championing economic, commercial and trade diplomacy. Members and Officers have attended 35 IBDE events and groups over the course of the year such as CEO and Business briefings. The City Corporation also has representation on three IBDE Advisory Groups, including on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion and Economic and Commercial Diplomacy.
9. Members of the Subcommittee have noted that there is a desire to engage and ensure we maintain corporate memberships across the political spectrum. Progressive Britain, a left-wing think tank, created a Corporate Forum, which the City Corporation indicated an interest in joining in mid-2023. Due to their delivery of our roundtable at the 2023 Labour Party Conference not being up to the calibre expected of a partner organisation, the Corporate Affairs Team is reviewing the membership and is now looking at other possible options for both membership or collaboration on an event.
10. We also have a number of ongoing and recent projects with other think tanks across the political spectrum. Partnering on research is a pivotal way that we influence policy making and ensure that our work, such as *Vision for Economic Growth*, has a wider reach.
- a. As one of the main London-focused think tanks, the City Corporation has supported Centre for London through support for their annual conference, which affords us the opportunity to deliver key messages to a London-wide audience. The City Corporation is also supporting a piece of research on *Rebooting London's Economy*. This piece of work will look at London's productivity and how to deliver inclusive and sustainable growth. It will investigate potential solutions on how to make London a competitive place to do business, how to attract workers and develop their skills and how to reform tax and investment to drive growth.
 - b. Sustainable finance is a key strategic priority for the City Corporation. Alongside the Investment Association, the City Corporation is partnering on a report from GFI and IPPR which seeks to:
 - i. Demonstrate what market-shaping in practice can look like in one of the UK's most influential economic sectors.

- ii. Support development of capability within the state to enable efficient partnerships with the private sector, to mobilise the level of capital required to meet UK environmental targets.
 - iii. Develop progressive policies that can accelerate the decarbonisation of financed emissions at home and abroad.
 - c. This report is in consultation and will be released in Spring 2024.
- 11. As well as our membership of the influential centre-right think tank Onward, we also contributed to their annual dinner which was held in Guildhall in July. This event saw a significant number of key policymakers travel into the Square Mile to hear remarks from the Deputy Policy Chairman, alongside the Chancellor. This was a beneficial moment to share our messaging on Vision for Economic Growth.
- 12. We work with the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) who are known to be an influential think tank for the current government. Their annual Margaret Thatcher Conference has been held at the Guildhall in recent years, and was again held on 12 June 2023 at Guildhall with the Chancellor and many other senior Ministers in attendance. This conference will not take place in 2024, and the City Corporation plan to work with CPS on a 50th anniversary event in 2024 that has confirmed senior Minister participation. We also work with them on one off projects in line with the City Corporation's priorities such as our engagement at Party Conference.
- 13. Relations between the UK and EU remain an important area for the City Corporation given the level of economic output for the UK driven by trading relations with the EU. As we have done in previous years, we have partnered with the European Policy Forum's (EPF) Cumberland Lodge Financial Services Summit. Guests at the Summit will include representatives from the financial services sector in the UK and Europe and the City Corporation will have a representative speak on the session on the Major Regulatory Challenges Confronting Financial Services.
- 14. The City Corporation keeps an open dialogue with various organisations where relevant to our policy interests, such as Strand Group of King's College London, IPPR, Institute for Government, Policy Exchange, Tony Blair Institute, amongst many others.
- 15. In addition to these projects, the Corporate Affairs Team recently organised the regular programme for this autumn's party conferences, which involved arranging events with key think tanks such as Centre for Policy Studies, Onward, Progressive Britain, Social Market Foundation and IPPR.

Forward Look Proposals

- 16. The City Corporation seeks to engage with a politically balanced range of think tanks in a number of key and relevant policy areas. The direction and degree of our engagement is shaped by a number of factors, including amongst others:

a particular think tank's public profile and the influence it has on government, major political parties and public policy debates.

17. The Corporate Affairs Team will ensure the City Corporation works with the most influential think tanks according to our strategic priorities, both through membership and through the flexibility of specific events and projects. We will also ensure that a balance is maintained across the political spectrum.
18. With the recent arrival of a new Executive Director of Corporate Communications and External Affairs and the changing dynamic nature of politics, it is proposed that a wider review of our existing partnerships with think tanks is undertaken with a view to updating the Subcommittee in early 2024.

Key Data

None

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

19. Proactive engagement and focused relationship-building with think tanks of relevance to the City Corporation's priorities will enhance our visibility, enable us to contribute effectively to the policy debate and contribute positively to our political engagement programme.
20. Continuing the engagement with think tanks will provide the City Corporation with opportunities to engage with government on key issues of concern, by facilitating events, meetings and occasions for policy discussion. It will also enable the City Corporation to participate in policy debates.
21. This work would also help deliver outcomes 2 – 10 of the 2018-23 Corporate Plan.

Financial implications

22. The Corporate Affairs Team has an established budget for all engagement related activity. Any sponsorship of ad-hoc policy projects is currently funded via the Policy Initiatives Fund according to decisions of the Policy and Resources Committee.

Resource implications

None

Legal implications

None

Risk implications

None

Equalities implications

None

Climate implications

None

Security implications

None

Conclusion

23. Members are asked to note the work of the Corporate Affairs Team in relation to the memberships of and engagement with think tanks across the political spectrum.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None

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