

Committee(s): Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee – For Decision	Dated: 5 February 2025
Subject: Political Party Conferences 2024/2025	Public report: For Decision
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes • provides business enabling functions. 	Dynamic Economic Growth
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	£0
What is the source of Funding?	Not applicable
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	No
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Summary

This report details a summary of the City of London Corporation programme and engagement at all the main political party conferences in 2024 and proposes plans for 2025. This programme of work was led by the Corporate Affairs Team, with input from the Remembrancer and Innovation and Growth teams.

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.

Given the number of key stakeholders present at conferences, they provide significant opportunities for promoting our strategic priorities as an organisation, including policy recommendations in major City Corporation reports. 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. This ensures the City Corporation is increasing its reach, maintaining and building its reputation and profile with target audiences.

The overarching 2024 conference objective was to build on the success of previous years in developing 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.

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.

At the November 2024 meeting of Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub-committee, Members held a discussion on several issues relating to the 2025 Party Conference programme, including: Member and officer delegation size, the format of events, business day passes, and costs associated with the overall conference programme. Officers were asked to come back to the Sub-committee with further recommendations for consideration.

It was agreed that the number of Business Day passes could be reduced from two passes to one pass at each of the conferences for the Policy Chairman. It was also agreed that the number and format of events at each conference could be bespoke to each conference, with Members indicating they felt that the party of Government could warrant a greater number of events in the programme, and Members in attendance. Officers were asked to return to the Sub-committee with further recommendations, outlined below.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the initial summary of 2024 activity.
- Approve the following proposals for 2025 party conference programme:
 - One fringe event and an additional event (reception) at Liberal Democrat Conference
 - One fringe event and an additional event (dinner) at the Conservative Party Conference (HM Official Opposition)
 - Two fringe events and an additional event (dinner) at Labour Party Conference (Party of Government)
 - Officer monitoring any party conference where the party has more than 10 MPs.
 - Member attendance at party conference will be considered for any party with more than 20 MPs.
- To approve a change to the Member and officer delegation travelling to party conferences, whereby:
 - The Policy Chairman and four (4) additional Members selected through an Expression of Interest process for the parties in Opposition.

Selected Members will be eligible for a two-day commercial guest party conference pass.

- No change to the Member delegation size for the Party in Government's conference. All Members of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee are invited to attend as City Corporation representatives and are eligible for a two-day commercial guest party conference pass.
- A business case is provided to the Policy Chairman and the Chair of Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee for proposed officer attendance at conference.
- Approve that one (1) Business Day pass is secured for the Policy Chairman use at each conference in 2025.
- Approve that Members attending party conference should travel second class on train journeys less than 2 hours.

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 in previous years. It was agreed at the November 2023 Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee that the Policy Chairman would not attend the 2024.
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 by adding an additional fringe event at Labour Party Conference, who were then in Opposition, holding City Corporation private roundtables, panel open fringe events and dinners at the conferences of the Conservative and Labour conferences, as well as a private roundtable and dinner at the Liberal Democrat dinner. This approach was continued in 2024 as the programme had been planned prior to the General Election being called.
4. 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.
5. In addition to the cost of the additional Business Day tickets, costs across the conference have gone up year on year. Additional funding provided by Policy & Resources enabled us to deliver our 2024 programme; however cost saving measures are necessary as the Corporate Affairs Team Budget is a set amount and has not been adjusted for inflation in recent years.

Current Position

Fringe Events

6. The Corporate Affairs Team led, secured and delivered five fringe events across the conferences. All were felt to be successful in hitting City Corporation objectives.
 - a. Roundtable at Liberal Democrat party conference titled "*How can we fund the transition to Net Zero?*" with Social Market Foundation. The politician in attendance was Wera Hobhouse MP.
 - b. A roundtable at Labour party conference titled "*How can financial and professional services create economic growth throughout the UK?*" with Labour Together. The politician in attendance was James Murray MP, a Treasury Minister.
 - c. An open fringe panel at Labour party conference titled "*Driving inclusive, green prosperity: A New Trade Strategy for the UK*" with IPPR. The politician in attendance was Liam Byrne MP, new Chair of the Business and Trade Select Committee.
 - d. A roundtable at Conservative party conference titled "*Growing professional and financial services around the UK: what's next?*" with Onward. The politician in attendance was Oliver Dowden MP.
 - e. An open fringe panel at Conservative party conference titled "*The UK's place in the World*" with the Centre for Policy Studies. The politician in attendance was Gareth Davies MP.
7. While the Corporate Affairs Team aims to secure partnership deals tied to other activity across the year where possible, the cost of partnerships with think tanks, particularly where fringes take place within the secure zone, has significantly increased. To ensure a high calibre of politician attendance, it was decided to only hold events in the secure zone at Labour Conference this year. As the cost the party charges for space within the secure zone has also increased, it means that in some instances, the costs of City Corporation fringe events doubled between 2022 and 2024.
8. Our choice of partnerships secured us quality political engagement despite the difficulty of securing MPs generally across party conferences this year. The Corporate Affairs Team was able to cover the additional costs associated due to the additional funding secured for enhanced political engagement; however without this funding, partnering with certain think tanks, such as Labour Together, would have been outside of our annual budget envelope.
9. It is of the utmost importance that the City Corporation party conference presence continue to deliver value for money and ensure the success of future events. Given the general election outcome and the possibility of this Government being in place for four years, it is recommended that the City Corporation proceed with the following programme for 2025:
 - a. One fringe event and an additional event (reception) at Liberal Democrat Conference

- b. One fringe event and an additional event (dinner) at the Conservative Party Conference (HM Official Opposition)
 - c. Two fringe events and an additional event (dinner) at Labour Party Conference
 - d. Officer monitoring of Scottish National Party Conference and any political party with more than 10 MPs.
 - e. Member attendance will be considered for any party with more than 20 MPs.
 - f. This proposed programme represents one less event than occurred in the 2024 programme, decreasing our engagement at Conservative Party Conference. This was the approach in the past, will afford us some cost savings, and can be reviewed again in the year preceding a general election, or dependent on political environment.
10. There are additional political parties across the UK with some taking a decision to hold conferences. It is recommended that Officers monitor other party conferences with 10 MPs or more that may take place in 2025.

Political & Industry Dinners

11. The City Corporation dinners at party conference continue to 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.
12. The Corporate Affairs Team worked with Members, Innovation and Growth and other departments to curate and maintain a high calibre of attendees and confirm an influential, interesting external speaker for each event.
13. The Corporate Affairs Team usually aims to have 50 attendees at Liberal Democrat Party Conference dinner, and 100 at each Labour and Conservative. This year, due to extremely high demand at Labour, this was increased to 130 (with an additional waiting list). There was a total of approximately 80 guests at the City Corporation dinner at Conservative Party Conference.
14. The City Corporation's dinner at Liberal Democrat party conference was attended by approximately 45 people. The guest speaker was Sarah Olney MP, who was the current Treasury, Business and Industrial Strategy spokesperson.
15. The City Corporation's dinner at Labour party conference was attended by approximately 130 guests made up of MPs, Assembly Members, London councillors, senior journalists and political editors, and business representatives. Following a speech from the Policy Chairman, the keynote speaker was Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Darren Jones MP. The calibre of guests this year at Labour Conference was extremely high, particularly as the Party did not host a Business Dinner on the same evening.
16. The City Corporation's dinner at Conservative party conference was attended by approximately 80 guests. Following a speech from the Policy Chairman, the keynote speaker former MP Robert Buckland KC. Despite the Conservative Party holding a Business Dinner on the Monday night, in direct competition with our

dinner, and overall lower attendance at Conservative Party Conference, there was still strong representation at the City Corporation dinner.

17. To confirm in-demand venues and hotels, the Corporate Affairs Team typically selects and confirms the venues and hotel rooms by the end of the calendar year the year prior to conference (i.e. December 2024 for 2025 conference season).
18. In 2024, for the first time, the Corporate Affairs team utilised the CRM system that is based in Innovation and Growth to introduce efficiencies. This was a helpful tool in deploying invitations and monitoring uptake. It is noted that Innovation and Growth Officers lent their time and support to assist the Corporate Affairs Team, demonstrating successful collaboration across the two teams.
19. There are several learnings to be factored into the creation of guestlists for next year, such as consulting with Members of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub-committee on the guestlist ahead of deploying invitations.
20. Feedback from the dinners has been overwhelmingly positive, with various commentary and responses from external stakeholders about the value that attendees found in attending and the calibre of speaker.
21. Following discussion at the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee in November 2024, the Corporate Affairs team has proposed for 2025 that the evening event at Liberal Democrat Party Conference is a networking reception.
22. Following a successful dinner at Labour Party conference in 2024, and as the Party of Government, the Corporate Affairs team proposes that the evening event remains a dinner, with the format of the event being maximised for networking opportunities.
23. Following a successful dinner at Conservative Party conference in 2024, and as HM's Official opposition, the Corporate Affairs team proposes that the evening event remains a dinner, with the format of the event being maximised for networking opportunities.

Media Impact

24. Working closely with the Media Team, it was an objective for 2024 to achieve strong media impact and coverage.
25. 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.
26. Taking a proactive approach to media scheduling, the Policy Chairman featured in a live radio and television interview on Bloomberg TV and Radio and CNBC. He was also quoted in the Independent, The Guardian, PR Week, Swissinfo and Investing.com.

Member and Officer Attendance

27. As agreed by the then-PRED Sub Committee in 2017, all Members of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee have been invited to attend party conferences as City Corporation representatives and are therefore eligible for a two-day commercial guest party conference pass, with the cost being met from the party conference budget.
28. The intention of Member attendance is for them to represent the City Corporation, and use their experience, connections and knowledge, across the range of conference events, not only at the City Corporation's hosted events. Members play a key role as representatives, speakers and hosts at the Corporation's party conference activities.
29. In light of inflation, think tank partnership costs, hotel costs and conferences pass costs have all increased. The Corporate Affairs Team communicated during the City's budget process that it expected overall costs to rise 10 – 20 per cent due to inflation and the final budget confirmed this estimate.
30. The City Corporation Member delegation has steadily increased in size in recent years and is traditionally larger in size than other stakeholder groups at conference. The final delegation numbers are listed below for 2024.
 - a) This year's Liberal Democrat party conference was held in Brighton from 15th – 17th September. A total of five (5) Members of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee attended the conference (6 Member passes purchased).
 - b) This year's Labour party conference was held in Liverpool from 22nd – 25th September. A total of 10 Members of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee attended the conference.
 - c) This year's Conservative party conference was held in Birmingham from 29th September – 2nd October. A total of 6 Members of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee attended the conference (8 member passes purchased).
31. Following the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub-committee in November 2024, Members indicated that the party of Government could be treated differently to the opposition parties. Therefore, officers propose that an Expression of Interest approach is taken for all party conferences besides the Party of Government. This would entail the below Member Delegation and process:
 - a) Chairman and four (4) additional Members selected through an Expression of Interest process.
 - i. Those interested in attending would be asked to provide a short Expression of Interest (maximum 500 words) demonstrating suitability for attendance at each party conference.
 - ii. The proposed applications process would be as follows:
 1. The opportunity to join the delegation will be advertised to the Communications and Corporate Affairs Committee.
 2. Those wishing to apply are asked to submit expressions of interest, setting out relevant experience / skills against the relevant criteria.

3. Applications are reviewed by an assessment panel (comprised of the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Vice Chairs and Chairman of Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub-committee) supported with advice from Officers.
 4. Policy Leadership and the Chairman of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub-committee take a final decision with an assessment of the process undertaken presented back to Committee at the next Sub-committee meeting.
32. For the party in government, it is proposed that all Members of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee are invited to attend. This is to ensure that there is a Member host on each table, and to ensure maximised engagement opportunities.
33. As is the current process, it is suggested that all Members of Policy & Resources Committee are invited to attend the dinners at each party conference, at their own cost, should they be at Conference. Select senior officers will also be invited to attend the dinners at party conference.
34. Last year, Business Day passes were purchased for the Policy Chairman and a senior Officer for the Liberal Democrat Party Conference, Labour Party Conference and the Conservative Party Conference. It is recommended that one (1) pass is secured for the Policy Chairman use at each conference in 2025.
35. Officer attendance is necessary to support the delivery of the overall party conference programme, as well as to support the Policy Chairman. Last year, for the first time, additional teams beyond the Corporate Affairs team and Remembrancers requested their officers were accredited. The Corporate Affairs Team will undertake a review with the aim to decrease pass costs for Officers for 2025. We will provide a business case outlining the proposal for officer attendance for conference season, outlining what their role is, to be presented to the Policy Chairman and Chair of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub Committee. In previous years, the majority of officers in attendance have also had a conference pass, this will also be reviewed with only officers that absolutely require a pass securing one.
36. A measurement tool to ensure value for money will be developed for the 2025/2026 conference season.
37. In an effort to manage costs, it is proposed that Members should book second-class travel on train journeys shorter than two hours.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

38. Strategic implications – Engaging with political stakeholders, organising events associated with the party political conferences and working with think tanks and other third-party organisations to produce events and associated policy reports provides an opportunity for the City Corporation to engage with key audiences on important global, national and local government issues and to demonstrate the City Corporation's involvement in relevant debates. Sponsorship and political engagement would also help deliver the six outcomes of the new Corporate Plan.

39. Financial implications - The Corporate Affairs Team has an established budget for party conference and 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

40. The purpose of the City Corporation's activities at party conferences is to deliver a programme of strategic engagement on issues of importance to the organisation with relevant politicians, policymakers and business figures and the political media. City Corporation party conference activity is a significant part of the Policy Chairman's political engagement and City Corporation advocacy and provides an excellent opportunity for Members and officers to meet many political contacts in one place. It also is a way for politicians and key stakeholders to build an understanding of the City Corporation and our strategic priorities. In 2024, with the potential for a high influx of new MPs, this awareness raising exercise is critical.

41. Members are asked to note the assessment of the City Corporation's involvement at the 2024 party conferences.

42. Members are asked to make a decision on proposals for 2025 party conference programme and agree the approach to size of Member delegation to recommend to Policy and Resources.

Appendices

None

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