

Committee: Public Relations and Economic Development Sub-Committee	Date: 6 November 2014
Subject: City of London Corporation: Party Conference Activities	Public
Report of: Director of Public Relations	For decision

Summary

Every autumn the UK political parties hold annual conferences to debate issues, set out policy priorities, and engage with key stakeholders and party activists. The 2014 party conferences provided the City Corporation with an opportunity to engage with the main political parties by promoting its work among a wide range of stakeholders; developing and strengthening the political contacts programme with both local and national politicians; and enhancing internal understanding of the likely policy evolution of the different parties. The City Corporation hosted a high-quality programme of activities at the conferences of the three main parties, including fringe events and policy-focused dinners. Planning has now begun for the 2015 party conferences. In the light of Members' feedback, a number of operational issues are being reviewed by the PR Office to improve the City Corporation's activities in 2015. In particular, it is to be decided whether the City Corporation should continue to host fringe events at the conferences.

Recommendation

The Sub-Committee is recommended to:

- (i) note the information about the City Corporation's activities in 2014;
- (ii) agree to the general approach set out for the delivery of the City Corporation's activities in 2015; and
- (iii) decide whether fringe event meetings should be included as part of the City Corporation's activities at the 2015 party conferences and throughout the next Parliament.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London Corporation hosts events at the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative Party conferences every year. This traditionally entails a public fringe event early on the Monday evening, and then a private dinner later on the same evening. These events provide the City Corporation with the opportunity to engage with a wide range of stakeholders.
2. The fringe events are typically attended by around 50-100 people, ranging from policy and industry experts, councillors, MPs and Party members, and have been held on a wide range of topics, including the economy, international affairs, and employment and skills. The panellists are typically

comprised of leading journalists, high-profile MPs, and figures from the think tank and business worlds.

3. The dinners take the form of private discussions, sometimes with a theme with a guest speaker. Attendees include representatives from London Boroughs, MPs, MEPs, government and opposition front benches, London Assembly Members and senior figures from think tanks.

Labour Party Conference – Manchester – 22 September

4. The fringe meeting at Labour conference was organised in conjunction with the New Local Government Network (NLGN), a think tank which focuses primarily on local government issues; it was held in Manchester Town Hall. The fringe's theme was how local government and businesses can work together at a local level to deliver skills.

Title: Economies of skill – the local role in the skills debate
Chair: Emma Burnell (NLGN)
Panellists: Cllr Sue Murphy (Deputy Leader, Manchester City Council)
Kevin Rowan (Head of Organisational Services, TUC)
Sir Robin Wales (Mayor of Newham)
Stephen Timms MP (Shadow Employment Minister)
Mark Boleat (Policy Chairman, City of London Corporation)

Despite producing a thoughtful discussion on devolution, training and employability, the fringe was attended by only 25-30 people. This can be explained in part by the fact that NLGN, which was a good partner, helped to organise the event at short notice, owing to a previous partner think tank's withdrawal at a late stage. Moreover, attendance was affected by the fringe clashing with Labour's main business reception.

5. The dinner at Labour conference – held in Manchester Art Gallery – was organised in partnership with the Social Market Foundation (SMF); it featured as speakers a number of potential candidates for the Labour nomination for Mayor of London. While the dinner venue's acoustics were not particularly good, nor suited to plenary discussion (which was further exasperated by the unilateral decision of the chair to initiate an impromptu question and answer session), the food and overall arrangements for the dinner were successful. Key guests attending the dinner included:

- Diane Abbott MP (MP for Hackney North & Stoke Newington)
- Lord Adonis (Shadow Infrastructure Minister)
- Lord Harris of Haringey (Chair of Police APG)
- Sir Peter Hendy (Transport for London Commissioner)
- Cllr Peter John (Leader of London Borough of Southwark)
- Sadiq Khan MP (Shadow Minister for London)
- Claire Kober (Deputy Chair of London Councils)
- David Lammy (MP for Tottenham)
- Joanne McCartney (Chair of London Assembly Police & Crime Committee)

- Cllr Tony Newton (Leader of London Borough of Croydon)
- Cllr Lib Peck (Leader of London Borough of Lambeth)
- Jules Pipe (Chair of London Councils)
- Professor Tony Travers (Director of LSE London)
- Cllr Richard Watts (Leader of London Borough of Islington)

Conservative Party Conference – Birmingham – 29 September

6. The fringe meeting at Conservative conference was organised in conjunction with the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA); it was held in the Jury's Inn on Broad Street. The theme was London's competitiveness.

Title: Keeping London competitive – what needs to be done?
 Chair: Mark Littlewood (Director General, IEA)
 Panellists: David Gauke MP (Financial Secretary to the Treasury)
 Dr Gerard Lyons (Chief Economic Adviser to the Mayor of London)
 Lord Flight (Director of Metrobank)
 Mark Boleat (Policy Chairman, City of London Corporation)

The fringe was attended by almost 100 people and produced a wide-ranging discussion including housing, tax, regulation and infrastructure. The Jury's Inn proved a satisfactory venue for the fringe and the IEA a good partner organisation.

7. The dinner at Conservative conference was held in Birmingham Town Hall; it was attended by a wide range of guests from the various strata of Conservative politics. Given the size of the venue, the number of attendees was significantly greater than in previous years. While the food and dinner arrangements proved to be a success and generated a great deal of good will among attendees (witnessed by the number of subsequent favourable communications received by the PR Office), the size of the event was in hindsight too large. Key guests attending the dinner included:

- Harriet Baldwin MP (PPS to Minister for Employment)
- Cllr Victoria Borwick AM (Deputy Mayor of London)
- James Cleverly AM (Chairman of LFEPA)
- Cllr Richard Cornelius (Leader of London Borough of Barnet)
- Mark Field MP (MP for Cities of London & Westminster)
- Lord Flight (Member of House of Lord EU Select Committee)
- Dominic Grieve MP (MP for Beaconsfield)
- Bernard Jenkin MP (Chairman of Public Administration Select Committee)
- Ramsey Jones (Special Adviser to the Prime Minister)
- Sir Edward Lister (Chief of Staff to the Mayor of London)
- Dr Gerard Lyons (Chief Economic Adviser to the Mayor of London)
- Bob Neill MP (Conservative Party Vice Chairman for Local Government)

- Matthew Pencharz (Senior Adviser to the Mayor of London on Environment & Energy)
- Cllr Philippa Roe (Leader of the City of Westminster)
- Alok Sharma MP (Conservative Party Vice Chairman for BME communities)
- Andrew Tyrie MP (Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee)
- Baroness Verma (Energy & Climate Change Minister)
- Veronica Wadley (Senior Adviser to Mayor of London on volunteering & charities)
- Sheridan Westlake (Special Adviser to Eric Pickles)

Liberal Democrat Conference – Glasgow – 6 October

8. The fringe event at Liberal Democrat conference was organised in partnership with CentreForum and took place in the SECC's Boisdale Room. The theme was business policy.

Title: A manifesto for business – what should it include?
 Chair: Tom Papworth (Associate Director, CentreForum)
 Panellists: Duncan Hames MP (PPS to the Deputy Prime Minister and Vice Chair of the Liberal Democrat's Manifesto Group)
 Vicky Pryce (former chief economist, Department for Business, Innovation & Skills)
 Julia Goldsworthy (former Special Adviser to Danny Alexander MP)
 Mark Boleat (Policy Chairman, City of London Corporation)

The fringe was attended by around 80 people and produced a good discussion on infrastructure, immigration, tax and European integration. The SECC was an adequate venue (there are limited alternatives) and CentreForum again proved to be a good partner organisation.

9. The dinner at Liberal Democrat conference was held at the Hotel du Vin Glasgow, which worked well as a venue; it featured a discussion focussed on education, skills, Crossrail 2, housing and Europe. Key guests attending the dinner included:
- Cllr Ruth Dombey (Leader of London Borough of Sutton)
 - Michele Dix (Managing Director of Planning, TfL)
 - Baroness Falkner (Lords Spokesman for Foreign Affairs)
 - Baroness Ludford
 - Maajid Nawaz (PPC for Hampstead & Kilburn)
 - Baroness Northover (Government Spokesperson for Culture, Media & Sport and International Development)
 - Lord Paddick
 - Caroline Pidgeon AM (Leader of London Assembly Liberal Democrat Group)
 - Terry Stacy (Political Adviser to the Liberal Democrat Group on London Councils)
 - Mike Tuffrey (Chair of the London Liberal Democrats)

- Lord Wallace (Government Whip)

Budgets

10. The total cost of the City Corporation's activities at the three party conferences in 2014 was £55,833.00. This compares with approximately £46,000 in 2013; the increase in costs in 2014 is due to the significant increase in the size of and venue hire for the Labour and Conservative dinners. The breakdown of expenditure is as follows:

- Fringe events: £15,904
- Dinners: £16,129
- Accommodation: £9,600
- Conference Passes: £9,100
- Travel: £5,100

Role of Fringe Events in Future City Corporation Activities

11. Feedback from Members who attended one or more conferences suggests that there are doubts about the value-for-money and usefulness of the City Corporation sponsoring and/or hosting fringe meetings at the party conferences in 2015 and subsequently throughout the next Parliament.
12. There are essentially three arguments in favour of fringe meetings: first, they give a public face to the City Corporation's presence at the conferences; second, they provide a forum for debate about City issues which could be filled by rival bodies if the City Corporation were not so doing; and, third they promote the City Corporation's messages on key issues to the respective parties. These arguments are countered by the fact that publicity for City Corporation fringe events tends to be minimal amongst the hundreds of meetings in the listings and the question of whether fringe events are, in fact, the most effective way of promulgating messages to key audiences (even if the meeting is well-attended, which over the years they usually have been).
13. Members are asked to decide whether fringe event meetings should be included as part of the City Corporation's activities at the 2015 party conferences and throughout the next Parliament. Three possible courses of action are available to the City Corporation at each party conference:
- a) Cancel fringe meetings altogether and seek to engage with key audiences primarily through the City Corporation dinner and related activities of the Policy Chairman; or
 - b) Cancel fringe meetings and instead organise a roundtable discussion, for example over a working lunch, on a relevant theme (with similar key speakers as hitherto at the fringes); or
 - c) Continue with the existing model of fringe meetings as part of the existing envelope of City Corporation activities, while reviewing where necessary the theme(s) of fringe meeting to increase attendance.

Framework for Party Conference Activities in 2015

14. Preparations are already well underway for the 2015 party conference seasons with plans for the City Corporation's activities already put in place (subject to the decision of your Sub-Committee on paragraph 13). These party conferences will be particularly important given they will be the first conferences after the 2015 General Election and may include the election of new party leaderships. The Liberal Democrat conference is being held in Bournemouth. The current plan is to hold the City Corporation's events in the Royal Bath Hotel. The Labour Party is holding its conference in Brighton. The current plan is to use the Old Ship Hotel for a fringe meeting and the Hotel du Vin for the dinner. The Conservative Party is holding its conference in Manchester. The current plan is to use Manchester Town Hall for the fringe meeting and Manchester Art Gallery for the dinner.
15. It is proposed to review the number of attendees at City Corporation dinners at all three conferences; the objective of this review will be to facilitate the best possible policy discussion and political contact for Members, especially further to engage with the City Corporation's key audiences of London politicians, policymakers, opinion formers and business leaders. In particular, it is also proposed that the City Corporation will no longer seek to co-organise a dinner with a think-tank at Labour Party conference; instead, as with the Liberal Democrat and Conservative conferences, the PR Office will organise this and issue invitations. In addition, it is proposed, as part of the Policy Chairman's political contact programme, to organise a small, high-level roundtable dinner on the Sunday night at each party conference which a key stakeholder from the respective party would be invited to attend.
16. Members play a pivotal role as representatives and hosts at the City Corporation's party conference activities, though this is balanced by the continuing desire that expenditure on activities is as cost-effective as possible. In 2014 attendance was open to all Members of the PR-ED Sub-Committee, while, as in previous years, other Members attending party conferences in other capacities were also welcome to attend the dinners. Considerable effort continues to be made to minimise the number of officers attending the party conferences on behalf of the City Corporation. At present, three/four officers from the PR Office attend each of the party conferences; any reduction in the number of officers attending would have a significant impact on the City Corporation's ability to deliver its programme of activities. In addition, one officer from the Remembrancer's Office attends in order to monitor the conferences, including fringe events. The Town Clerk and Remembrancer typically attend at least two of the conferences.
17. In response to concerns about the cost of Members' travel, it is proposed to change the way in which such travel is booked. In recent times the price differential between booking advance tickets at a fixed time and an open ticket has widened considerably. The PR Office always aims to ask if individual Members can specify a time: sometimes they can, often they cannot, at least initially, when cheapest tickets with a fixed time are still available. It is

recommended that the City Corporation will only pay for an advanced (1st class) ticket, with a fixed time, and that individual Members book their own travel on this basis and reclaim the cost through an expenses claim. In both instances, any available discount travel cards should be used to further reduce costs. If, at the last minute, the timings have to change for a justifiable reason, then the City Corporation would also pay any costs arising for a booking change.

18. It is proposed to continue to eschew a number of other activities which are available to City of London Corporation at the party conferences because they do not present sufficient value-for-money or adequate means to engage with key audiences. Such activities include:
- a) *Exhibition stands.* A number of organisations choose to have a stand in the exhibition space, though the numbers so doing has recently declined significantly due to the prohibitive cost and negligible benefits (the City Corporation has never had a stand).
 - b) *Sponsorship of a Reception.* A variety of receptions take place during the party conferences for which there are sponsorship opportunities. The City Corporation has chosen not to sponsor or organise receptions due to the associated high costs and desire instead to promote discussion on policy issues relevant to London.
 - c) *Advertising.* The Party Conferences offer a variety of opportunities to advertise in both online and printed publications. This again carries high costs.

Conclusion

19. The party conferences remain a vital and effective way of engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including leading politicians and decision makers. The 2014 party conference season was broadly successful for the City of London Corporation, thanks to the opportunities offered by both the fringe events and dinners to engage with these stakeholders.

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