

To Peter Lisley, Assistant Town Clerk

Response from the Organising Committee for the City of London Pensioner's Lunch to consultation on the possible removal of the budget.

1. As promised, we are responding to the points raised about the possible removal of the budget for the pensioner's lunch arising out of the recent meeting that we were asked to attend with you and Mr Debus.
2. The Organising Committee, who oversee this annual event on behalf of the Establishment Committee, fully understand the need for the City Corporation to make budget reductions. We, therefore, wish to assist in that process and the Committee has met to consider how best to respond positively whilst wishing to continue to oversee a truly valued event to a standard expected of the City Corporation and Guildhall.
3. The City Corporation Pensioner's lunch has been held annually for 52 years and is greatly appreciated by 550-600 people who attend. It is open only to those individuals who retire from the City Corporation's employment and who take-up their pension on retirement. The popularity of the lunch is such that it is mostly oversubscribed.
4. It is a very special occasion for former colleagues enabling them to get together in the grandeur of their former HQ to enjoy each other's company and keep abreast of what's happening in the City. The lunch is preceded by a special service for retirees in St Lawrence Jewry.
5. The City Corporation's pensioners appreciate that they are privileged to have worked for an organisation that continues to recognise their worth and the contribution they made after they have retired. We believe that this commitment on the part of the City Corporation reflects well upon it as an institution and an employer. The fact that Members of Common Council are prepared to give up their time to attend the lunch reinforces that link and again, this is greatly appreciated.
6. It also provides an opportunity for some current staff to support and meet their former colleagues as the wine is served by existing City Corporation employees. They do this without payment (although there is an out-mess) and this has been a tradition for many years and appreciated greatly by the guests.

7. It would be a sad loss to the pensioners if the lunch was to be abandoned but also we believe a loss to the City Corporation as this type of now virtually unique commitment sets it apart and adds to its special qualities.

8. The organising committee has looked in some detail at the current funding position and how that might be improved in order to retain the event.

9. The current budget for the lunch (and, therefore, the required saving) is £42,000. It is a generous budget and the total cost of the lunch, which includes a modest pre-lunch drink reception and brief post-lunch coffee in the Old Library, is nowhere near that sum. We are very keen to see the cost of the lunch kept to a minimum wherever possible and we always seek competitive tenders for catering from the City's approved list, which is the biggest element of expenditure. In addition, the guests all make a contribution from their pensions of £5 each which raises approximately £3,000. This goes towards keeping the City Corporation's costs down.

10. In 2014, the £42k budget provided by the City Corporation plus the income from the contribution from the pensioners attending the lunch of £3,000, was underspent by approximately £15,000. The total cost of the function (including postage etc) was approximately £30,000. The actual cost to the City Corporation in 2014 was, therefore, approximately £27,000.

11. We have also reviewed carefully the outgoings associated with the event which last year came to £3,735. These include items such as postage, very modest flowers (top-table only), Church fees, a contribution to the Red Cross for first aid, a toastmaster, etc.

12. As requested, we looked at the various proposals that you put forward as possible options and our response is as follows:

Linking the lunch with the staff annual lunches

13. This would involve linking the pensioner's lunch to the staff annual lunches held annually in late December (so making the lunch for the pensioners one of four on consecutive days). The committee felt that, bearing in mind the ages and sometimes the mobility and fragility of a number of the guests, an event in December, with the strong potential for inclement weather and travelling home in darkness, was not a viable option. Hence the lunch for the pensioners is usually held in the autumn and for 2015 is planned for 4 September. We did not see a lunch in December as a viable option simply because of its impracticality for the more elderly, less mobile guests and those with special needs.

Altering the format of the lunch (ie the reception arrangements, the type of meal the number of courses, post dinner coffees, venue)

14. We could, of course, make a variety of changes to the format by cutting out certain elements of the function. For some of the guests, due to their age, mobility and general health, being able to sit at a table to eat is very important. This is especially so for those accompanied by carers or with other special needs, where a great deal of thought is put into the seating arrangements. If the lunch was simply a buffet reception we feel that this would appeal less and possibly only to the more able-bodied. The current format enables pensioners to meet informally over a brief pre-lunch drink and then to be seated with their chosen former colleagues wherever possible.

15. The lunch is currently three courses which could be reduced to say, two. However, it must be remembered that some pensioners travel often long distances to attend (ie Scotland, Devon and even Spain!) and appreciate the care and attention that goes in to the preparation and presentation of the meal which goes to make it a very special occasion. The pensioners also now make a contribution towards the cost.

Limiting numbers by holding a smaller function

16. Limiting the number of pensioners who traditionally attend the lunch could reduce the cost. However, as stated above, the lunch is always oversubscribed and this would serve to increase the disappointment on the part of those who are not lucky enough to attend.

Altering how the event is managed

17. We understand that the suggestion is to possibly bring the arrangements in-house to be run by an events team in the City Corporation. This would largely make the need for an organising committee redundant. Whether this would achieve any significant savings is questionable as there would be an increased cost to the City Corporation through extra staff time in organising the event. For example, over 1,200 invitations are dispatched to eligible pensioners (for 600 places) and the organising committee goes to great lengths to accommodate, wherever possible, pensioners sitting with requested individual former colleagues and friends. The amount of work that goes into the seating plan is quite detailed and very time-consuming.

18. It should be noted that because of the amount of work involved, honoraria (totalling £1,675 in 2014) has, for a number of years, been paid to some of the committee members (mostly the retirees) to recognise their contribution, particularly to those who prepare invitations, place cards, table plans and guest lists and also for posts of the Secretary and Finance Officer. This sum is

contained within the outgoings referred to in paragraph 11 above. If the work was taken in-house, these payments would cease but it is likely that the staff costs involved would far exceed this expenditure.

The Organising Committee's response

19. Whilst fully appreciating the need for savings, the organising committee hopes very much that the City Corporation will continue to make available funding for an annual lunch for its pensioners. The budget of £42,000 has been consistently underspent and could, therefore, be reduced substantially.

20. In addition, the organising committee feels confident in increasing the contribution towards the lunch from the pensioners from £5 to £10 per person, which, based on existing numbers, would increase income to £6,000. This may deter some pensioners, especially those on more modest pensions, but we feel it would be an acceptable and reasonable increase in the contribution for a City lunch with wine, hosted in the Guildhall.

21. The estimated actual cost of catering in 2015 is £29,170. Add to this the additional expenditure in administering the event plus essential things such as the Red Cross which amount to £3,905. This brings the total estimated expenditure in 2015 to £33,075. Reducing the City Corporation's financial contribution to say, £27,000 plus the enhanced contribution from the pensioners should provide a budget to pay for a lunch to the same or similar standard to that currently enjoyed.