

ConferenceNews

Security matters

CN looks at how Political Party Conference security is handled

Giving back with teambuilding

How can teambuilding provide a charitable cause?

The Big Interview

Taylor Lynn Corporation's Liz Taylor on talent and pitches

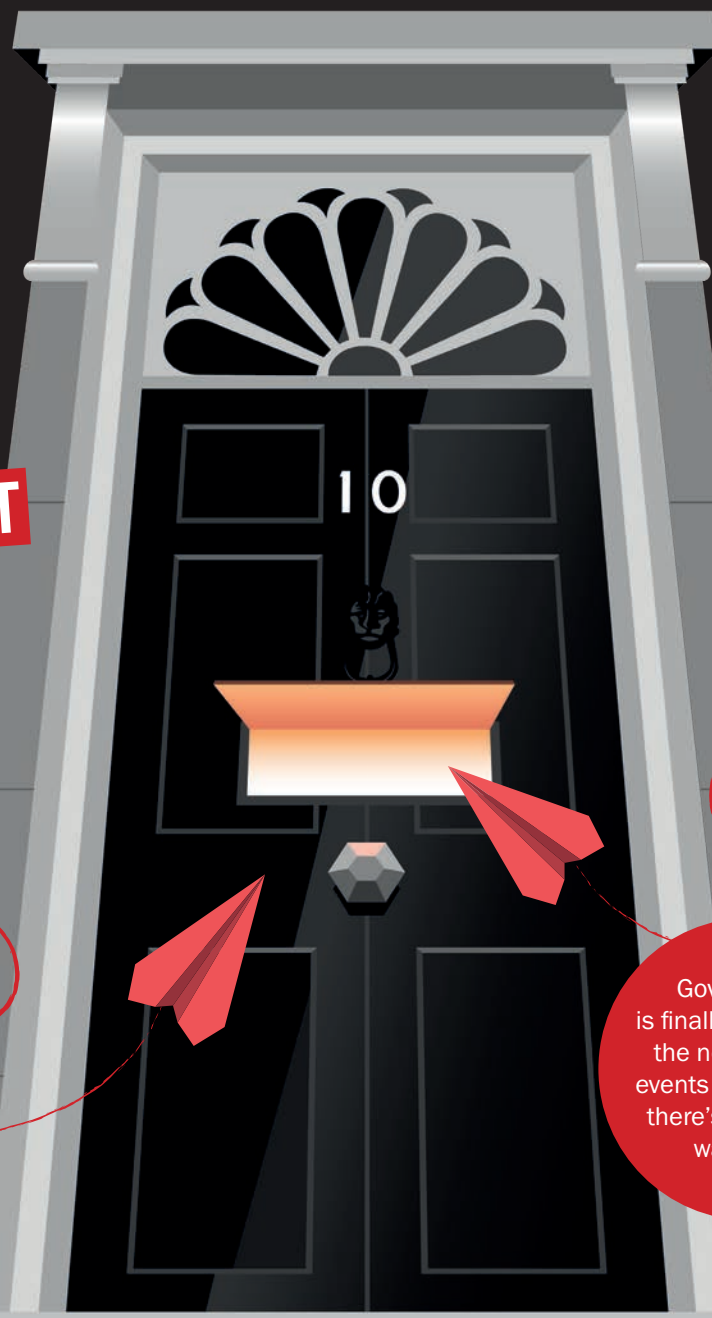
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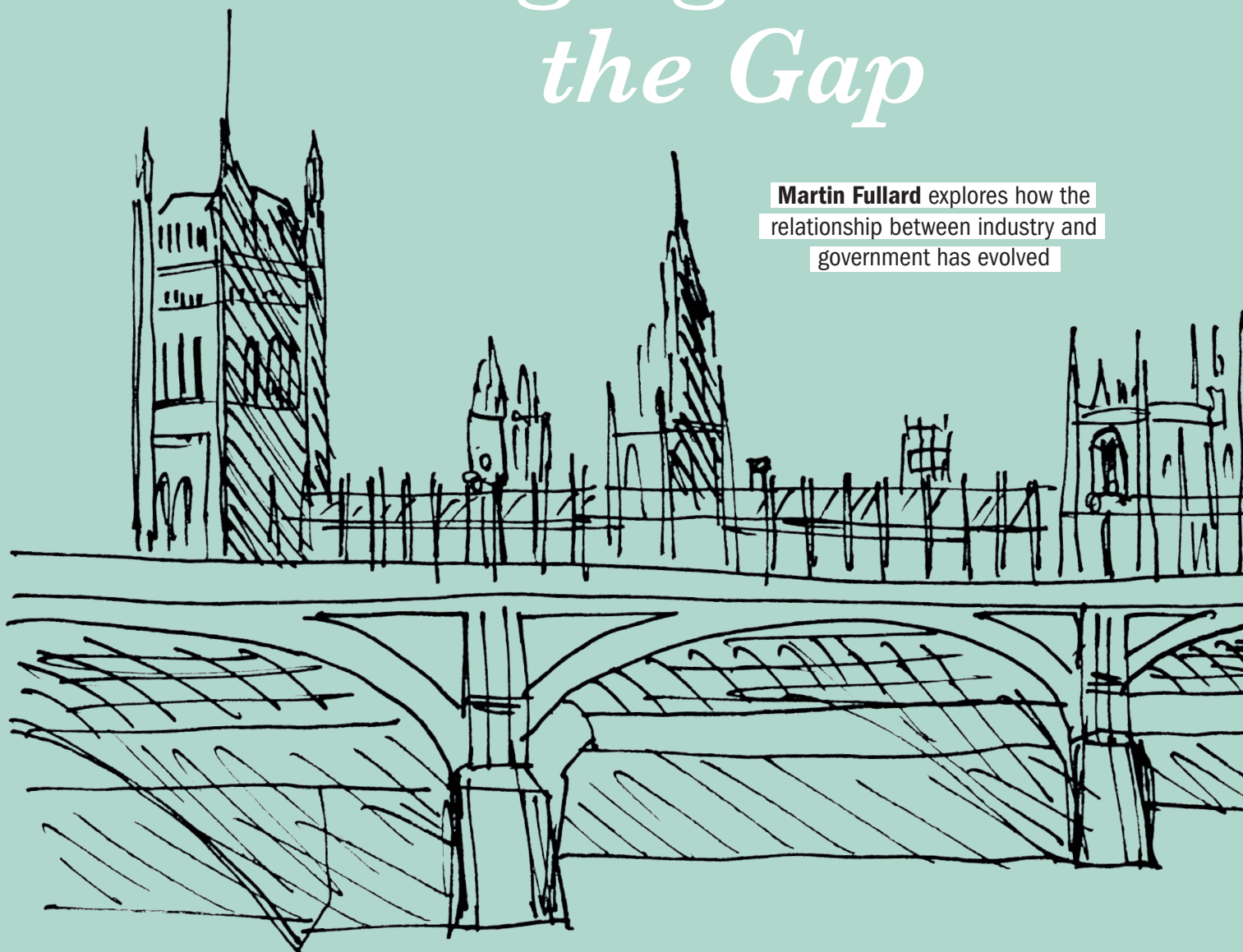
GOVERNMENT



Government is finally listening to the needs of the events industry, but there's still a long way to go

Bridging the Gap

Martin Fullard explores how the relationship between industry and government has evolved



A common complaint in this industry is that the UK government doesn't fully appreciate the value of events, nor does it listen to its wants and needs. For a time, this was certainly the case, but the winds have changed and now the industry's voice is starting to be heard.

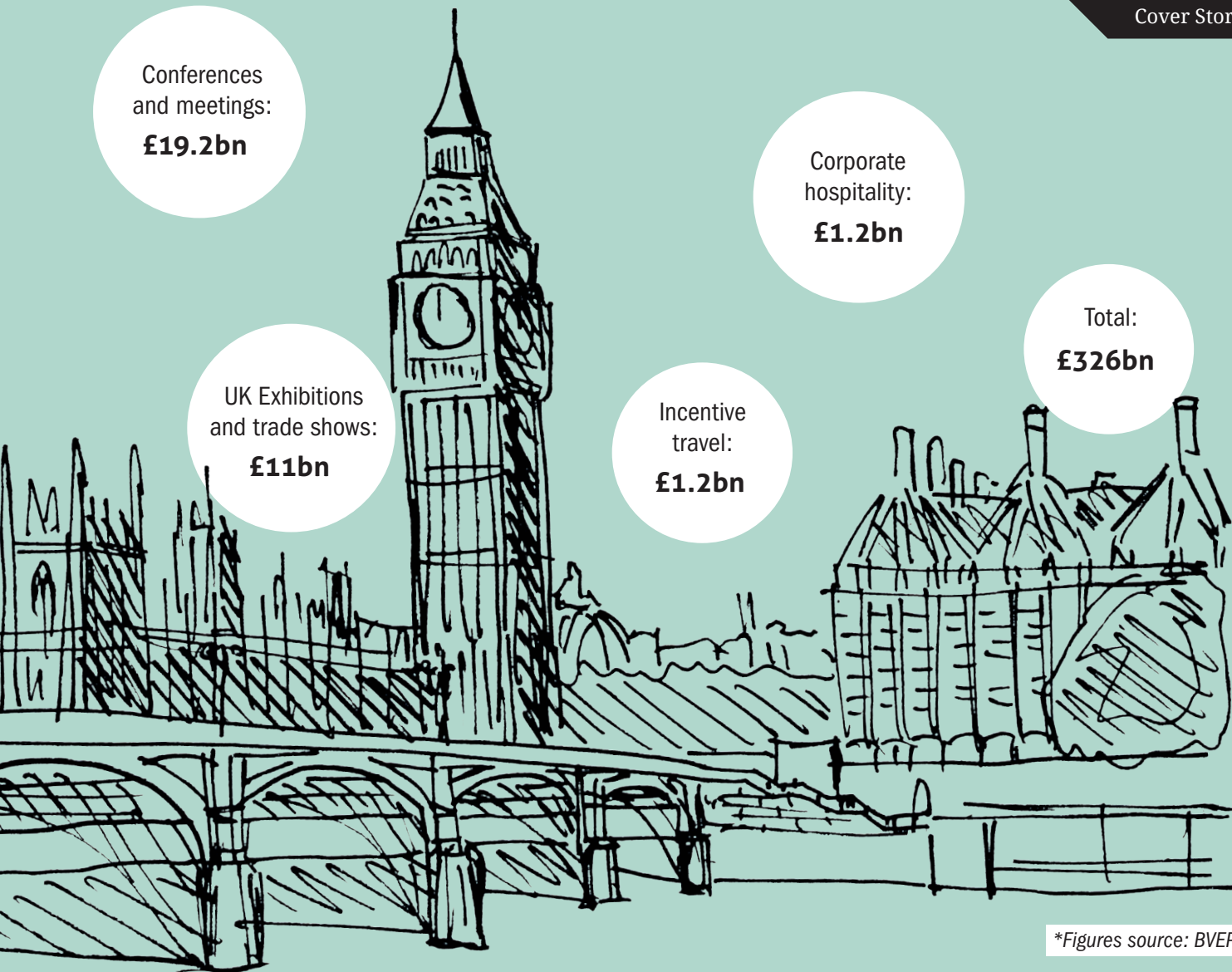
The Business of Events (TBOE) Senior Leadership Forum will take place at the Mermaid, London, 6 November, and provides an opportunity for eventpros to get their points across to government. The conversation this year will focus around the

Tourism Sector Deal, the UK government's Industrial Strategy and the International Business Events Action Plan, which was announced in June by former Prime Minister Theresa May.

Taking place on the 7 November is the Parliamentary Debate, which returns to Portcullis House. Held in partnership with the All Party Parliamentary Group for the UK Events Industry, the debate will provide a platform for senior leaders across the sector to discuss key issues and inform parliamentarians of the value and benefits of the business events sector. A private

dinner will take place following the debate.

So, it's all going in the right direction. Indeed, speaking exclusively to *Conference News*, new Tourism Minister, Helen Whately MP, appears to acknowledge the value of the sector. "The business events industry plays a pivotal role in the UK's tourism industry and makes a huge contribution to the wider travel sector and the UK economy," Whately says. "The UK hosted 592 international association meetings in 2017. Business visitors made up almost a quarter of the 38m visits to the UK in 2018. The business events sector is worth



*Figures source: BVEP

£32.6bn (see figures in above illustration for breakdown) to the UK economy. As well as spending £4.5bn, event delegates boost visitor numbers out of season, helping spread the economic benefits of tourism throughout the year.

“Business events are a great opportunity to introduce international visitors to the best the UK has to offer, and it is significant that more than half of those who come to the UK for a conference choose to return as leisure visitors.”

These are all the positive platitudes you would expect to hear from a Minister of State, but what are the plans for future investment in the events industry? “We

want the UK to attract the biggest and best international business events and our Tourism Sector Deal sets out how Government and industry will work together to ensure the sector continues to thrive,” continues Whately.

“It is important that we have skilled staff in positions to make the most of the newly developed conference infrastructure. The Sector Deal will create 30,000 new apprenticeships each year by 2025, covering all grades, to support the industry and boost the business events workforce.

“It’s through initiatives like these that we will continue to work in partnership with the private sector to build the business events sector in the UK.”

Sounds like a plan. The announcement

by the previous government that £250,000 has been set aside for improving broadband connectivity at venues with international inclinations has been met with mixed responses. Indeed, in this issue (p17), RefTech’s Simon Clayton is not convinced the Wi-Fi bonanza will stretch very far at all. But the fact that something has been done at least testifies to the idea that this industry is finally being listened to. Change will always be incremental.

The board role

Bridging the gap between the industry and the government is the Events Industry Board (EIB). Michael Hirst, OBE, is its chair, a role he undertakes alongside his position as chair of the Business Visits and Events Partnership (BVEP). ➔



☛ The EIB had a strong influence shaping the Tourism Sector Deal. Hirst is the face of the industry in the eyes of the government, and it is through the research undertaken by the wider EIB that government policy pertinent to our world was formed.

Regardless of how far it stretches, the Wi-Fi grant is an example of the government listening to the events industry, but what's next?

"There are a number of different initiatives and projects right now that the industry can get involved with and they will benefit our sector greatly when they come to fruition," Hirst says.

"An example of a great initiative that is already in place is VisitBritain's Business Events Growth Programme, which is now in its third year. The programme, which forms part of the UK Government's commitment to grow the sector, is designed to support bids for hosting international events here in the UK, which align with the Government's priority industry sectors, as well as growing international attendance at events already taking place here. Of course, by doing this and securing more international events we will promote the UK as a world-class destination for business events.

"There are also a number of upcoming projects and activities detailed in the recently launched International Business Events Action Plan, which will be implemented across government departments in the coming months. Our EIB Talent Taskforce and EIB Working Group for Infrastructure

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Above:
Helen Whately MP,
Tourism Minister

Right:
Michael Hirst, OBE,
chair, Events Industry
Board and BVEP

and Connectivity are completing their recommendations relating to capacity mapping, opportunities for inward investment to improve venue infrastructure, better co-ordination of skills development and career progression within the sector."

The remit of the Events Industry Board is to advise government departments on how to attract, grow and create international business events in the UK. To that extent, Hirst insists the EIB shall be ensuring government is aware of the industry's concerns over Brexit and also made aware of where there are opportunities for further growth by creating a greater competitive market and business environment.

"We gather our feedback from the industry through a series of roundtable discussions with the sector's key stakeholders," says Hirst. "Recently we held sessions with international corporate buyers and DMOs. We have plans to do further roundtables with hotels in the meetings and conference space, as well as smaller event venues.

"We have also established a Senior Leaders Advisory Panel, comprising some of the leading businesses in the sector which will meet twice a year to provide first-hand input for the EIB on the key issues affecting the industry's progress.

"We are working closer with the Department for International Trade, in recognition of the export and inward investment opportunities that arise from trade fairs, exhibitions and business



conferences.

"Next year we shall prepare a comprehensive report into the activities of the EIB which will be shared with Ministers and key stakeholders."

At present, the events industry doesn't have a Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code, as issued by the Department for International Trade. Are we likely to get one as it will help underline the value of the industry, or is the industry too fragmented?

"Most of the codes are actually European but the good news is we have an opportunity to review the present system with the recent launch of the Office of National Statistics and Warwick University's Institute for Employment Research's SOC survey," says Hirst. "But we must strike while the iron is hot and we must have the support of the whole industry. We need everyone to be responsive and receptive of establishing a code that truly recognises the unique resources existing in the sector."

CN speaks to a lot of events industry stakeholders around the UK, and it's fair to say a number of them feel isolated and without representation. Many of them have never heard of the EIB. Hirst makes plain the hierarchy, saying: "The EIB is an advisory body to government. The best way to channel issues is through the respective trade associations that represent the various sectors of the industry. These matters are then brought to the EIB by representative members on the Board or through the Business Visits and Events Partnership (BVEP).

"The Board also has a secretariat at the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and direct contact can be made here. There is also a website: www.gov.uk/government/groups/events-industry-board, which posts information of the EIB's activities and reports.

Not sure which trade association you should be a part of? CN will break it down in November's issue. **CN**