

**London Government Dinner**  
**Mansion House**  
**Thursday 11th January 2024**  
**The Rt Hon The Lord Mayor of London**  
**Alderman Professor Michael Mainelli**

Mr Mayor. My Lord Bishop. Aldermen. Mr Recorder. Sheriffs. Chief Commoner. Your Worships. Ladies and Gentlemen...

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to Mansion House for the London Government Dinner - at the start of this new year...

...an opportunity for leaders, mayors, and chief executives to come together to celebrate the fantastic work taking place across our capital and to discuss the challenges and opportunities that present themselves in the year ahead.

Dubbed the "mega election" year - and hopefully, not the MAGA election year - 2024 will see more than half the world's population head to the polls, including in London and the UK, the US, and India.

The Ancient Greek comic, Aristophanes, once wrote that:

*"To win the people, always cook them some savoury that pleases them."*

And while I suspect his meaning was more metaphorical than prandial, I hope our hospitality this evening does please all of you.

Mark Twain also quipped:

*"If voting made any difference, they wouldn't let us do it."*

And I guess I can see what he means.

Whoever you vote for, the government always wins...

But ladies and gentlemen, London government is winning.

2024 is also a year of important milestones for our capital.

It is 20 years since that iconic landmark of London's skyline - The Gherkin – first opened.

200 years since the National Gallery and The Royal National Lifeboat Institution were founded.

And 750 years since another of London's great institutions was established – the role of Town Clerk of London, marking nearly eight centuries of service to the City and its residents.

I am delighted that our current Town Clerk and Chief Executive, Ian Thomas, joins us here tonight...

...as do our two guest speakers - the returning Chair of London Councils, Cllr Georgia Gould, and the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan. Cllr Gould, it is good to have you back. Having recently extended your family, I can only imagine that you have been even busier than usual! I know that I speak for all of us here when I pass on my thanks to Cllr Claire Holland for the work she has done as London Councils' Acting Chair in the interim.

And thank you, Mr Mayor, for all your work, not least your intervention this week which kept London moving and ensured our guests could get here tonight.

With last week's spectacular New Year's fireworks display still fresh in our minds, allow me, if you will, to quote one of the artists featured in the display – George the Poet:

*“Ain't it crazy how we're all connected? Don't you think it's cool how we're linked? Let's not fall out of sync.”*

Because, as some of you may be aware, the mayoral theme for the year is Connect to Prosper – celebrating the many Knowledge Miles of our Square Mile - the world's oldest democratic workers' and residents' cooperative - and reviving London's proud coffee house tradition.

One in which Jonathan's Coffee House, opened just 100 yards away from here in 1680, grew into the London Stock Exchange...

... Lloyds Coffee House, founded in 1686, became Lloyds of London...

...and the Virginia and Baltick Coffee House, opened in 1744, spawned the Baltic Exchange...

...with The Spectator, Tatler, Sotheby's, and Christie's emerging from these “penny universities” too.

And with central London today home to 40 learned societies, 70 higher education institutions, 130 research institutes, and over 24,000 businesses, with more than 300 languages spoken...

...we're promoting our city as the world's “coffee house” – a place where people come together, from across the globe, to find solutions to the biggest challenges facing our planet: from mental health to climate change.

When London connects, everyone, everywhere around the world, today and tomorrow, prospers.

For our part, the City of London Corporation is already connecting with the boroughs of Hackney, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark, and Tower Hamlets through the ten academies we sponsor and 12 housing estates we manage with them across our capital.

City Bridge Foundation, our 900-year-old institution that manages and maintains five of London's iconic bridges - including Tower Bridge - at no cost to the taxpayer, also happens to be London's biggest independent charity funder...

...awarding grants of over £30 million a year to charities throughout our city, including in Hounslow, Brent, and Camden.

And because the task isn't just identifying and solving the problems of the here and now, but those on the horizon too...

...the Corporation is building future connections with Barking and Dagenham through our £1 billion investment to regenerate 42 acres of

industrial land into a global logistics exposition for Billingsgate and Smithfield markets...

...stimulating growth and generating thousands of jobs...

...with a new food hall extravaganza in the pipeline to train tomorrow's market traders, butchers, fishmongers, and fruiterers.

Our Vision for Economic Growth, published by our excellent Policy Chair, Chris Hayward, and the late Lord Mayor sets out a roadmap to prosperity via a series of reforms to make sure businesses across London get the funding they need to start here, scale here, and succeed here...

...putting forward proposals that are already working to transition us to a digital-first economy and ensure that London remains at the forefront of efforts to tackle climate change.

And speaking of digital, our Ethical AI Initiative, which we launched in November with the Chartered Institute for Securities & Investment and the British Computer Society, already has over 2,000 students from more than 220 organisations across 41 countries registered, with over 100 graduates.

The integral role London plays – as an engine of UK-wide growth and an international hub of learning and creativity – is something we should never be abashed to celebrate as loudly as we can...

...even more so now, in the climate of levelling up, which often places too much emphasis on the levelling, and not enough on the up.

As an author once said:

“Decentralisation is good as long as everyone marches to the same step.”

And while it isn't a panacea, when London connects with its friends in other regions - like the West Midlands and Greater Manchester - we make a more cogent and persuasive case for devolution and the benefits that can arise from greater local control and the ability to tailor policies around the needs and wishes of the communities we serve.

Our nation navigated its way through Brexit.

We found a way through Covid.

And we're establishing ourselves as an independent, economic powerhouse.

Because we are open and connected.

Because we treat all-comers fairly.

Friends, flanked by these two magnificent stained glass panels displaying scenes connected to London's past...

...including the 29th Lord Mayor, Sir William Walworth, meeting with Wat Tyler at Smithfield in 1381...

...and on a happier note, Queen Elizabeth I's procession by water from the City to Westminster in 1558...

...we are reminded that London has always been a place to make connections.

It's a diverse, progressive, multicultural, multilingual, pluralistic success story, with unrivalled global connections, top talent, and a world-class legal system.

As the drones at the New Year's fireworks spelt out – “a place for everyone.”

And while we all know the problems we face, let's be optimistic. Pessimism is for better times.

By connecting and working together – channelling that coffee house tradition upon which our London was built - we are not only better placed to rise to the challenges of today, but also better positioned to ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous, and sustainable future for our city and its residents tomorrow.

Thank you.