



Coventry City Council

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Public report

## **REPORT BACK ON CONFERENCE/SEMINAR**

**REPORT TO:** Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee **Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2005  
**REPORT OF:** The Lord Mayor, Councillor John Gazey  
**TITLE:** 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Coventry / Saint-Etienne twinning relationship  
**DATE:** 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2005  
**VENUE:** City of Saint-Etienne, France

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### **1. Recommendation**

The Scrutiny Coordination Committee is recommend to consider the report on and note the benefits of the civic visit of Lord Mayor, Cllr Gazey, to Saint-Etienne.

### **2. Background**

The City of Coventry has 26 twin cities throughout the world. Most of these links were formed in the spirit of peace and reconciliation after the end of World War II. The link with Saint-Etienne was formalised in April 1955 thus 2005 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the link.

The two cities were twinned in 1955 after spending time searching for a comparable twin city. The two cities were twinned because of their similar populations, sizes, and industries. Both cities had developed rapidly during the industrial revolution with similar local industries (weaving, bicycles, armaments and mining).

The Lord Mayor was invited by the City of Saint-Etienne to officially open an exhibition of sculpture to mark the anniversary of the link. The exhibition, by local sculptor Jean Parker, called *Bald Statements* was on display in the Saint-Etienne tourist information office.

In addition, a small delegation from the Coventry Association for International Friendship (CAIF), of which the Lord Mayor is President, were invited to visit the Saint-Etienne Franco British Club. CAIF is a group that maintain links and organises activities between citizens in Coventry and citizens in twin and partner cities. Similarly the Franco-British Club in Saint-Etienne is a group of Anglophiles who meet regularly and organise visits and exchanges. The Franco-British Club organised a reception to mark the anniversary and produced a display charting the history of the link. In previous years there has not been much organised, active contact between citizens in the two cities and this anniversary presented a good opportunity for the two groups to meet and to cement much stronger links for the future.

Accompanying the Lord Mayor allowed the International Policy Officer to have a brief meeting with the Head of International Relations and International Relations Officer from Saint-Etienne municipality to discuss areas with potential for cooperation.

### 3. Cost of attending

In addition to the time of the Lord Mayor and officer, the costs of the civic visit are as follows:

Economy Class, Return Flights, Birmingham to Lyon	£230.20
Travel Insurance	£32.68
Car parking at Birmingham Airport	£12:00
Expenses	<u>£8.17</u>
Total	<b>£283.05</b>

The Lord Mayor's hospitality Budget will cover costs for the Lord Mayor's travel and the International Policy Budget will cover travel costs of the International Policy Officer.

### 4. Benefits

Local authority international links and partnerships provide a number of benefits including improved service delivery and problem solving through learning from the best practice of others. Sharing information and experiences with counterparts overseas and staff exchanges can be an effective way of delivering technical assistance and can be more sustainable than one off projects. Local authorities can compare approaches and let members and officers learn from each other over time. Overseas partnerships and twinning links increase awareness of European and international issues and can improve local authorities' understanding of our counterparts in the rest of the world. In terms of EU funding, twinning links provide a good source of reliable partners for transnational funding projects and short visits are often the quickest and most effective way of keeping up to date with developments in each other's cities and maintaining an active link.

The Lord Mayor was officially invited to open the exhibition *Bald Statements*, by local artist Jean Parker, jointly with the mayor of Saint-Etienne, Michel Thiolliere. The exhibition was displayed in the central tourist information office in Saint-Etienne to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the twinning link between the two cities. It was appropriate for the Lord Mayor, Cllr Gazey to represent the City of Coventry on the occasion of such an anniversary and demonstrate the esteem that Coventry has for its twin city of Saint-Etienne. The exhibition was attended by local media, representatives of the Council in Saint Etienne, the Franco - British Club, members of C.A.I.F. amongst others. The Lord Mayor's address was a welcome opportunity to reflect on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the link and to express thanks to the City of Saint-Etienne for holding an exhibition by a Coventry artist.

As President of the CAIF the Lord Mayor's presence in Saint-Etienne was of great use in supporting the fledgling links with the Franco-British Club of Saint-Etienne. The CAIF is a citizens group for people interested in people to people contact in twin cities and partnership cities around the world. CAIF organises a regular programme of meetings, exchanges, hosting opportunities and are excellent ambassadors for the city of Coventry.

For a number of years the organisation had struggled to establish a people to people link in Saint-Etienne, despite valiant efforts. This anniversary had given both groups the impetus to establish a firm link of friendship with a view to developing more regular exchanges between the two cities. The Lord Mayor was guest of honour at a small reception hosted by the

Franco British Club for the representatives of CAIF. The Club had also organised a display charting the history of the link between the two cities and were particularly pleased that the Lord Mayor was able to attend the reception and lend his support to the link. The meeting of the two groups was most successful and identified a number of opportunities for future exchanges.

During the visit, the Lord Mayor was given the opportunity to see a number of the city centre regeneration projects currently in progress in Saint Etienne, including a centre for design, a business centre, concert and exhibition hall and an additional tram line. Saint-Etienne has been successful in gaining European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) support for numerous regeneration projects and has considerable expertise in this field. When the current EU structural funds programmes end both Coventry and Saint-Etienne will no longer be eligible to receive ERDF money. An alternative source of European funding could come through transnational European programmes, which require a number of European partners. Coventry and Saint-Etienne have experience of cooperating on European funding projects and this area was identified as a common area of interest in the two cities. The international offices in both cities will remain in contact with a view to identifying joint initiatives, which could be eligible for transnational European Funding programmes.

A second area of joint interest was also identified during the visit: regional partnerships. The Coventry Saint-Etienne link is matched by a Birmingham - Lyon link (Lyon is the capital of the Rhône-Alpes region of France). For some time the West Midlands region (through the West Midlands Regional Assembly and Advantage West Midlands) has been pursuing engagement with European and international partners. One region of interest to the West Midlands is the Rhône-Alpes region of France. An initial discussion with the International Relations Office in Saint-Etienne led to agreement in principle to explore four-way working between Coventry, Saint-Etienne, Lyon and Birmingham. This will be explored with Birmingham City Council and chambers of commerce by the International Policy Office to see how it could lend support to the case for a region to region link between the West Midlands and Rhône-Alpes.

List of background papers

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Papers open to public inspection

Description of paper:	Location
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