

REPORT BACK ON CONFERENCE/SEMINAR

REPORT TO: Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

REPORT OF: Phil McGrahan, International Policy Officer

TITLE: Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities

DATE: 18th – 20th October 2006

VENUE: Rennes, France

1 Recommendation

1.1 Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report detailing the outcomes of meetings at the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities (CAAC) general secretariat in Rennes.

2 Purpose of Visit

2.1 As a new member of the CAAC city network, it is important for Coventry City Council to fully understand the network and how Coventry City Council can benefit from being a member. The purpose of this visit was for the International Policy Officer to attend meetings with the general secretariat (GS) of the CAAC to gain a complete knowledge of the services the GS provides in order for Coventry City Council to maximise its benefit from participation in the network.

2.2 Coventry City Council agreed to lead one of the CAAC commissions - the Urban and Port Cities Working Group. There are five such commissions - particular working groups, each focussing on issues common across the membership such as climate change, and tackling unemployment. The other commissions are: Policy and Strategy; Economic Development; Culture and Heritage; and Transport and Accessibility. The visit allowed the International Policy Officer to plan the forthcoming meeting of the Urban and Port Cities Working Group in Coventry and discuss what responsibilities the City Council has as the president of the Urban and Port Cities Development working group.

2.3 The second day of the visit allowed the International Policy Officer to discuss Coventry City Council's priorities in the areas of urban development and sustainable development particular in relation to the City Council's environmental health team with the general secretariat of the CAAC as well as representatives of the deputy president of the working group – Brest Metropole.

3 Background

3.1 The Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities (CAAC)

The Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities is a city network of some 40 cities from Ireland, UK, Spain, Portugal and France which was founded in 2000. CAAC has benefited from funding through the European Union (EU) Regional Programme INTERREG aimed at improving co-operation and promoting economic development between certain EU regions – in this case the North West periphery of the EU known as the Atlantic Arc. As a respected European city network, CAAC is regularly consulted by the EU on urban and regional policy. The city of Cardiff currently holds the Presidency of CAAC.

3.2 The CAAC is one of Europe's most influential networks and focuses its work on trans-national collaboration between its member cities with the exchange of best practice; the development of regional policy high on its agenda. A relatively inexpensive network – costing €5200 (c.£3500) – the CAAC is influential in Brussels and has good access to the European Commission. Membership offers us some access to specific trans-national funding and more importantly, ready made partnerships to access a wider range of EU funds. It also has provided opportunities to promote the city and showcase good practice.

3.3 Coventry, like the rest of the West Midlands region, was included within the EU Atlantic Arc area as part of the 2000 –2006 regional policy programmes. A number of member cities, including Coventry, have been excluded from the Atlantic Area in the new programme and consequently will only be eligible for a very small amount under the INTERREG IV Atlantic Area funding. In order to compensate for this development, the CAAC is now broadening its scope to include additional competitive trans-national funding streams such as LIFE+ and the Seventh Framework Programme for which all members are eligible.

3.4 The CAAC was keen for Coventry to be a member city - as a UK city with a different economic offer we make a good partner and have many similar regeneration and sustainability aspirations to cities such as Lisbon, Burgos, Rennes and Cork and although CAAC has a maritime focus for some areas of its policy and funding streams, a number of other member cities are also in-land as they either continue to be or were included in the EU's Atlantic area.

3.5 Coventry's Role

The CAAC has reorganised its working groups as described above in order to help develop projects and initiatives that can access European trans-national funding for the new EU funding programmes from 2007. Coventry has been chosen to lead the Urban Regeneration work stream. This position provides the opportunity to influence the development of initiatives and projects in order to maximise the benefits of membership and will also enable the council to assess better the value of the council's investment.

3.6 As a lead city, Coventry has become a member of the Executive Bureau (EB) and two officers attended a meeting of the EB and the Economic Development Group on 20 and 21 November 2006, where two presentations about Coventry's proposals for future projects were given to around 20 cities. Marco Orani, a senior representative from the European Commission responsible for Urban issues in EU regional policy was also present at the meeting.

3.7 Coventry has agreed to become a member of the CAAC for two years. During this time it is expected that the council will become involved in a range of trans-national projects that

will help deliver council's objectives to regenerate the city. Membership in the network will also help provide access to EU funding and the network of partners required to successfully bid for non-structural funds.

4 **Cost of attending**

Flights:	£237.25
Insurance:	£20.92
Accommodation:	£94.26
Expenses:	£27.97
Parking:	£18.60
Total:	£399.00

All costs for the International Policy Officer were covered by the International Budget.

5 **Benefits**

- 5.1 The most immediate benefit of the visit has been the organisation of the first meeting of the working group. This will be held in Chester in June 2007 alongside the Annual General Meeting of the CAAC to reduce costs and increase attendance. The following priority areas will be explored: Sustainable Urban Development, Community Engagement and Redevelopment of Urban Centres. The meeting will feature a number of presentations focussing on these key areas, while a representative from the INTERREG Atlantic Area office will also present on the priorities for the new programme. A representative from the Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs has also agreed to attend to discuss the opportunities for Environmental Health projects under the LIFE+ scheme, while a representative from the Union of Baltic Cities will attend to discuss potential for collaboration between the two networks.
- 5.2 Further benefits to the City Council from attendance at the meeting include the development of a better understanding of new EU funding opportunities and how to access to them through the membership of a trans-national city network designed to facilitate access to these opportunities.
- 5.3 As the lead city for developing activity on urban regeneration, Coventry will have direct influence on the type of projects that will be developed and put forward for funding. Therefore the City Council will be able propose specific areas of interest to Coventry.
- 5.4 Regular close collaboration with city partners from Ireland, Spain, France and Portugal as well as partners in related city networks such as the Union of Baltic Cities will provide Coventry with a wide network of partners for EU funded projects. One of the main comments Dr Jon Bloomfield received when conducting his research for his report 'Coventry's European Future' was that colleagues within the City Council interested in applying for EU funding found locating reliable trans-national partners one of the main barriers to accessing this type of funding. Active participation in this network will help locating interested and reliable partners.
- 5.5 Collaboration and the development of projects with European partners, within the working groups to which Coventry City Council is a member, will remove the above obstacle without it being a question allowing easier access to funding.

List of background papers

Proper Officer: Head of Corporate Policy

Author: Phil McGrahan, International Policy Officer

Tel Number: 024 7683 3060
(Any enquiries should be directed to the above)

Other contributors:

Papers open to public inspection

Description of paper:

Location