



Coventry City Council

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Public report

REPORT BACK ON CONFERENCE/SEMINAR

REPORT TO: Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee
REPORT OF: Lord Mayor, Councillor Jack Harrison MBE. JP
TITLE: 65th Anniversary of the Twinning of Coventry and Volgograd
DATE: 31st August – 7th September 2009
VENUE: Volgograd, Russia

1 Recommendation

The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee is recommended to note the report on, and the positive outcomes of, the Lord Mayor's visit to Volgograd, Russia from 31st August to 7th September 2009.

2 Background

The delegation from Coventry was invited to Volgograd by the Mayor of Volgograd, to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the twinning of Coventry and Volgograd. An inward delegation from Volgograd to Coventry, including senior politicians and a university professor, visited the UK in June 2009.

In addition to delegates representing the city council, delegates from Coventry Cathedral, Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce and Aldermoor Farm School were invited to participate in the trip. As well as civic events during the visit, a number of events were held dedicated to visiting organisations and establishments involved with business, industry, education and the medical sector. Additionally, a special meeting was set up for Coventry Cathedral representatives to meet representatives of Volgograd Cathedral (who are also members of the Community of the Cross of Nails) and the regional Archbishop.

Through such connections, it was anticipated that opportunities could be forged for future business, trade and education links between Volgograd and Coventry. This is particularly important given that Russia is an emerging market globally.

3. Lord Mayor's objectives

The Lord Mayor had 3 main objectives to be achieved during the visit to Volgograd:

- To experience the education system first hand and engage with young people through their regular activities; to understand how the Russian system operates regarding engagement with young people and their approach to training and employment

opportunities and finally to explore the possibility to set up an exchange pilot between the two cities around the theme of sport and or education.

- To experience some aspects of the Russian health care system and to further dialogue between the two cities around the health agenda and make links between relevant health providers and the University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire.
- To understand the workings of the Volgograd Chamber of Trade and Commerce and explore the potential for business development and mutual support.

4. Specific events

The itinerary for the visit was very busy, with a diverse range of meetings and site visits most notable included:

Meetings with the Mayor of Volgograd, Mr. Roman Grebennikov and Chair of the Audit Chamber of Volgograd, Mr. Vladimir Gordin – There were several official and informal meetings between the Volgograd government officers and the delegation. The first of which set the foundation for the visit in terms of meeting the most senior government official in Volgograd. The Lord Mayor and the rest of the party had opening discussions about the Lord Mayor's objectives for the trip and thanked the Mayor for hosting this visit. In particular the discussions centred around the future partnership working between the two cities and the continued strengthening of our ties around education and business opportunities.



Visit to the Eye Microsurgery Clinic – The visit to the award winning optical microsurgery clinic was very interesting to compare and contrast facilities between the two cities. The Lord Mayor took the opportunity in his role as non-executive director at UHCW to discuss the potential for exchange visits between the two establishments to forge greater links and share experience and best practice between the two organisations. This invitation was welcomed by the Clinic Director.



Meeting with the Chamber of Commerce – There were several meetings between representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and our delegation which resulted in a good understanding of the respective organisations and how they might work together in the future. Alan Durham and David Burton have provided a detailed commentary on the outcomes in a later section of this report.



Visit to the football Club ZENIT, meeting with the Chairperson of the Sports Committee Mr. Slashev Alexey and to the Olympic Swimming Training facility – This presented us with the opportunity of viewing some of the City's sports facilities and the delegation had the pleasure of meeting 3 Olympic athletes from Volgograd. The Lord Mayor took the opportunity to discuss the possibility of exchange visits between school footballs teams in the future.



Visit to the School Lyceum 5 - Previous civic delegations to Volgograd have visited this school and we were eagerly awaited. The School put on an extensive programme of singing, dancing and an exhibition on the history of the school. It was clear that the school takes very seriously the history of the war with memorials in the school to students who fell in the war. The connection between Volgograd and Coventry is clearly very well known to all of the students and its significance is taught to the pupils as part of the history. The Headteacher from Stoke Aldermoor School took the opportunity to forge links with the school. The bell presented to the Lord Mayor in Volgograd has subsequently been presented to Aldermoor Farm School.



Visit to the Cathedral of Volgograd and meeting with the Bishop of Volgograd – The delegation were warmly welcomed by the Bishop of Volgograd and his team and there were several meetings where gifts were exchanged and a sharing of information on how the Anglican and Russian Orthodox churches operated. We were privileged to have a private viewing of the cathedral and took the opportunity to attend the service on Sunday at a local church which had been raised to the ground during the conflict and had been rebuilt to the original specifications from drawings found in St. Petersburg.



Visit to the War Memorial Mamayev Hill and the Panorama Museum – The Battle of Stalingrad – A guided tour to the famous War Memorial at Mamayev Hill and the Museum Panorama were one of the highlights of the visit. It was particularly moving to see the references to Coventry in the Museum.



Official reception for invited twin cities – Coventry were one of several twin cities Volgograd had invited to their official celebrations of the City’s anniversary. There was an official ceremony in the Panorama Museum, an exchange of gifts in their Civic Offices and then an evening reception.

3 Cost of attending

Return Flights for Lord Mayor & Mrs Messinger	£1,410.08
Single Entry Russian VISA Charges (2 @ £120.30)	£240.60
Subsistence Costs for meals & refreshments	£458.12
Travel Insurance for Mrs Messinger	£16.33
Excess baggage costs for returning gifts	£96.00
TOTAL	£2,221.13

The flight costs and VISA charges for the Lady Mayoress were funded personally by the Lord Mayor.

4 Benefits

A number of benefits have resulted from this trip, namely:

- Attendance of the civic party at the 65th anniversary celebrations and the Volgograd 'City Day' and a reinforcement by both cities of the importance of our twinning link
- A pen-pal exchange established between Lyceum no. 5 School in Volgograd and Aldermoor Farm School in Coventry, with a few to possible school exchanges or other youth projects in the future.
- Invitation sent to the doctor at award winning eye clinic to visit Walsgrave Hospital as a personal development opportunity
- Mutual exchange of information and potential for future opportunities between the two chambers – see section 5 below

5. Report back from Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce representatives

Russia is of interest to the Chamber as a market that has been identified as having major growth potential for the future. It is however a difficult market for most SMEs, who are conscious of problems in doing business there, and particularly problems with corruption. The Russian economy has suffered with the onset of the world recession.

Russia's trade with the outside world is dominated by Moscow, with St Petersburg also a strong area. The Chamber was represented at MIMS, the major Russian automotive event, which took place in August 2009.

The Chamber welcomed the opportunity to visit Volgograd, to gauge the potential for business in a major Russian city. Useful meetings took place with the Volgograd Chamber of Commerce, with Mr Gordin (Volgograd's finance chief) and various business representatives, with representatives of the State Pedagogical University, and with a private sector hotel and catering group. It was also very helpful to discuss opportunities in Russia with Patrick Haughey of the British Embassy in Moscow. Potential outcomes:

- The Chamber will publish an article on Volgograd in its C&W in Business magazine, to be written by the Volgograd Chamber, together with an article on the wider Russian economy. This will be followed up with a seminar on Russia at the Chamber, and a possible further visit. A cooperation agreement between the two chambers was signed by David Burton and Alexander Belitsky, CEO, Volgograd Chamber.

-David Burton discussed links between Coventry University and Volgograd, particularly around post graduate students - this discussion is ongoing.

-cooperation between the Chamber and a Volgograd based hotel group who have an interest in learning more about British catering styles.

Overall, our impression of Volgograd was a positive one. Unlike Jinan and other Chinese cities we have built a relationship with, Volgograd does not benefit from plans by central government to develop the regions. There is a real need for infrastructure development and also for know-how eg developing university/business links, and also upgrading their traditional manufacturing industries. Tourism in particular seems to have good potential but there is an almost complete absence of signage in any language other than Russian (eg in the museum of the battle of Stalingrad).

The twin city link between Coventry & Volgograd does have a strong and emotional basis. This would be valuable in helping develop future economic links as Russia develops, although it would

be a long term process and one that would need nurturing, with ongoing commitment from the City Council and Chamber of commerce. It is in our view worth continuing with.

Finally, we believe that Coventry has an opportunity to make more of this historic link, which isn't well known even amongst local people. The story of Stalingrad has had much exposure recently through films and books so Coventry's relationship would be worth highlighting.

6.0 Conclusion

The trip was very successful and has bought the potential for tangible benefits to both Coventry and Volgograd and has significantly strengthened the links in this historic anniversary year of our twinning. The hallmark for the trip was the welcome received by the delegation by everyone in Volgograd from the leading officials to locals on the streets of Volgograd who all clearly knew about the special relationship between our two Cities.

Various civic gifts were exchanges which will be displayed in the Lord Mayor's office and in the Council House.

Both the Lord Mayor's office and the International office, in partnership with The Chamber of Commerce, will have joint responsibility for pursuing the follow up actions arising from the visit.

List of background papers	
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Papers open to public inspection	
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