



Coventry City Council

**5c)**  
**Public report**

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

**REPORT TO:** Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee  
**REPORT OF:** Lord Mayor of the City of Coventry, Councillor Keiran Mulhall  
**TITLE:** Report back on Civic Visit to India  
**DATE:** 22<sup>nd</sup> February to 4<sup>th</sup> March 2012  
**VENUE:** Punjab, India

---

### **1. Recommendation**

The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee is recommended to endorse the report of the Lord Mayor's civic visit to India and the positive outcomes of the visit.

### **2. Background**

Two Coventry organisations, Sikh Union Coventry and Godiva Lions Club, undertake significant fundraising in the city and the extended area to raise funds for free eye camps in India for the needy and poor people who cannot afford essential medical or optical treatment for their eyes.

Since 2009 these camps have taken place on an annual basis and I was invited to accompany a delegation this year to witness the Free Eye Camps taking place in Jalandhar, Punjab.

In addition, I received an invitation to receive the Bhai Mardana Award from the International Bhai Mardana Yadgari Kirtan Darbar Society at their religious function where guests from around the world are honoured.

### 3. Cost of attending

Based on exchange rate of £1 = 74INR

|                            | Costs Approved by Cabinet/Cabinet Member                                   | Total of Actual Costs                                                                          |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Conference Fees            | N/A                                                                        | N/A                                                                                            |
| Flights                    | Lord Mayor @ £1,800<br>Lord Mayor's Supervisor @ £700                      | Lord Mayor @ £1,745<br>Lord Mayor's Supervisor @ £690                                          |
| Additional Travel Expenses | Approx £60 per day for hire of minibus, driver and fuel for 12 days = £720 | £948.11<br>See (1) below                                                                       |
| Visa Fees                  | £43.40 per person                                                          | £41.50 per person                                                                              |
| Travel Insurance           |                                                                            | £116.59                                                                                        |
| Accommodation              | Approx £60 per night x 10 nights = £600                                    | £679.20 per person x 2 = £1358.40                                                              |
| Subsistence                | Approx £100 per day for 3 people = £1,200                                  | £1,532.13 which covered costs of all drinking water, food, beverages and hotel laundry service |

(1) In total the group travelled 1,940 miles over the 9 day period. This was far more than expected, hence additional costs for fuel.

**Total Cost of visit £6,515.33**

### 4. Benefits

#### Day One – Friday 24 February

I opened an eye camp for the poor and needy in the Kadia District on the Punjab where at least 700 were being treated for eye disease. It was a great charitable programme by the Sahil Project, Coventry in the rural area of the Punjab. It was amazing to see the number of local people that turned out and what worth the money raised in Coventry means to the local people.



On the same day we visited the first school of Councillor Harjinder Singh Sehmi in Dhariwal in the District of Gurdasbur, after 40 years. The conditions the children are taught in were unbelievably basic.



**Day Two – Saturday 25 February**

The day started with a local drive to the city of Chandigarh where we were invited by Kumar Swami Ji. We witnessed about 100,000 local people gather in an open space to listen to his peace speech and we were honoured to be among this crowd. As a mark of great respect to us we were asked by Kumar Swami Ji to distribute wheelchairs, blankets and sewing machines to the needy people.



**Day Three – Sunday 26 February**

I had been invited to do the official opening of another eye camp in Jalandhar where about 500 people were being treated with eye disease and received free optical treatment and surgery. This camp was organised and funded by the Sikh Union Club of Coventry. Whilst we were there we were privileged to be asked to present some tricycles to the disabled people from the Sikh Union.



On the same day we went to Bhai Mardana Ji Society at Ferozepur, where we witnessed 26 weddings of poor couples whose parents cannot afford their weddings. The weddings were organised by the above charity. It was a most unique experience to witness a mass wedding and the help being given to the people by this society.



**Day Four – Monday 27 February**

A day where I was officially welcomed by the Mayor of Ludhiana and we had lunch together with local politicians and other key community leaders discussing the demographics of our cities and the vast differences of culture.



Later that day we were invited by the Mayor of Jalandhar where we had tea with the Municipal Corporation of Councillors and the Commissioner of Jalandhar. This visit in particular attracted mass publicity.



**Day Five – Tuesday 28 February**

We visited Amritsar, a holy city for Sikhs. First we visited The Hermitage, a hospital where the handicapped and mentally ill people are being treated.



Then we visited Khalsa College of Amritsar which is the oldest college in the Punjab. It is a beautiful, iconic building and stands proud in the city. The college has international standing and attracts global graduates. I felt honoured to be shown around by the Principal and we were able to see the old Sikh history Granths which were in magnificent condition.



Onwards to the Golden Temple in Amritsar where the Information Centre of the Temple Authority honoured our presence and provided a guided tour of the Temple. My whole visit was massed by the press for TV, radio and photographers – made me feel like a film star!

First we went to Lungahall where 1000s eat free every day. Then we visited Ramgharia which is situated on the edge of the Golden Temple.



Then we went into the Golden Temple itself where we were honoured by the High Priest of the temple. It was a great day for us to see the golden shrine where 1000s of people come and pray every day. It is a truly remarkable building and I can say this was a once in a lifetime experience.

#### **Day 6 – Wednesday 29 February**

Another extra-ordinary day ahead. I was invited by Sant Balbir Singh Ji Seetchewal at Sultanpur Lodhi to visit where Guru Nanak the first Guru of Sikhs started his preaching. The river called Vain Nadi was in a very poor condition with pollutants and overgrowth. With determination and vigour the above Saint jumped into the river and over a 11 year period that followed he cleaned up the river and made it into a beautiful place for people to visit.



**Day 7 – Thursday 1 March**

Back to Chandigarh again, only on this occasion to be met formally by the Mayor and her colleagues. She honoured us and welcomed us in the beautiful city of Chandigarh in the Punjab. We met with representatives of the Municipal Corporation and received a presentation on their solid waste management and water purification systems. This was followed by lunch along with some politicians and officials of Chandigarh.



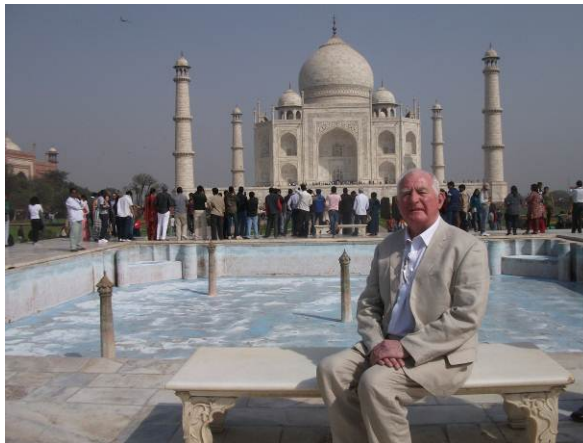
**Day 8 – Friday 2 March**

This was a travelling day of 10 hours by road from Chandigarh to Agra to see one of the seven wonders of the world, the Taj Mahal. We stayed at our hotel, had dinner and relaxed.

**Day 9 – Saturday 3 March**

The visit to the Taj Mahal was a great day. Truly a remarkable building of architecture. We got the opportunity to have our photos taken on the affectionately known ‘Lady Diana’s bench’.

After spending the day at the Taj Mahal we travelled back to Delhi Airport for our departure back to England.



As mentioned above, in total the group travelled 1,940 miles over the 9 day period.

List of background papers

Proper Officer: Bev Messinger, Director of Customer & Workforce Services

Author: Councillor Keiran Mulhall, Lord Mayor

Tel Number: 024 7683 3100

(Any enquiries should be directed to the above)

Other contributors: Jane Barlow, Lord Mayor's Supervisor, Lord Mayor's Office

Papers open to public inspection

Civic Visit to India File

Description of paper:

Authority for Attendance Form approved by Cabinet Member (Community Safety & Equalities) on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2012

Location: CH60