



REPORT BACK ON CONFERENCE/SEMINAR

REPORT TO:	Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee	11th September, 2013
REPORT OF:	Lord Mayor of the City of Coventry, Councillor Tim Sawdon	
TITLE:	Report back on Civic Visit to Volgograd	
DATE:	31st January to 3rd February 2013	
VENUE:	Volgograd, Russia	

1. Recommendation

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

2. Background

- 2.1 The Battle of Stalingrad was a turning point during WWII, and from Coventry extending messages of friendship came the first ever twinning link in the world - Coventry & Stalingrad (now Volgograd) in 1944. This founded the worldwide twinning movement. The friendship was cemented as a result of both cities experiencing devastation during the Second World War.
- 2.2 2013 marked the significant 70th anniversary of the victory of Soviet people and military troops in the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943. The Lord Mayor, Councillor Tim Sawdon, received an invitation from Volgograd City Administration to attend and take part in a programme of commemorative events organised to mark this historic occasion.

3. Cost of attending

	Costs Approved by Cabinet/Cabinet Member	Total of Actual Costs
Conference Fees	None	None
Flights	£847 (estimated) for Lord Mayor and Lord Mayor's Supervisor	£861.04 for Lord Mayor and Lord Mayor's Supervisor
Additional Travel Expenses Visa Fees	£155 single entry VISA application costs per VISA	£127.60 single entry VISA application costs per VISA
Travel Insurance	£49.00 City Council's travel insurance for both	£49.01 City Council's travel insurance for both

Accommodation	Hosted by City of Volgograd administration	Hosted by City of Volgograd administration
Subsistence	£200 currency for incidentals	£125.10 spent on food and beverages

The flights and VISA costs for the Lady Mayoress were funded personally.

Total Cost of visit £1,313.07 funded from the Lord Mayor's Hospitality Budget.

3. Benefits

- 3.1 The Lord Mayor delivered an address at the 'Peoples' diplomacy of cities' stable development in the XXI century' symposium at Volgograd State University. Its audience was delegates for Volgograd's other twin and friendship cities as well as State University representatives.

The Lord Mayor can be seen staged with Mr Valery Vasilkov the Mayor of Volgograd; Mr Sergey Paramonov, Executive Vice-President of the Twin Cities International Association; and Mr Oleg Inshakov, Russian Public Chamber Deputy.

The text of his address was twofold: firstly to celebrate our 69 year twinning link with Volgograd – which was the world's first twinning arrangement – and to urge the other delegates to support our joint approach to the United Nations to officially recognise twinning as a way of promoting international peace and friendship (see reference at para 4.4 below). The second part of the speech was to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the historic Russian victory over the German Army in February 1943. The address attracted a lot of local, national and international media interest.



3.2 The significant commemorative occasion that marked the 70th anniversary of Soviet troops defending the people of Stalingrad's future, was in the form of a military parade, with very high ranking officials and thousands of local people in attendance. The Lord Mayor laid the wreath alongside Mr Jiri Mastalka, Czech Euro MP at the Eternal Flame on the Square of Fallen heroes.

The commemoration also extended to the Hall of Eternal Glory on the Mamayev Hill



3.3 As part of the visit, the itinerary also included:

A visit to the Panorama Museum, housing numerous wartime exhibits including Coventry's 1942 tablecloth and the original 1944 twinning agreement where the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress signed the visitor's book.

We were also able to visit Gymnasium No3, a school that has have recently engaged in a Christmas gift exchange with a school in Coventry. The visit included a powerpoint presentation, question and answer session and a singing/dance display with the pupils.



3.4 During the visit the Lord Mayor commenced dialogue on how both cities will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the twinning link in 2014. Both cities are co-signatories to a letter to the United Nations for Volgograd and Coventry to be recognised as founder members of the international twinning movement during this 70th anniversary year.

For information, a copy of the 'Lord Mayor's Parlour: issue no 9' is below. Written by Councillor Tim Sawdon, a summary appeared in his column of the Coventry Telegraph on 21st February 2013.

LM Parlour 9

In my last Parlour notes I mentioned that the Lady Mayoress and myself were going to Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad) in Russia so I thought I'd try and paint a picture of what Lord Mayors get up to when they spend your Council Tax on foreign trips – Lady Mayoresses pay their own fare by the way.

Our two day trip turned out to be one and a half as thanks to an Aeroflot flight delay we missed our Volgograd connection and spent an unscheduled night in Moscow. Arriving at lunchtime I was in action straight away. Together with the Mayor of Volgograd and a delightful Czech Euro MP (who in his spare time is a chain smoking cardiologist!) I gave a keynote speech to an audience of delegates from Volgograd's other twin and friendship cities.

The text of my address was twofold. Firstly to celebrate our 69 year twinning link with Volgograd – which was the world's first twinning arrangement- and to urge the other delegates to support our joint approach to the United Nations to officially recognise twinning as a way of promoting international peace and friendship. Fortunately they all agreed! The second part of my speech was to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the historic Russian victory over the German Army in February 1943. Interestingly the people of Volgograd always refer to it as the defeat of the fascists.

In addition to the obvious affection that Volgogradians have for Coventry two other Britons feature prominently. Winston Churchill's wife Clementine who raised £8M (a huge amount in the 1940's) to provide Red Cross aid and the late Queen Mother who gave great moral support to them when the city was in ruins and was awarded the title of the 'Honourable Citizen of Volgograd'. She was the entire content of a later speech by a Russian author who's written a book on her. Unfortunately it's in Russian and hasn't been translated!

The evening of our first day consisted of a buffet supper and, would you believe it, no less than 47 speeches! All were in Russian or translated into Russian and so the only ones I understood were mine and that of a 92 year old American. At least they were relieved by occasional bursts of music from a string quartet. A late night.

Next morning was an early start to join the victory commemoration. Normally at this time of year the temperature is well into minus numbers but this time it was just above freezing but still pretty nippy in the wind. After queuing in a huge crowd for about an hour and carrying a wreath with my Czech Euro MP colleague we eventually laid it by the 'Eternal fire on the Square of the Fallen Heroes'. Whereas we carry poppies they have red carnations – real flowers and thousands of them. To see them all laid around the memorial was incredibly moving. The main event in the square was the victory parade but with tens of thousands of people around it we found it impossible to see anything so our guide very sensibly took us to the museum.

On the lower level of the museum are numerous wartime exhibits including a Coventry section where our 1942 embroidered tablecloth with the names of nearly 900 Coventry citizens hangs, together with the original 1944 twinning agreement signed by Mayor Alderman Grindley. The upper level is contained in a large dome with an amazing panoramic depiction of the Battle of Stalingrad which really does succeed in evoking the horrors of it all.

Near the museum is Coventry Street – in Russian. Once you've understood that the C is a K, V a B, E is backwards, N an H, R a P, and the Y something indescribable you knew where you were! As we left the museum it was closing early and we noticed serried ranks of Russian soldiers being drawn up.

A quick bite to eat and we set off to visit Gymnasium No3. And what you may well ask is that? Actually it's a school and this being a Saturday the pupils were hard at work. In Russia school is a six day week! Here they have seven lessons of English a week and only one of Russian and so we had a question and answer session in English and then a dance display - in costume - of English songs. One thing that they'd really appreciate is more links with Coventry schools so there's a challenge! Incidentally in their school brochure is a photograph of our late Lord Mayor Jack Harrison and on their notice board are photographs of former Lord Mayors Dave Chater and Jeff White.

Back on the bus we headed for Mamayev Hill where much of the wartime fighting took place. In the late afternoon we climbed up to the 'Hall of Eternal Glory' which houses an eternal flame and the names of 17,000 previously unidentified fallen soldiers engraved on the wall. To see yet more red carnations makes you think again about the enormous sacrifice the Russian people endured. We weren't able to stay long as we were gently, but firmly, moved on by Russian soldiers.

Apart from the obvious there is a distinct difference between the head of the Russian state and our own head of state. Whereas the Queen enjoys meeting the public in her many walkabouts the Russian leader doesn't seem to do people. You've guessed it, President Putin was in town and it seemed as if half the Russian army was there as well. We were ushered further and further away from the hall past the amazing fifty metre high statue of Mother Russia with her sword raised even higher – an amazing spectacle.

The Lord Mayor's chain cut little ice with the President's support team but perhaps cut just a little bit of muddy slush as we were helpfully directed through an army camp – specially constructed for the occasion – to a log cabin café above the Joseph Stalin museum. I never expected to find myself drinking coffee under a portrait of the man known as 'Uncle Joe'; someone too often associated with death and 'gulags'. After about an hour the Putin cavalcade departed and we were allowed to leave – by foot as our bus was banned from the 'exclusion zone' to allow the army to depart. Even our Russian interpreter was amazed by the whole performance and remarked that the 'admiring crowds' must have been airbrushed in to the newspaper photos of the popular President Putin!

Later than planned we met for a drink with Deputy Volgograd Mayor Mr Litvinenko who we'd had the privilege of meeting in Coventry last autumn when he visited for Remembrance Sunday weekend and took opportunity to see his son who's at school in England. We then had dinner with our Czech Euro MP and a delegation from Kazakhstan, one of whose members seemed to be a bit of an oligarch. Sadly I failed to persuade him to buy our beleaguered football club as he turned out to be an avid Chelsea supporter! Sleep was a bit short lived as we were up at 4am to start the journey home.

Visiting our original twin city was a great experience but also I think an important one. Firstly to maintain the links first forged all those years ago in the midst of the Second World War, secondly to appreciate that in our ever shrinking world what huge opportunities there are for our young people - particularly with the benefit of the internet to forge their own links and thirdly to develop further our trade, industrial, educational and cultural links.

I can't end without referring to the Volgograd roads. Their local Council has a unique way of dealing with potholes. They don't! It may explain why their drivers prefer the freezing weather as when snow covers the potholes – actually some of them are more like trenches – they get a smoother ride. Great though to see amongst the Ladas (yes, they still make them – fill them up with petrol and they double in value) that there was a good smattering of Range Rovers and Discoveries; probably in off road mode to cope with the potholes!

ENDS

List of background papers

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Papers open to public inspection

Civic Visit to Volgograd File

Description of paper: Report Back on Conference/Seminar Location: CH60

Authority for Attendance approved by Cabinet Member (Community Safety & Equalities)
on 8th November 2012