



Coventry City Council

Public report

REPORT BACK ON CONFERENCE/SEMINAR

REPORT TO: Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee 11th September, 2013
REPORT OF: Councillor John Mutton
TITLE: Report back on Delegation to City of Volgograd
DATE: 8th – 11th May, 2013
VENUE: Volgograd, Russia

1. Recommendation

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee is recommended to endorse the report of the delegation to the City of Volgograd and the development of plans to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the twinning between the cities of Coventry and Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad) in 2014.

2. Background

2.1 The Coventry delegation was invited by the City of Volgograd to attend their city commemorations of the ending of war in Europe in the Second World War and to continue the discussions and development of proposals for the 70th anniversary of the twinning that had been started by the Lord Mayor during his visit earlier in the year. The particular focuses of the visit were the development of cultural and arts links between the two cities and the development of Volgograd's proposals for a formal recognition by the United Nations of the importance of city twinning in developing good relations between different people in the world.

3. Cost of attending

	Costs Approved by Cabinet/Cabinet Member	Total of Actual Costs
Conference Fees	n/a	none
Flights	£1300	£1827.75
Additional Travel Expenses	Visas: £450 Travel Insurance: £49	Visas: £663.35 Travel Insurance: £49.01

Accommodation	None (hosted by city of Volgograd)	none
Subsistence	£200 for incidentals	£113.76 (meals/refreshments)

The flights and proved to be more expensive than the original figures quoted to the Council that were available when the report was approved; whilst the subsistence/incidental costs were lower than originally budgeted for as no untoward expenditure was required.

The total cost of £2653.87 was funded out of the Council's international budget.

4. Benefits

- 4.1 The Delegation met with the Acting Mayor of the City of Volgograd and the Director of the Council and other senior managers and politicians to discuss future plans for the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the twinning between Volgograd and Coventry. These discussions focused on how Coventry could support Volgograd in approaching the United Nations to recognise the importance of town twinning to the development of good relations between different people across the world and the key role that the cities of Volgograd and Coventry had played in establishing the movement.
- 4.2 It is believed that such an approach would strengthen the links between our two cities; promote peace and reconciliation; and also continue to build the two cities reputations internationally as centres where peace and reconciliation was being promoted. It was agreed Coventry would contact its own twin cities to promote this initiative and that both cities would need to work through their own national governments if the approach to the United Nations was to be successful. This work is due to be followed up later in the year following the local elections in Russia in September.
- 4.3 Discussions also took place about developing further the two cities' wider work on peace and reconciliation forward including the development of links between Departments covering peace and reconciliation studies in the cities' Universities and Volgograd's plans to develop an International Centre for Peace focusing on the contribution that people and communities working together can make to peace and reconciliation.
- 4.4 The delegation was invited to attend the annual commemoration events held in Volgograd to mark the ending of the Second World War in Europe. These annual commemorations remain very important to Russian people and the people of Volgograd in particular and included a military parade and the laying of red carnations at the Hall of Eternal Glory on the Mamayev Hill – the war memorial.
- 4.5 The visit offered the opportunity to understand better the changes in local government in Russia including changes in governance at a regional level and in the Volgograd region in particular. Some of the current political and social changes are reflected in the debate about the name of the city itself which is reflected in the frequent use of three names: Tsaritzyn (the original pre-revolutionary name); Stalingrad (Soviet era); and Volgograd (Soviet era but post-Stalin). The city is keen to continue to develop economically and some initial discussions took place about the possible development of trade links between the cities' respective chambers of commerce. This has since been followed up in Coventry and there seems to be potential in developing this work further.
- 4.6 The other main focus of the visit was the development of further artistic, cultural and community links between Coventry and Volgograd, including links between schools, and in particular in activities that could take place next year as part of the commemoration of the twinning anniversary – these do not all have to be sponsored or organised by the Council. The delegation visited two schools – one, the School of Choreography featuring extra-

curriculum dance activities and the other, Gymnasium Number 3, specialising in languages.

- 4.7 The delegation included Laura Elliott, Director of Artspace, an independent art charity that manages studios, community spaces, art events and outreach projects for the benefit of the public in Coventry. For the past three years Artspace has been contracted to provide Arts Development Services on behalf of Coventry City Council.
- 4.8 In January 2013 Artspace curated an exhibition of Coventry artists' work for inclusion in the 'Vita-Art-Time' festival at the Museum of Fine Arts in Volgograd in May 2013. As a result of undertaking this project, Laura Elliott was invited to act as a judge for the 'Vita-Art-Time' festival of graphics at the Museum of Fine Arts in Volgograd and as part of the delegation, Ms Elliott met with artists from Volgograd and from its other twinned cities to promote artists in Coventry that had submitted work for the 'Vita-Art-Time' festival. This included giving a presentation at the Museum of Fine Arts for 40 artists, members of the public and museum staff entitled 'Art in Coventry now and the possibilities for artistic connections between our twinned cities'.
- 4.9 Ms Elliott also met with the Director and Education Officer at the Museum of Fine Arts to discuss longer term opportunities for collaboration, including the development of a sound understanding of Volgograd's cultural offer and key locations and comparisons that could assist in future cultural exchanges e.g. Coventry is the city of three spires, Volgograd is the city of three names, education and importance of peace and reconciliation agendas, artists are interested in exploring the urban environment, traditional skills exchanges etc.
- 4.10 The delegation also visited the Volgograd Children's Gallery, a museum and education space dedicated to the development of young artists. The museum has subsequently donated 8 original art works created by children in Volgograd for exhibition in Coventry.
- 4.11 Future opportunities to be explored include:
- ***Exhibition of Coventry artists' work at the Museum of Fine Arts in Volgograd with a public Skype event:*** a conversation event between artists in Volgograd and Coventry and for the general public linked by Skype to show the exhibition of Coventry artists at the Museum of Fine Art and to discuss our cities and opportunities for collaboration. The International team in Volgograd has already committed to translating and providing technical support in Russia.
 - ***Exhibition of Volgograd children's art work in Coventry:*** an exhibition of the work of children donated by the Volgograd's Childrens' Gallery. Such an exhibition could also help promote other opportunities for exchange (physical and otherwise) between young people in the twinned cities.
 - ***Development of exchanges between artists in Coventry and Volgograd:*** development of proposals for future exchanges (physical and otherwise) for artists in the twinned cities with the Museum of Fine Arts. There are potential external funding avenues for such exchanges, including the British Council.
- 4.12 There is a range of opportunities arising from the delegation to Volgograd including the promotion of peace and reconciliation by Coventry and Volgograd; the possible development of economic and trade links; and joint artistic and cultural activities which could be developed as part of the commemoration of the twinning between the two cities.

List of background papers

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Papers open to public inspection

Description of paper: Report Back on Conference/Seminar

Location: CH60

Approved by Cabinet/Cabinet Member on: