

**Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination
Committee held at 2.00 p.m. on 11th September 2013**

Present:

Committee Members: Councillor Mrs Fletcher (Chair)
 Councillor Clifford (Deputy Chair)
 Councillor Blundell
 Councillor Sandy
 Councillor Skipper
 Councillor Taylor
 Councillor Thomas

Other Members: Councillor Bigham (for item 26 below)
 Councillor J Mutton (for items 23 and 24 below)
 Councillor Ruane, Cabinet Member (Housing and
 Heritage)

Employees (by Directorate):

Chief Executive's: V Castree, G Holmes, J Venn, A West
People: J Newton
Place: C Hickin
Resources: L Knight
Apologies: Councillors Abbott, Crookes, Kelly and Sawdon

Public business

20. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

21. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 7th August, 2013 were signed as a true record. Further to Minutes 13 and 14 headed 'Equality Strategy – Performance Report' and 'Equalities in Employment', the Committee noted that, at his meeting on 5th September, 2013 the Cabinet Member (Community Safety and Equalities) had accepted the recommendations put forward by the Committee.

22. Report Back on Conference – Civic Visit to Volgograd

The Committee considered a report of the former Lord Mayor, Councillor Sawdon providing details about the civic visit to Volgograd which took place from 31st January to 3rd February, 2013. The Lord Mayor had been invited to take part in a programme of commemorative events organised to mark the 70th anniversary of the victory of the Soviet people and military troops in the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943. The messages of friendship from Coventry to Stalingrad at this time resulted in the first ever twinning link between the two cities in 1944 which founded the worldwide twinning movement. The report highlighted the costs, the itinerary and the benefits associated with the visit. Reference was made to

the opportunity taken by the Lord Mayor to urge delegates to support the joint approach to the United Nations to officially recognise twinning as a way of promoting international peace and friendship (Minute 23 below also refers).

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee endorse the report of the former Lord Mayor's civic visit to Volgograd and the positive outcomes of the visit.

23. Report Back on Conference – Delegation to City of Volgograd

The Committee considered a report of the former leader of the Council, Councillor J Mutton providing details about the Coventry delegation visit to Volgograd which took place between 8th and 11th May, 2013. Coventry had been invited to attend Volgograd's commemorations to mark the ending of war in Europe in the Second World War and to continue the discussions and develop proposals for the 70th anniversary of the twinning between the two cities, as started by the Lord Mayor during his visit earlier in the year (Minute 22 above refers). The particular focuses of the visit were the development of cultural and art 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. The report highlighted the costs, the itinerary and the benefits associated with the visit.

The Committee questioned Councillor Mutton and the officer on a number of issues and responses were provided. Matters raised included a concern about the costs of visas; further information about the future opportunities for cultural and art links and the links between schools; and a suggestion that Coventry should provide a response to the recent homophobic murder in Volgograd.

RESOLVED that:

(i) The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee 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.

(ii) A briefing note on the future opportunities and actions arising from the visit to be circulated to the Committee.

(iii) Officers be requested to ensure that late charges for visas are not incurred when making arrangements for visits abroad.

(iv) The Committee recommend that the Cabinet Member (Policy and Leadership) use Coventry's links with Volgograd, as our twin city to express concern at the recent homophobic murder in the city. We should also use our positive relationship with the city to bring about change to the Russian state's current policies towards homosexuality.

24. Presentation to the European Union, Strasbourg

The Committee considered a report of the former leader of the Council, Councillor J Mutton concerning his visit to Strasbourg from 10th to 12th June, 2013 where he addressed the European Parliament to gain the support of its members to get the twinning movement officially recognised by the United Nations and for Coventry and Volgograd to

be recognised as the founders of the twinning movement. The report highlighted the costs, the itinerary and the benefits associated with the visit.

It was suggested that it would be appropriate for Coventry and Volgograd to be involved with any launch that was subsequently arranged to acknowledge the recognition.

RESOLVED that:

(i) Coventry continues to work in partnership with our twinned cities to get the twinning movement officially recognised by the United Nations.

(ii) As discussions progress on the recognition by the United Nations, officers work towards securing Coventry and Volgograd's involvement in the launch.

25. Civic Visit to Kiel, Germany for 131st Kieler Woche

The Committee considered a report of the Lord Mayor, Councillor Crookes, concerning his civic visit to Kiel from 21st to 24th June, 2013 to take part in the programme of events to mark the opening of Kieler Woche (Kiel Week). The report highlighted the costs, the itinerary and the benefits associated with the visit.

The Committee discussed the issues raised in the report including the wearing of the civic chains and badges of office which facilitated conversations with others; the feasibility of a 'Coventry Week' linked to other festivals in the city; and the request for support to promote more cultural exchanges with Kiel.

RESOLVED that:

(i) The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee endorse the report of the Lord Mayor's civic visit to Kiel and the associated Kieler Woche (Kiel Week) celebrations.

(ii) The Committee support the wearing of the civic chain and badges of office, when appropriate.

(iii) The issues raised by the former Lord Mayor, Councillor Sawdon concerning 'Coventry Week' and support to promote more cultural exchanges with Kiel be referred to the Chairs of the Advisory Panel for Sports Vision and Strategy, Tourism and City Wide Events.

26. Houses in Multiple Occupation - Recommendations from Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator informing of the outcomes of the work of the Task and Finish Group on Houses in Multiple Occupation (HiMO). A proposed report for Cabinet at their meeting on 8th October, 2013 and the report of the Task and Finish Group were set out at appendices attached to the briefing note. Councillor Bigham, Chair of the Task and Finish Group, and Councillor Ruane, Cabinet Member (Housing and Heritage) attended for the consideration of this item.

The briefing note indicated that the Task and Finish Group was established to look

at the options for addressing residents' concerns about HiMO following an increasing number of complaints being received about these properties, particularly from certain areas of the city. Three representatives from residents associations were co-opted onto the Group to assist. Consultation took place through an on-line questionnaire as well as Neighbourhood Forums. Representatives from Coventry and Warwick Universities provided evidence along with a representative from the National Landlords Association.

During the course of their investigations, it became clear to the Group that, whilst HiMOs were an issue, they were part of a wider problem caused by an increase in the private rented sector as part of the housing solution. As a consequence the Group were recommending the establishment of a further Task and Finish Group to further investigate issues relating to the private rented sector.

The Task and Finish Group had also considered the use of Article 4 Directions which removed 'permitted development rights' to switch from houses to smaller HiMO meaning that planning permission was required. It was a way for local authorities to manage the distribution of HiMO, however there were disadvantages to this approach. Other issues considered by the Group included the introduction of 'clearaway' days to manage waste and the use of existing enforcement powers to manage issues caused by HiMO and private rented sector houses.

The Committee questioned Councillor Bigham and the officers on a number of issues and responses were provided, matters raised included a suggestion that the recommendations in the briefing note should be stronger; whether the Council's planning policy was sufficient to be able to support challenges to Article 4 Directions and whether this was the right approach for the city; the involvement of Whitefriars Housing Association; and the financial implications associated with the proposed recommendations.

RESOLVED that:

(i) A Task and Finish Group be established to further investigate issues related to the private rented sector, in particular to look at additional and selective licensing, landlords and letting agents.

(ii) The public be encouraged to report issues in their communities using Coventry Direct.

(iii) Cabinet be requested to accept the recommendations below:

That Cabinet refers the recommendations to the relevant Cabinet Members with oversight provided by the Cabinet Member (Housing and Heritage):

1) That the Cabinet Member (Business, Enterprise and Employment) obtains further detailed evidence before approving the use of an Article 4 Direction, supported by planning policy, to support sustainable, contented and healthy communities as part of the wider housing strategy.

2) That the Cabinet Member (Community Safety and Equalities) and (Public Services) investigates further establishing 'clearaway' days to manage waste in communities heavily populated by HiMO, in partnership with the Universities and third sector.

3) That the Cabinet Member (Community Safety and Equalities) use existing enforcement powers more effectively to manage issues caused by HiMO and private rented sector houses, including waste and noise issues.

27. Outstanding Issues

The Board noted that all outstanding issues had been included in the Work Programme for the current year.

28. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2013/14

The Committee considered the Work Programme for 2013-2014 and were informed that the meeting on 9th October would be a health themed meeting to include reports on the City Wide Marmot Plan and the Statutory Advisor on Health. The meeting on 11th December was to be a single item meeting on Welfare Reform. It was agreed that Scrap Metal Licensing could be removed from the list of additional items.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme be updated to take account of the issues outlined above.

29. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no additional items of public business.

30. Meeting Evaluation

The Scrutiny Board discussed and evaluated the meeting. Members' comments would be used to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the future meetings.

(Meeting closed: 11.35 a.m.)