



Coventry City Council

Public report

REPORT BACK ON CONFERENCE/SEMINAR

REPORT TO: Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

REPORT OF: Lord Mayor, Cllr Lindsley Harvard

TITLE: Civic Visit to Volgograd and attendance at “Volgograd International People’s Diplomacy Forum: Dialogue Upon the Volga: Peace and Mutual Understanding in the 21st Century”

DATE: 29th October – 2nd November 2016

VENUE: Volgograd , Russia

1. Recommendation

1.1 Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee is recommended to endorse the report of the Lord Mayor’s civic visit to Volgograd and the attendance at the conference.

2. Background

2.1 As Lord Mayor of the City of Coventry, I was invited to present two papers at the “Volgograd International People’s Diplomacy Forum: Dialogue upon the Volga: Peace and Mutual Understanding in the 21st Century”. Travelling with me was Professor Alp Ozerdem, Professor of Peacebuilding and Co-Director of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University.

3. The Presentations

3.1 The first session comprised presentations from a panel of five, to a full audience of international delegates, civic dignitaries from Volgograd, students and staff from the universities and the Russian media. As one of the five panel members my contribution was a short introduction to stimulate debate into means that might be explored to decrease conflict in the world. The Panel then fielded questions from the audience.

3.2 The second session comprised presentations from a panel of three, to an audience that had selected the topic “Global and Regional Security: Main Challenges and Perspectives”. As one of the three panel members my contribution was a thirty minute presentation on the topic, focussing on four themes, with the aim being to stimulate debate. The themes were: (1) the resurrection/perpetuation of the cold war and its effects in Europe and in the Middle East; (2) terrorism associated with radical Islam; (3) climate change; and, (4) a growing gap between rich and poor, within and between nations. The Panel then fielded questions from the audience.

Subsequently, we received a letter of thanks from the Mayor of Volgograd that included the compliment: 'I would like to point out especially that the expert opinion of Coventry representatives has notably livened up the debates and made a profound impression on all attendees'.

4. Visit to a School

4.1 I was invited to inspect the facilities of Gymnasium Number 3 and to meet its staff and students. The inspection was followed by performances from the student orchestra and choir. I then gave an address to the assembly, followed by a question-and-answer session.

5. Visit to the Square of the Fallen Fighters, Mamayev Hill and the Museum Panorama Battle of Stalingrad

5.1 At the Square of the Fallen Fighters, alongside the Mayor of Volgograd, on behalf of the City of Coventry I laid flowers in remembrance of those killed in the Battle for Stalingrad.

5.2 Alongside the Mayor of Volgograd, on behalf of the City of Coventry, I laid flowers in remembrance of those killed in the Battle of Stalingrad at various points of commemoration as we ascended Mamayev Hill.

5.3 In company with the international delegation, I was given a conducted tour of the Museum Panorama Battle of Stalingrad.

5.4 The Battle of Stalingrad was fought between August 1942 and February 1943. Historians estimate that there were 2,500,000 casualties. It is seen by many as the turning point in the war against Nazi Germany.

6. Requests and responses

6.1 Teachers and pupils at Gymnasium No. 3 asked if I could help them to make contact with their counterparts in Coventry, with a view to setting up an exchange programme. I proffered the view that their aims would perhaps be better met via contact through social media, say through facetime meetings between students in their respective school classrooms. On my return, at a meeting with Kirston Nelson, Director of Education, Libraries and Adult Learning, I put forward this idea, which she agreed to pass on to Coventry schools.

6.2 A number of voluntary groups in Volgograd asked if there were ways if other groups could make contact with their counterparts in Coventry. On my return I met with Sue Ogle, Director of Operations and Development at Voluntary Action Coventry, who said that she would contact officials in Volgograd with a view to facilitating exchanges through social media.

6.3 Volgograd will be a host city of the 2018 European Football championship. Alongside their new stadium they are regenerating a park, sections of which will be dedicated to Volgograd's twin cities. Volgograd officials requested ideas of what they might situate in the section representing Coventry. On my return I sent them several images,

including the Three Spires, Lady Godiva, the crests of our two universities, the Sky Blues and the Wasps, and, specifically at their request, a photograph of an English oak tree. Also, I conveyed their request to Andrew Walster, Assistant Director, Streetscene and Regulatory Services.

6.4 The Mayor of Volgograd raised with me the question of whether requests made to the City Council by Vadim Aleksin, Chair of the Coventry Russian British International Cultural Centre, to be allowed to renovate Volgograd Square in Coventry could be granted. Mr Aleksin wants to renovate the memorial plaque, paint the ring road pillars bright colours, re-commission the water feature if possible, erect a stage for bands to perform under the ring road, and fit coloured lighting. He said this could be funded by the Russian Government if the Council gave permission. A decision on the latter is awaited.

6.5 Following the conference delegates were asked to add their names to a resolution calling for Volgograd to: establish 'a standing international discussion platform on the acute security problems and on the development of conceptual ways of improving the world order' to help strengthen peace and security and encourage international links; hold this annually on October 31 – World Cities Day – and encourage attendance; hold the next meeting on October 31, 2017 on the topic of “Strategy and Ideology of Peace in the 21st Century”; appeal for support to develop a “Big Eurasia” as a community of security and emphasise the ‘impermissibility of the expansion of military infrastructure in Europe’; encourage participation of youth, civic representatives and media to spread objective information about the international agenda; disseminate information about the international agenda; and, entrust the organizing committee to send the resolution to participants.

6.6 We have since been asked for photographs to display in a new museum in Volgograd, a section of which will be dedicated to destruction associated with World War Two. In response I had sent a number of post-blitz scenes in Coventry, including one of a Winston Churchill walkabout.

7. Cost of attending

	Costs Approved by Cabinet Member	Total of Actual Costs
Conference Fees	Nil	Nil
Flights	£380	£353.45
Additional Travel Expenses	£100 (Visa) £50 (Travel insurance)	£120.00 (Visa) £49.01 (Travel insurance)
Accommodation	Nil	Nil
Subsistence	£200	£16.18
TOTAL	£730	£538.64

8. Benefits

8.1 During my visit as Lord Mayor, I met with a number of senior politicians and officers from Volgograd. It was an excellent opportunity to strengthen our links and to continue to promote Coventry's message of peace and reconciliation.

8.2 As the Lord Mayor of Coventry, I was regarded as an honoured guest at all the functions attended. Civic gifts were exchanged between ourselves and Volgograd.

List of background papers

Proper Officer: Executive Director, Resources

Author: Councillor Lindsley Harvard, Lord Mayor

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(Any enquiries should be directed to the above)

Papers open to public inspection - None

Description of paper: Report Back on Conference/Seminar

Location: CH60

Approved by Cabinet/Cabinet Member on: 28th July 2016