
Council

08 December 2020

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership - Councillor G. Duggins (Leader)

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Law and Governance

Ward(s) affected:

ALL

Title:

UK City of Peace and Reconciliation

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

This report requests the Council to agree to a proposal to submit a petition the Cabinet Office to seek the formal recognition of Coventry as the UK City of Peace and Reconciliation. This would recognise the important role the City has played in advocating Peace and Reconciliation nationally and internationally and enable the City to be recognised in its Royal Charter as such.

Coventry has a rich and varied history dating back to 1043, and the time of Earl Leofric and Lady Godiva. Coventry was first recognised as a City in 1345. The City's history includes many important national events, but much of the City's identity today was formed in events which occurred in the twentieth century.

The City was bombed by enemy aircraft in November 1940 and we recognise the horror of war and its human impact in the preservation of the ruins of St Michael's Cathedral Church alongside the new Cathedral. The events of 1940 have had a lasting impact through the many changes which have occurred in the City over the intervening time and Coventry justifiably now regards itself as an International City of Peace and Reconciliation. The purpose of the petition will be for Coventry's history and actions in the promotion of Peace to be formally recognised in the City's charter.

Recommendations:

- (a) That the City Council endorses the proposal for Coventry to be designated as the UK City of Peace and Reconciliation, and
- (b) That the City Council authorises the Lord Mayor, in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council and Chief Executive to submit an appropriately worded Petition to the Cabinet Office in support of this proposal.

List of Appendices included:

None

Background papers:

None

Report title: UK City of Peace and Reconciliation

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 The Council is requested to formally endorse the proposal for Coventry to be designated as the UK City of Peace and Reconciliation. The City's work in promoting peace and reconciliation stems from the impact of the Second World War and the bombardment of the City by enemy aircraft culminating in considerable damage to the City Centre preserved for future generations by the preservation of the St Michael's Cathedral Church. On the day after the fires subsided in November 1940 Provost Richard Howard wrote the words "Father Forgive" on the walls of the ruined building thus shaping the post-war reflection on the impact of war.
- 1.2 The Council has been at the forefront of bringing communities together in the time since the end of the war, promoting formal partnerships through initiatives like town twinning and working together with others to manage the impact of violent conflict around the world.
- 1.3 The Council is part of several international partnerships dedicated to the promotion of peace and considers itself an International City of Peace and Reconciliation. The proposal is to seek a formal designation of this status in the Council's Royal Charter.
- 1.4 The proposal was suggested by Mr Michael Taberner, a local solicitor and resident of Coventry, who has approached the Council for its support in seeking an Order in Council for a royal warrant recognising the City's role in promoting peace and reconciliation. This report builds upon the extensive and detailed work that he has undertaken.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 The Council has the option not to pursue the proposal to seek a designation as UK City of Peace and Reconciliation however this would miss an opportunity to celebrate the positive contribution the City has played in promoting Peace and Reconciliation and may be able to play in the future.
- 2.2 The City will also be in the international spotlight during 2021 as the UK City of Culture. This event will celebrate both the City's diversity and cultural strengths and will be an opportunity to make a lasting impact building on the existing strong reputation in the sphere of Peace and Reconciliation.
- 2.3 The City has a Royal Charter which dates back to 1345. This document records the City's historical relationship with the monarchy and particularly references matters related to the links between the City and the Church of England. An addition to the Royal Charter celebrating the City's role in the promotion of Peace and Reconciliation will also allow for greater recognition of the multi-faith work done in the City and the success the City has had in promoting community cohesion celebrating the positive contribution made by all parts of the Coventry community.
- 2.4 The City's economic and social history includes welcoming dissidents from the Reformation, Huguenots fleeing religious persecution in France, Irish refugees fleeing the great famine and the City welcomed refugees from the Nazis before the war and afterwards. Over recent years the City has refined its historical role still further in welcoming people fleeing persecution and violent conflict. The City received refugees from the

conflicts of the late twentieth century including from the Balkans, and became an asylum dispersal area in 1999, supporting national efforts to manage asylum and migration flows. In 2015 the Council became one of the first local authorities to respond to national requests to support the impact of the terrible conflict in Syria.

- 2.5 The Council regards itself as a City of Sanctuary being pleased to host the national City of Sanctuary movement in their 2019 annual meeting. As well as its 26 twin cities, other international collaborations the City takes part in include the International Association of Peace Messenger Cities and the United National Alliance of Civilizations.
- 2.6 Since 2015 the City Council has worked closely with Coventry Cathedral and Coventry University to host the annual RISING Global Forum. This is a unique annual event gathering together peacebuilders, policymakers and academics from around the world to exchange brave and innovative strategies for resolving violent conflict and sustaining peaceful societies. Hosted by Coventry Cathedral's Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation working closely with the University's Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations this is a local partnership event but with impact felt internationally and acknowledged as a powerful global force for peace.
- 2.7 As the city becomes the UK City of Culture, there is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring communities together and celebrate the city's heritage and diversity. The successful bid for the City of Culture title has improved perceptions of the city nationally and internationally and there is an opportunity to convert this into sustained and lasting improvements for cohesion and engagement as part of the legacy.
- 2.8 Since 1994 the city has hosted the Positive Images Festival, a community-led annual festival celebrating the heritage culture and diversity of the city. Every June and July the city hosts multi-genre events spanning poetry reading, drama, music, literature, contemporary art exhibitions, food and more. The event takes place in multiple venues across the city bringing together many different communities in a positive celebration of the city's cultural talent. In 2016 the Positive Images Festival was given the Queens Award for Voluntary Service.
- 2.9 The petition will also provide a vehicle for the City to recognise its growing diversity and the strength that it gains from strong community relations and people from different cultures and faiths co-existing together. The 2011 census reported that 33% of the population identified as people from a Black or Minority Ethnic group and the expectation is that the 2021 census will see this proportion increase. The City's recent population growth has been driven by an increase in international migration along with increased births. Importantly however, whilst the City is becoming more diverse, recent household surveys have seen strong resident satisfaction with community cohesion.
- 2.10 The City has a rich history of association with Christianity, with the founding being linked closely to the establishment of a monastery by Earl Leofric. This petition will offer the opportunity to reflect more closely on diversity of belief in the City and the modern experience of multi-faith life here. The twentieth century saw significant number of people moving from South Asia leading to the Muslim community opening one of the first purpose-built mosques in the UK here in 1961, and the first purpose built Sikh temple opening in 1965. The Hindu community had an adapted building from 1968 with a purpose-built temple being opened in 1978. Coventry historically also had a Jewish community with a synagogue opening in 1870 and although now closed the building is being preserved as a sacred space.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 Limited consultation has been undertaken in advance of this report being presented. It is anticipated that on confirmation by the City Council that a petition can be prepared letters of support will be received by local stakeholders. The intention would be for the petition to be from the Council, with supporting correspondence appended to show the breadth of support in the City for this concept.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 The petition will be finalised and taken forward to the Cabinet Office as soon as possible.

5. Comments from Director of Finance and Director of Law and Governance

5.1 Financial implications

There are no specific financial implications.

5.2 Legal implications

The procedure for seeking a royal warrant (in recognition of the status of Coventry as UK City of Peace and Reconciliation) involves the submission of a petition to the Cabinet Office. If approval of the petition is recommended, then it would normally be followed by an Order in Council conferring the title.

6. Other implications

Any other specific implications

6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan (www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/)?

The Council Plan calls for Coventry to be Globally Connected and Locally Committed. The proposal for Coventry to be designated as the UK City of Peace and Reconciliation will reflect the City's heritage, enhance the City's image and support local partnership work promoting peace and reconciliation and mitigating the impact of war and conflict.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

There are no specific risks associated with this report.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

None

6.4 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

There are no specific implications from the report on Equalities. The proposal will continue and celebrate Coventry's work in promoting Peace and Reconciliation. This will enable the Council to continue to promote Equality and Diversity particularly in work to integrate newly arrived communities and in particular work to support those who have fled war or suffered persecution to resettle and begin new lives.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

There are no specific implications for the Council's partner organisations. This proposal is expected to attract widespread support from those organisations the Council already works with in promoting Peace and Reconciliation.

Report author(s):

Name and job title:

Peter Barnett CBE – Head of Service Libraries and Migration

Directorate:

Education and Skills

Tel and email contact:

02476 972 680

peter.barnett@coventry.gov.uk

Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

| Contributor/approver name | Title | Service Area | Date doc sent out | Date response received or approved |
|--|--|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Contributors: | | | | |
| Suzanne Bennett | Governance Services Officer | Law and Governance | 27.11.20 | 27.11.20 |
| Carol Bradford | Solicitor | Law and Governance | 27.11.20 | 27.11.20 |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Other members | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members) | | | | |
| Finance: Barry Hastie | Director of Finance and Corporate Resources | Finance and Corporate Resources | 27.11.20 | 27.11.20 |
| Legal: Julie Newman | Director of Law and Governance | Law and Governance | 27.11.20 | 27.11.20 |
| Director: Name | | | | |
| Members: Cllr George Duggins | Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership and Leader of the Council | | 27.11.20 | 27.11.20 |
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