144.    **Developing International Links**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Chief Executive, which sought approval for new international links to be developed with Jalandhar, India and to explore potential relationships and links with cities and regions in Brazil.

Coventry had an international reputation as a city of peace and reconciliation. In addition to its post-war historic links, the City had a wide range of international links and relationships - economic; educational and cultural – that continued to develop and change over time. The Council's international strategy directed and prioritised international activity including the development and support of key international links through formal civic engagement led by the Lord Mayor of Coventry. It was proposed that the current priorities of the Council's international activity should be maintained, and, in view of economic and global change, new international links should be considered and developed to support future growth and jobs in Coventry.

The report indicated that Coventry's most active civic international arrangements were with its most recent twin city, Jinan in China. This international link was developed thirty years ago by the Council working with local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce and it continued to be important for economic development activity. A review of potential trade and investment opportunities of civic links by the council's Business Growth Team and discussions with local businesses had identified the potential economic benefits to Coventry of exploring the development of civic links to the other "BRIC" countries (Brazil; Russia; India; China), in particular India and Brazil. A recent UK trade delegation to India led by the Prime Minister had emphasised the need to develop closer ties to take advantage of the potential economic opportunities for UK businesses.

In February 2012 the Lord Mayor of Coventry, Councillor Mulhall, made a civic visit to India. As part of the visit, the Lord Mayor's delegation had initial discussions with three cities in the Punjab region of India with a view to exploring potential civic links, aiming to build on local community links to help develop potential future economic benefits to the city. An assessment of the economic and cultural benefits of twinning had identified the city of Jalandhar as a potential twin city and it was proposed that the Council agreed to pursue a formal twinning link with Jalandhar.

In addition, the Cabinet noted that there was also currently considerable local business interest, including from the automotive industry, in South America, particularly in Brazil where it was anticipated that there would also be potential benefits for local businesses from the 2016 Olympic Games. Coventry did not have the strong community and cultural links with Brazil as it had with India and it was considered that the formal twinning route may not be the best way to develop links with cities in this country. It was therefore recommended that the Council should work with local businesses to explore potential relationships and links with cities and regions in Brazil which may take a different form to the more traditional civic twinning link.

RESOLVED that, after due consideration of the options and proposals contained in the report and matters referred to at the meeting:

1.      The Cabinet give approval:

      (a)      For International activity undertaken by the Council to continue to focus on three priorities:

                  •      Peace, reconciliation and supporting democracy
                  •      Economy, business and trade
                  •      Culture, education and community links

      (b)      To pursue formal civic twinning arrangements between the city of Coventry and the Indian city of Jalandhar.

      (c)      To work with local businesses to explore the development of new international links with Brazil,

      (d)      To continue to recognise the value of community-led international links and initiatives, providing civic support to such activities when it is appropriate

2.      The Cabinet recommend that Council endorse the decision detailed in 1 above.