

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 12 MAY 1998**

**LATVIA - PROPOSED VISIT**

**Report by Chief Executive**

**Summary**

This report seeks approval for a visit to Latvia by a small member/officer delegation to enable a number of potential initiatives to be pursued further and, in particular, to make provisional arrangements for a Trade Mission to the area in the spring of 1999.

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee is asked to approve a visit to Latvia by Councillor A Shand accompanied by the Economic Development Manager and Corporate Support Manager from 27 May to 2 June 1998, inclusive to enable various cultural/educational initiatives to be pursued and preparations made for a Trade Mission to the area in the Spring of 1998.

**2. BACKGROUND**

Reference is made to Report No. 1052/97 approved by the General Purposes Sub-Committee of the Policy and Resources Committee on 14 October 1997 when it was agreed that discussions could be entered into in connection with possible cultural and educational links with Latvia and also to Report No. 90/98 approved by the Policy and Resources Committee on 27 January 1998 which included Latvia in the overseas trade promotion schedule for 1998/99.

An invitation has been received from the Provost of Sigulda to visit during the last weekend of May at which time events in the town will provide maximum opportunity for discussions with appropriate representatives.

**3. CULTURAL/EDUCATIONAL LINKS**

As reported in October 1997, a number of initiatives are being explored in conjunction with the "Friends of Scotland" association based in the town of Sigulda just outside Riga, the principal city. Establishing these contacts has already brought advantages to Angus in that when the British Government wanted participation in its "British Week" last October, it approached the Friends of Scotland who immediately contacted Angus Council.

As a result of personal contacts made during two previous visits the Council is well established for developing potential links with that area and there is considerable interest in Latvia to establish links between schools, for language development in particular and to explore the potential for cultural exchanges (music/folklore etc).

In addition, EC funding is increasingly becoming available to assist in the Baltic State countries particularly in providing professional expertise through exchange visits and work placements.

This whole area is considered worthy of further exploration as it would demonstrate commitment to working with the authorities in that area in a positive and supportive manner while at the same time providing opportunities for the Council to establish its identity more strongly.

#### **4. TRADE LINKS**

It was intended as part of the approved Overseas trade Development Schedule for 1998/99, to participate in a Scottish Trade Exhibition in Latvia during summer 1998. This was to be an exploratory exercise to build on existing links.

However, difficulties have been experienced in appointing a Trade Development Officer which has impaired the Economic Development Unit's ability to prepare for this event within the restricted timescale and it is suggested that instead of participating in the planned event one further exploratory visit be made to prepare the way for a Trade Mission to Latvia in the spring of 1999.

#### **5. PARTICIPATION**

During the last two visits to Latvia strong personal contacts have been established by the Council's representatives not just in the town of Sigulda but also in various Government agencies/Chamber of Commerce in Riga. At these early stages it is useful to have continuity in these exploratory discussions.

On both occasions, Councillor Shand has attended at his own expense but has participated in all formal discussions and meetings and has even been interviewed for Latvian national television to promote Angus and its interest in establishing trade and cultural links. Much of what has been achieved has been as a result of his direct involvement since the presence of an elected member has been well respected by the authorities in Latvia.

Since the Council has now formally agreed to support the Latvian links and included it in the Overseas Trade Development Schedule, it is suggested that Councillor Shand should participate in the proposed visit as an official member of the delegation.

*It is recommended that the delegation should make use of these established contacts and comprise Councillor Shand, the Economic Development Manager and the Corporate Support Manager both from the Chief Executive's department.*

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The cost of the visit including travelling and accommodation is estimated to be £2000 which can be met from the Chief Executive's Revenue Budget (shared between Economic Development and Twinning).

## **7. CONSULTATION**

The Directors of Finance and Law and Administration have been consulted on the terms of this report.

A B WATSON  
Chief Executive  
May 1998

Note: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing this Report