



House of Commons  
Foreign Affairs Committee

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**The FCO's preparations  
for the 2018 World Cup  
in Russia: Government  
response to the  
Committee's Ninth  
Report**

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**Thirteenth Special Report of  
Session 2017–19**

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## The Foreign Affairs Committee

The Foreign Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its associated public bodies.

### Current membership

[Tom Tugendhat MP](#) (*Conservative, Tonbridge and Malling*) (Chair)

[Ian Austin MP](#) (*Labour, Dudley North*)

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The following Members were also members of the Committee during the Parliament:

[Ms Nusrat Ghani MP](#) and [Nadhim Zahawi MP](#)

### Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/facom](http://www.parliament.uk/facom) and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Tom Goldsmith and Hannah Bryce (Clerks), Dr Ariella Huff (Senior Committee Specialist), Ashlee Godwin, Dr Matthew Harries, Emma Makey, Dr Eoin Martin and Hannah Stone (Committee Specialists), Clare Genis (Senior Committee Assistant), Zara Emmett and Matthew Chappell (Committee Assistants) and Estelle Currie (Media Officer).

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## Thirteenth Special Report

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On 8 June 2018, the Foreign Affairs Committee published its Ninth Report of Session 2017–19, on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's preparations for the 2018 World Cup (HC 1011). The Government response was received on 6 August 2018. The response is appended below.

### Appendix: Government Response

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The Government notes the Foreign Affairs Committee's report on "The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Preparations for the World Cup", which was published on 8 June 2018.

This report sets out the Government's response to each of the Committee's conclusions and recommendations. The Committee's text is in bold and the Government's response is in plain text. Paragraph numbers refer to the Committee's report.

#### Risks to UK nationals

1. **Russia presents particular risks as a World Cup host, due to the history of violence by football hooligans; intolerance and discriminatory state policy towards LGBT individuals; the history of racist abuse in and around football matches; current heightened political tensions; and the threat of terrorist attacks. We remain concerned about the safety of UK fans travelling to Russia, and the apparent lack of specific provisions to protect targeted groups, particularly LGBT football fans. (Paragraph 17)**
2. *The Committee calls on the FCO to set out, clearly and publicly, the specific assurances it has received from the Russian authorities on the safety of LGBT fans, including on how the "anti-propaganda" law will be applied to foreign visitors, so that fans can make an informed decision based on the level of risk to which they will be exposed. LGBT fans should have as much information as possible on the extent to which they can expect to be safe if, for example, flying the rainbow flag, engaging in public displays of affection, or using bathrooms that correspond to their gender identity. (Paragraph 18)*

FIFA awarded the World Cup to Russia in 2010. The Local Organising Committee (LOC) provided assurances on the safety and security of all fans as part of their bid, and the Football Association (FA) were in regular dialogue with FIFA on these issues. The LOC's preparations were reviewed and tested by FIFA in the run up to the tournament, including during the FIFA Confederations Cup (a trial event for the World Cup) which was held in Russia in 2017. We also had practical experience from the five British teams who played in Russia since 2016 in European competitions.

The FCO worked closely with key partners—including the UK police, the FA and the Football Supporters' Federation (FSF)—who kept us informed of their assessment of the LOC's preparations. This information was shared with partners across government at the cross Whitehall co-ordination meetings which ran from March 2017. Staff from the

British Embassy in Moscow visited each of the eleven host cities on several occasions in the two years leading up to the tournament, and raised our concerns regarding fan safety with local organisers, as well as with the LOC and the Russian Government.

It is Government policy to respect the rights of all people. We disagree strongly with the Russian government over their attitudes towards LGBT+ rights and will continue to raise our concerns directly with them. We provide advice for LGBT+ travellers in our main Travel Advice for Russia, which we keep under regular review, and our "Be on the Ball" page provided a link to detailed guidance provided by the FSF for LGBT+ fans.

Alexey Smertin, anti-discrimination and racism inspector for the Russian Football Union, publicly stated on a number of occasions that LGBT fans would be welcome at the World Cup. The LOC consistently assured us that fans of all backgrounds will be safe and protected during their visit to Russia. We remained in touch with FIFA during the tournament to ensure that those assurances, for example on flying the rainbow flag at matches, were being met.

Preparations carried out by the FCO ensured the success of our consular operation. Fan behaviour was exceptionally good. We estimate that up to 20,000 England fans visited Russia during the World Cup, with a total of 33,000 tickets sold to addresses in the UK. We provided consular assistance to 50 British nationals who were in Russia for the tournament. This included six arrests, of which four were for football related anti-social behaviour. All of the individuals to whom we provided assistance have now returned to the UK.

### The FCO's preparations

**3. We note the evidence of the preparations for the World Cup that the FCO has been making over the last two years, and the testimony that UK-Russian co-operation on this point has been continuing post-Salisbury. We recognise the work of officials and others involved in these preparations, particularly those diplomatic staff who have remained in Russia following the expulsions and their colleagues who had to leave as a result of those expulsions. We believe it was wrong for the Russian government to expel British diplomats, particularly the officials leading on preparations and the safety of fans for the World Cup, and remain concerned that this will have hindered preparations and could put the safety of British fans at risk. (Paragraph 37)**

**4. We have been told that there will be rigorous security measures and consular support in place in cities where England plays, on match days, particularly within stadiums and official fan zones, and we look forward to seeing this happen. We are, however, concerned about the safety of UK fans outside these times and places, particularly those travelling to matches in which England is not participating. In addition, while reasonably extensive preparations have been made for the first three England matches, we are concerned that preparations for any subsequent matches will be more rushed. (Paragraph 38)**

**5. *The FCO should do more to make fans aware of the distinction between arrangements that will be in place on match and non-match days, and in England and non-England match cities. (Paragraph 38)***

During the tournament the FCO had permanent representation in three of the eleven host cities (Moscow, St Petersburg and Ekaterinburg).

The FCO has a well-established procedure in place for major international sporting tournaments like the FIFA World Cup. Mobile Embassy and police teams were deployed to every city that England played in for match day and the days before and after. There was an Operations Centre in Moscow for the duration of the tournament. In parallel, the FCO rostered staff at an operations centre in London as a precaution for every England match.

British nationals requiring assistance are able to contact us by telephone 24/7 by calling the FCO in London or our embassies and consulates overseas. Our operators can provide information and advice about the consular services available. Where they are unable to help the caller to resolve the issue themselves, or when they judge that the caller needs urgent assistance, they pass the call on to the nearest embassy or consulate. If they are closed, the call is passed to our Global Response Centre in London. These arrangements worked well during the World Cup, and were set out in all of our consular communications.

While the expulsion of our diplomats made our preparations more challenging, we were able to manage this situation. This was thanks to the dedication of those who continued to work on the issue on their return to London, and the efforts and agility of our remaining staff in Russia, supported by the targeted deployment of colleagues from the UK and across the Eastern Europe and Central Asia network. The entire FCO network provided support to the World Cup effort, including by releasing staff for deployment to Russia.

The FCO's operations during the tournament also benefited from two years of preparations. This included multiple visits by staff from the British Embassy in Moscow to each of the eleven host cities to build relationships with local officials, to see first-hand the challenges that travelling supporters may face, and to obtain practical information to inform our planning and advice. A delegation made up of the UK police, the FA, the Football Supporters' Federation and FCO staff visited Russia for the FIFA Confederations Cup (June/July 2017), and again in February 2018 to visit the host cities where England were due to play in the opening round. There was also in-country Diplomatic Academy training on consular skills for non-consular staff in the Russia Network, as well as crisis exercises.

The co-operation between UK and Russian police held firm, underpinned by the strong relations built up over six reciprocal visits in the lead up to the tournament. And the Russian police took a non-confrontational approach to problems involving foreign nationals during the World Cup.

**6. We welcome declarations by the FCO and other witnesses that they have received adequate reassurances on Russia's commitment to keep fans safe. However, in our view these reassurances are undermined by:**

- **Russia's decision to expel UK officials working on World Cup preparations;**
- **Supportive attitudes on the part of some Russian politicians towards previous hooligan violence;**

- **The advice of Russian civil society groups not to trust the government's reassurances on LGBT issues; and,**
- **The present volatility of UK-Russian relations. (Paragraph 39)**

7. **The FCO told us that it would advise UK nationals not to attend the World Cup if it could not guarantee their safety. Given the volatile state of UK-Russia relations, and the fact that the FCO's assessment of Russian reactions to Salisbury is ongoing, it is particularly important that the Government can communicate with UK fans during the tournament. In the context of 150,000 UK citizens travelling to Russia annually, the fact that only 8,800 people are subscribed to the FCO's travel advice seems worryingly low, and suggests that many fans intending to go to the World Cup do not receive the alerts. (Paragraph 40)**

8. *Given the volatility of the relationship and the nature of the Russian state, it is essential that, if the security situation deteriorates, the Government is prepared to act fast and decisively to advise fans against travel to the World Cup or to advise those in country to avoid a location, stay in their hotels, or even leave the country should the situation demand it. Although there is now little time to do so, the FCO should, as a matter of urgency, take additional steps to encourage UK fans to sign up for its travel alerts, so that it can keep as many fans as possible informed of any developments while they are in Russia. It should learn from this experience to ensure more people are subscribed to its travel alerts before future similar events. (Paragraph 41)*

We were explicit in our evidence to the Committee that it was for the Russian authorities to ensure the safety of all fans. The FCO only advises against travel where we assess the risks to British nationals would be unacceptably high.

The purpose of FCO Travel Advice is to provide information and advice to help British nationals make their own informed decisions about foreign travel. We keep our Travel Advice under constant review and update it as quickly as possible if we are aware of an incident that might significantly affect British nationals travelling or living in the affected area. We assessed and monitored the full range of risks to British nationals before and during the tournament, updating our Travel Advice regularly. We made sure that it included information on the risks most likely to affect their safety and security.

That is why our "Be on the Ball" campaign and other public communications encouraged British nationals travelling to Russia for the FIFA World Cup to subscribe to receive automatic e-mail alerts whenever our Russia Travel Advice was updated. As anticipated the numbers registered for our e-mail alert service increased in the run up to the tournament. As at 31 May 2018, 11,674 people were subscribed for e-mail alerts for Russia; an increase of 32.8% on our figure for February. We continued to promote our Travel Advice during the tournament. The FCO Travel Advice page for Russia had a total of 66,255 unique page views in June, and 51,211 unique page views so far in July (as at 27 July), and more than 900 people signed up for e-mail alerts during June and July.

Our e-mail alert service is one of a number of methods the FCO uses to inform the travelling public about a significant change to our advice. Other methods include our digital and social media channels, briefing the media, our staff on the ground, and communications through our partners, which includes the travel industry.

Our main means of communicating with fans on the World Cup was through our “Be on the Ball” campaign, which is a recognised brand having first been used for the 2004 European Championships. The 2018 World Cup version was launched in July 2017. “Be on the Ball” aims to reduce the number of preventable problems fans could experience by giving them practical information and advice related to the tournament to help inform their planning.

Our “Be on the Ball” page had 59,288 unique views between 1 June 2017 and 25 July 2018. Our messaging was picked up in both the national broadcast and print media, and used in various media engagements, not just by the FCO but by partner organisations such as the FA and the UK Football Policing Unit. We also have an ongoing relationship with the Football Supporters’ Federation (FSF), who published our advice in their fan guides (“Free Lions”) for the tournament and for each England game. Identifying key partnerships was a key component of the campaign strategy to reach British fans going to Russia. As a result, over ten targeted partners supported “Be on the Ball”, including Drinkaware, the FA, the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA), Skyscanner, and Visit Russia. Bespoke materials were created for the FA Fan Forums, which FCO officials attended, and were handed out to fans intending to travel to Russia. 6,000 fan cards were produced and distributed to fans on the ground in Russia by FCO and FSF teams.

**9. It is important that LGBT, BAME and other minority groups have all the necessary information to make an informed decision on whether to attend the World Cup, how to stay safe while there, and what steps to take if they face intimidation or violence. Though the Government recognises the issue, we are concerned that their approach in this area has been overly complacent. While we welcome the FCO’s commitment, following our suggestions, to update the Be on the Ball website with warnings about the risks to LGBT and BAME individuals, not to have taken this step earlier means that the FCO has missed a trick. (Paragraph 42)**

**10. We recognise that the FCO is limited in what it can reveal publicly about its concerns, and about the levels of consular staffing, before the World Cup has concluded. *Given these restrictions, the FCO should report back to us after the tournament has concluded. This report should cover its consular operations, police co-operation, and any challenges the FCO faced, as well as an assessment of how far Russia’s assurances were fulfilled in practice. It should also set out what it has learned from the tournament, to help inform preparations for future events. We ask the FCO to provide us with this information by the end of September.* (Paragraph 43)**

The FCO has a longstanding working relationship with groups working on LGBT+, BAME and other issues both in and outside of Russia. The FCO hosted a fan engagement meeting in January 2018, and an FCO officer participated in an event run by the FA in February 2018 with minority groups. Both events were part of an ongoing dialogue on these and other issues, and helped inform our planning.

Following the commitment given by the Minister of State, Harriett Baldwin MP, during her appearance before the Committee on 9 May 2018, the “Be on the Ball” page was updated to provide specific information for LGBT+, BAME and disabled fans. And the information provided on the main travel advice page for Russia for LGBT+, BAME and disabled travellers was refreshed.

This advice was kept under regular review during the tournament. For example, advice was published from CAFE on an accessibility guide for disabled spectators and spectators with limited mobility, as was the Diversity Guide to Russia produced by the Fare Network. The British Embassy in Moscow and Consulate in St Petersburg also provided support to local “Diversity Houses” which offered advice to LGBT+ fans. Providing links to information received from respected organisations is an important part of ensuring fans have the information they need. However such information is often only available immediately prior to the tournament.

The Committee will be aware that the Government Equalities Office published the LGBT Action Plan on 3 July 2018. As part of this the FCO committed to provide better travel advice for LGBT people, in particular ensuring that issues specific to LGBT travellers are addressed in travel advice communications.

While the lessons learned exercise is ongoing, this response to the Committee’s report outlines the principal conclusions on the FCO’s operations during the World Cup in Russia in 2018.

## Future World Cups

**11. We regret that the World Cup is hosted by countries with poor human rights records, and which pose a heightened degree of risk to football fans. *The FCO should monitor the selection process for the 2026 World Cup hosts, and report back to us its assessment of how effectively the new conditions have served to ensure that host countries respect human rights—including the rights of LGBT and BAME individuals. That report should also set out what further steps are needed to ensure that FIFA treats human rights considerations adequately; and how the FCO and other departments intend to feed back to FIFA on this point. We ask to receive this report by the end of September.* (Paragraph 45)**

As the Committee will be aware, FIFA has made a number of changes to its processes following the decision to award the tournament to Russia (in 2018) and Qatar (in 2022). In 2016, FIFA adopted a new provision in their statutes (article 3) which states, “FIFA is committed to respecting all internationally recognised human rights and shall strive to promote the protection of those rights.” In 2017, they established a Human Rights Advisory Board. All bids to host future World Cups are now required to include a human rights strategy. This is then subject to external review - for the right to hold the 2026 tournament this was carried out by Business for Social Responsibility - with explicit reference to the UN’s Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. These reports are publically available on FIFA’s website.

Another change was for the decision to be made by the 211 member associations instead of the FIFA Executive Committee, and for the results of the vote to be publicly available. The FIFA Congress which met in Moscow on 13 June 2018 voted to award the 2026 tournament to a joint bid submitted by Canada, Mexico and the United States of America. The Football Association (FA) voted in favour of this bid, as did the Scottish Football Association, the Football Association of Wales and the Irish Football Association. The FA stated that they “welcome the fact that the bidding process was both open and transparent.”

The FCO does not have responsibility for policy towards FIFA. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport leads on the Government's relationships with sports organisations in general, and can be approached for further information.