

# **Role of the Town Twinning Network in supporting Twinning and Friendship Links in and around Swindon**

**Town Twinning Network  
2010**

**Date: 29 September**

**Author: Director of Law and Democratic Services**

**Wards Affected: All**

## **Purpose**

- At the meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2010, members of the Town Twinning Network asked that a report be submitted to their next meeting outlining how the Network and Swindon Borough Council support Town Twinning activities within the Borough of Swindon.

## **Recommendation**

The Town Twinning Network is asked to: -

- Note the contents of the report.

## **1. Reasons**

- 1.1 A number of discussions have taken place over the last few years regarding the role of the Town Twinning Network and, in particular, the commitment of Swindon Borough Council in supporting Town Twinning and Friendship Link activities within the Borough of Swindon. At the last meeting, held on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, Bruce Clarke, Andy Lane and David Martin submitted a proposal that the Network became an arms length organisation in order that it could apply for external sources of funding, especially EU funding, and that it could generate a more entrepreneurial approach to Town Twinning, whilst retaining its Civic links with the Council.
- 1.2 Further information was requested as to how this arms length organisation could be developed and a submission from Bruce Clarke is attached to this report as Appendix 1. Alongside this, members of the Network also asked for a report to be prepared by the Director of Law and Democratic Services, outlining how the current structure within the Council supports the activities and development of Twinning within the Borough of Swindon.

## **2. Detail**

- 2.1 In 1999 the Council agreed that a Town Twinning Network should be established and that this Network should have its own constitution.

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Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Alison Smith on 01793 463612 or Email [alsmith@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:alsmith@swindon.gov.uk).

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---

The constitution is attached as Appendix 2 and lists the four objectives of the Town Twinning Network as:

- The Town Twinning Network will act as a co-ordinating body for interested groups and individuals seeking to promote twinning links with the Twin Towns of Swindon (currently Salzgitter and Ocotal)
- The Town Twinning Network will seek to co-ordinate fund raising and publicity in relation to Town Twinning but will not itself undertake these activities.
- The Town Twinning Network will seek to encourage the development of international friendship links and commercial links between the people of Swindon and communities in other Countries by the provision of a forum for discussion and the exchange of information.
- The Town Twinning Network will receive and consider applications for Town Twinning grants, and make recommendations to the Council.

- 2.2 A number of discussions have taken place over the last few years regarding the role of the Town Twinning Network and, at the meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2007, members of the Town Twinning Network reviewed both the name of the Network and the contents of the constitution to ensure that they were up to date and relevant. At this meeting, agreement was reached by the members of the Town Twinning Network that no changes were necessary to either the constitution or the name of the Network as it was felt that the Town Twinning Network should continue in the manner for which it was originally established.
- 2.3 The Network currently functions adequately as a forum for discussion and the exchange of information. However, some members of the Network feel that the current Council structure restricts any effective development of twinning and linking activities and, as a result, have put forward a proposal to develop an arms length civic twinning/friendship organisation that would *“see an organisation set up as a legal entity that enshrines its civic responsibilities to the Mayors represented in the Network and that would be able to raise funds through grants and EU funding sources, maintaining a close relationship with authorities through service level agreements and seek sponsors such as the Bristol Twinning example that is housed in the University of West of England”*.
- 2.4 Members of the Town Twinning Network have also raised other concerns over the last few years, namely in relation to the funding of grants for Town Twinning activities and in the provision of officer support to assist groups with their activities, particularly in relation to assistance in applying for funding from external sources.

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## Funding

A report was submitted to the Town Twinning Network meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2010 informing members of the Network of the funds currently available for Town Twinning grants and the background as to how these funds were established. Members noted that the fund had been established in 2001 and that the fund would decline with every Town Twinning grant awarded or any overspend on the cost of official Civic Twinning activities. This fund currently stands at £5250. This report prompted some members of the Network to review the structure and has resulted in the proposal to establish an arms length organisation.

## Officer support

Currently, the Council's commitment to supporting the Town Twinning Network is to provide a clerk to service the Town Twinning Network meetings.

In 2004, a commitment was given to the Network that the then Senior Economic Development Officer would spend one to one and a half days per month on Town Twinning activities. This commitment ceased when the officer left Swindon Borough Council in 2006 and, whilst a number of requests were submitted to both the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive for similar officer support to be provided, these requests were unable to be met within existing resources.

- 2.5 It is highly unlikely that additional funding and/or officer support would be provided to the Town Twinning Network in the current economic climate and members of the Network may want to give consideration to whether changes should be made to the current structure, in conjunction with the proposal to develop an arms length organisation.

## 2.6 Cost benefit analysis

Salzgitter Twinning Association and Swindon Ocotol Link each receive an annual grant from the Council of £500 and £1800 respectively as these are the two official twin towns with Swindon. Each group has to complete an application form to be eligible for this grant each year and to provide information as to how the grant was to be spent

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Swindon Salzgitter Twinning Association received £500 last year (2009/10) and the grant was used to assist with the group's administrative expenses through the following activities:-

- Attracting new members by publicity
- Organising monthly business and social meetings for members; and
- Arranging a cultural visit to Salzgitter in May/June 2010.

Other funding was raised by members paying an annual subscription fee and from fund raising events. At the time of writing this report, Swindon Salzgitter Twinning Association had not yet submitted their application for a grant for 2010/11.

Swindon Ocotal Link received £1800 for 2010/11 and a detailed service level agreement outlined how this grant would be used and provides information under the following headings:-

- Facilitate exchange of citizens between the two towns
- Arrange 20 year Anniversary visit from Ocotal to Swindon
- Promote community to community and people to people links
- Provide a national profile
- Facilitate official civic communication between the two towns
- Provide opportunities for learning in our schools and communities about the example of Ocotal
- Raise funds for social projects in Ocotal: and
- Raise the profile of Ocotal.

## Alternative Options

- Not applicable

### Risk Management

#### *Financial and Procurement Implications*

- There are no direct financial or procurement implications relating to this update. Any future activity that has financial implications would be subject to a separate report.

#### *Legal / Human Rights Implications*

- This report has no specific legal or human rights implications.

#### *Links to Corporate Plans and Policies (in particular to Swindon 2010 Promises)*

- There are no direct links to Town Twinning within the Council's Corporate plans and policies.

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## **Consultees**

- The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

## **Background Papers and Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Update to the Town Twinning Committee on establishing an autonomous International Linking group (submission from Bruce Clarke).
- Appendix 2 - Constitution of the Town Twinning Network