

Review of Town Twinning

Cabinet

Date: 17th October 2012

Author:	Leader of the Council and Director of Law and Democratic Services
Wards:	All
Locality Affected:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1 Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 In March 2012, Cabinet requested that a review of town twinning take place.
- 1.2 This report highlights the current position with regards to town twinning activities in and around Swindon and highlights issues raised by members of the Town Twinning Network in response to this review.

2 Recommendations

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Confirm its commitment to town twinning activities in and around Swindon and to recognise the potential of twinning in promoting international links involving Swindon's citizens, groups and businesses;
- 2.2 Recognise the value of the Town Twinning Network in providing a forum for discussion and exchange of information, in addition to supporting the development of other international links;
- 2.3 Note the importance of the Civic and Mayoral roles in supporting and promoting town twinning activities and that formal recognition by the Mayor's Office would provide support to the development of important international relationships;
- 2.4 Subject to 2.3 above, recommend to Council that the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor be formally appointed as *ex officio* members of the Town Twinning Network; and
- 2.5 Consider what further support could be provided to support town twinning activities such as promotional and marketing activities, through the use of existing Council services.

3 Detail

- 3.1 There are two formal twinning arrangements with Swindon Borough Council, one with Salzgitter (Germany) that was established in 1975 and one with Ocotal (Nicaragua), established in 1990. Each of these organisations receives a grant each year to assist with their administration costs (Salzgitter receives £500 and Ocotal receive £1800).

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- 3.2 In addition to the formal twinning arrangements, Swindon also has friendship agreements with Torun (Poland) and Chattanooga (USA).
- 3.3 Each of these groups organise their own fundraising, activities, events and exchange visits and usually give an update on their activities at each town twinning network meeting.
- 3.4 The Town Twinning Network was established in 1999 to provide a forum for discussion and the exchange of information as well as encouraging the development of other international links. In addition to those twins and friendship links mentioned in 3.1 and 3.2 above, a number of other organisations involved in twinning activities regularly attend the town twinning network meetings. They are:-
- Wroughton – St Germain les Corbiel Twinning Association
 - Highworth-Pontorsion Twinning Association
 - Geminid
 - Potential link with Mauritius
 - Potential link with Somaliland
- 3.5 The economic benefits of twinning can include activities and events that generate interest in the town and bring money into Swindon either in grants or by visitors. Some examples of economic activity and income brought into the town over the last 20 years include:
- Swindon / Ocotol Link organises between 3 and 4 events per year and which raises £5,000 - 6,000 of which 20% goes in funding hall hire, materials, printing, travel and tickets. Similar activities by the many linking groups in and around Swindon would reflect this level of economic activity.
 - One successful EU bid brought to the town £25,000 that paid for a youth work project.
 - Another successful EU bid brought in sufficient funding to redesign two streets in the Manchester Road area as well as attracting several EU partner workshops.
 - There have been two EU twinning conferences over the years bringing 25+ visitors for several days and included conference venue bookings. One of these conferences focussed upon the benefits to tourism and business opportunities arising through twinning and was organised by the Swindon Salzgitter Twinning Association.
 - Continental street markets held during the above conference.
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Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Alison Smith, Direct Dial 463612, alsmith@swindon.gov.uk.

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- A recent visit by the Saltzgitter football team brought 10-12 visitors for several days to the town, all spending money in Swindon.
 - Adult education partnerships and EU funded projects have brought to Swindon around 5 conferences involving 10 - 20 visitors on each occasion which lasted over 4-5 days.
 - Visitors have returned to Swindon to study English.
 - A number of work experience exchanges involving apprentices, office workers and students have taken place.
 - Links with South America have established an annual event at the Arts Centre attracting large audiences 'South America Comes to Swindon.'
 - Many schools have brought over teachers through EU funded programmes bringing income into the town.
- 3.6 The Town Twinning Network believes that the Council is well placed to access EU funding, either as a lead body or as a partner. There are a number of EU Funded programmes that are available for twinning activities including:
- Youth exchanges
 - Education and Training programmes
 - Language programmes
 - School Teacher and student exchange Programmes
 - Culture
- 3.7 Forms to apply for EU funding are incredibly detailed and complex and a certain level of knowledge and expertise is required in order to submit a successful application. The level of grant available for each programme is different and a detailed knowledge of the amount of grant available for each programme is also necessary as applications have been known to fail in the past as not enough money had been requested. It may be that external specialist help could assist groups in maximising their chances of getting a grant and bringing money into the town.
- 3.8 The Town Twinning Network also felt that the Council could communicate its Civic support for all European and international applications being made by organisations, schools and community groups. In this way, the Mayor's Office is aware of applications from the start and it communicates the message that the Mayor's Office takes seriously Swindon's Civic role in supporting international links. On that basis, it is suggested that the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of the day be each appointed as members of the Town Twinning Network, *ex officio*.
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- 3.9 There is the potential for twinning activities to complement the economic strategy in that international links have already been established and officers could look to make use of these existing connections in order to generate business within Swindon. The Civic link with Salzgitter also offers further opportunity for links to be made between businesses in Swindon and Salzgitter that could lead to economic investment within Swindon.
- 3.10 Whilst the twinning and link organisations that currently make up the Town Twinning Network could provide some help in providing initial contacts, they do not have the resources or expertise to generate business links. The majority of the groups were set up to develop cultural links between two towns and their main activities include exchange visits with a small amount of fundraising to enable these visits to occur. The members of the Town Twinning Network are, however, willing to support the implementation of the Council's economic strategy where it is possible.
- 3.11 The Town Twinning Network would support the Council using its economic development partner, Forward Swindon, to promote better economic links with our international links, partners, friends and seek support through maximising the opportunity of EU funding to support this and other International link activity.
- 3.12 Over the last five years, the town twinning network has reviewed their purpose and constitution and have actively encouraged attendance at their meetings from the youth forum, schools, police and the Chamber of Commerce. Unfortunately, attempts to encourage young people to participate in the network have been unsuccessful and the Chamber of Commerce have not attended meetings for a number of years.
- 3.13 Officer support is limited and, currently, the Council's commitment to supporting the Network is to provide a clerk to service the meetings. The Chair of the Network has requested additional officer support in the past but these requests were unable to be met within existing resources.
- 3.14 A small town twinning grants budget is available and currently stands at about £5,000. Groups can apply for a grant of up to £1,000 but once the £5,000 has been spent, there will be no additional budget available for grant funding.
- 3.15 Civic visits to Salzgitter occur every other year and the next visit would be held during 2012/2013. Swindon Borough Council only pays for the cost of flights to Salzgitter but pay all costs when visitors from Salzgitter come to Swindon. The total budget for Civic twinning is £2,000 per annum. In the past, any excess from this budget was put towards the town twinning grants budget. However, due to increased travel and accommodation costs, this is no longer the case.
- 3.16 Members of the Town Twinning Network were asked for their views as part of this review. A copy of the responses received is attached as Appendix 1, but, in summary, the main issues raised were:-

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- Better recognition of town twinning activities and benefits by departmental heads and Lead Members.
- Greater promotion of twinning activities within the town.
- More focus upon the economic benefits of twinning to Swindon.
- Better resources available to access EU and other funding.
- Greater involvement from the Mayoral office/Mayoral attendance at events etc.
- The value of the Town Twinning Network in helping to support the work of individual groups and to provide access to and an understanding of the functions of the Council.

3.17 Further discussion took place at the Town Twinning Network meeting held on 13th June 2012. Members of the Network were very clear that, in order to undertake twinning properly and effectively, there needed to be a clear commitment, from both Councillors and officers, to the value of twinning and an understanding of the social and economic benefits that twinning could bring to Swindon.

3.18 Councillor Dart, the late Chair of the Town Twinning Network, fully endorsed those comments made by members of the Network that commitment and support from the Cabinet, Councillors and from officers is essential in order to continue with town twinning activities effectively. Having being involved in Town Twinning for a number of years, she was keen for twinning to be revitalised and for the social and economic benefits to be recognised.

4 Alternative Options

4.1 Cabinet may decide to withdraw any support for town twinning.

5 Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

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

Legal and Human Rights Implications

5.2 This report has no specific Legal or Human Rights implications.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

5.3 This report has no specific implications relating to staff, sustainability, health, rural, crime and disorder.

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Links to One Swindon, Strategic Objectives, Plans and Policies

- 5.4 There are no specific links between Town Twinning and One Swindon, Strategic Objectives, Plans and Policies.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.5 A Diversity Impact Assessment has not been completed for this report as no changes to staffing, budget or service eligibility criteria are proposed.

Risk Management

- 5.6 A risk assessment has not been undertaken.

6 Consultees

- 6.1 The Board Director Finance, Revenues, Benefits and Property (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7 Background Papers

None.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Feedback from members of the Town Twinning Network regarding the review.

9. Key Decision/Decision in Forward Plan

- 9.1 This is not a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Forward Plan / Work Programme for October 2012.