

REPORT TO Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting: 24th November 2016
Report of: Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support
Title: TWINNING ARRANGEMENTS
Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1.1 What is the report about?

- 1.1 This report provides a review of the current twinning arrangements that the City Council has, as well as detailing future involvement in events of mutual benefit and how such involvement could have a wider benefit to the community.
- 1.2 It also uses this opportunity to review the International Cooperation Strategy, produced in 2004.

2. Recommendations:

2.1.1 That the current twinning arrangements be noted;

2.1.2 That the involvement of the Council in future twinning initiatives be noted and endorsed as appropriate.

2.1.3 That the Council encourages other organisations within the City to be involved in twinning opportunities as and when they arise;

2.1.4 That the Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support reviews the International Cooperation Strategy for consideration by the Executive for full Council approval.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

- 3.1 The City has an active twinning community which is supported by annual grants, as well as inward and outward visits between Exeter and its four twin cities.
- 3.2 However, the basis upon which such twinning agreements were developed, has changed considerably since they were first entered into, and it is felt appropriate that the Council reappraise its continuing support for them, so that the Council and other organisations within in the City maximise the opportunities that such agreements offer.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.

4.1 There are no additional costs attributable to the contents of this report.

4.2 However, it should be noted that in addition to officer support (principally from the Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support), the Council offers the following annual grants:-

- £3,500 to the Exeter Twinning Circle (which covers the agreements with Rennes, Bad Homburg and Terracina)

- £1,100 to the Exeter Yaroslavl Twinning Association

4.3 The Lord Mayor is Honorary President of both organisations.

4.4 It should be noted that the level of these grants has not been increased for a number of years.

4.5 The Council also contributes to the costs involved in any formal exchange visits, with such contributions coming from the Lord Mayoralty Hospitality budget.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 There are no financial implications contained in this report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 There are no legal implications contained in this report.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

8.1 The City Council has formal twinning agreements with the following cities:-

- Rennes (France) signed in 1956
- Bad Homburg (Germany) signed in 1965
- Terracina (Italy) signed in 1988
- Yaroslavl (Russia) signed in 1989

8.2 All were signed and agreed for *promoting and encouraging the exchange of cultural, educational and sporting activities between the communities*. Several were also based on strong links between universities in the cities.

8.3 In most recent times, the majority of the continuance of the links between the relevant cities has been undertaken via the two twinning groups based in the City, hence the payment of annual grants to each organisation. They each organise both an annual inward and outward visit to the twin cities for their interested members. Whilst the annual grants from the City Council goes some way to the costs involved in twinning, they each rely heavily on subscriptions from their members, as well as other fundraising activities.

8.4 One matter which both Associations are keen on, and are looking towards the City Council to provide, are road signs at appropriate locations on entrances into the City. These, they suggest, would be an easy way to permanently promote the City's twinning links by naming the cities with which the City is twinned. Members will no doubt have seen similar on entrances to many other cities.

8.5 To date, due mainly to financial considerations (it would cost in the region of £8,000 to erect signs in appropriate locations), this has not been considered a Council priority.

8.4 The City Council has, primarily through the Lord Mayor's role, been involved in formal visits of officials between the various cities as follows:-

- An outward visit to Yaroslavl in 2013 at the request of the Yaroslavl City Council, to resurrect the twinning agreement between the Cities ahead of the 25th anniversary of the agreement in 2014 (attended by the Lord Mayor, three councillors and an officer);
- An inward visit from Yaroslavl in 2014 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the twinning agreement between the two cities;
- An outward visit to Bad Homburg in 2014 at the request of the Oberburgermeister to be included in the city's Festival of Lights (attended by one officer only);
- An outward visit to Bad Homburg in 2015 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the twinning agreement between the two cities (attended by the Deputy Lord Mayor, another councillor and one officer);
- An inward visit from Bad Homburg in 2015 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the twinning agreement between the two cities;
- An inward visit from Terracina in 2015 to attend the Italy versus Romania Rugby World Cup match being played at Sandy Park;
- An inward visit from Rennes in 2016 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the twinning agreement between the two cities;
- An outward visit to Yaroslavl in 2016 during which a new agreement relating to the operation of Exeter House was agreed (attended by the Lord Mayor, the Leader of the Council, two other councillors and two officers);
- An outward visit to Rennes in 2016 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the twinning agreement between the two cities (attended by the Lord Mayor, two other councillors and an officer).

8.5 In such circumstances, it has long been the agreement between the twinned cities, that reciprocal arrangements would be in place in relation to the costs involved in such visits, with the host city paying the accommodation and other associated costs of the visit, with the visiting city paying any travel costs. This has, in the main, worked well.

8.6 In an effort to spread costs, wherever practicable, efforts are made for there to be one outward and inward visit per annum.

8.7 As can be seen in paragraph 8.4 above, this has not been possible over the last few years due mainly to the various (and significant) anniversaries of the twinning agreements, falling within close proximity of each other.

8.8 As stated above, the original concept for the twinning agreements was for *promoting and encouraging the exchange of cultural, educational and sporting activities between the communities*. This concept has been reconfirmed with three of the four twin cities as part of the anniversary celebrations detailed in paragraph 8.4 above.

8.9 It was further reconfirmed during the most recent trip to Yaroslavl when a new agreement for the operation of Exeter House was signed by the Leader of the Council and the First Deputy Mayor of Yaroslavl, which included a willingness to

“support, including by way of grants to the participating organisations, the Russian-British projects in the areas of culture, sport, education, youth and social policy.”

- 8.10 To this end, discussions are already taking place as to how this can be progressed, with the possibility of a cultural project being the first to be achieved.
- 8.11 It cannot be stated enough, how significant our twin cities see the links they have with Exeter and the efforts to which they go, to reaffirm this during the visits. All visits include not only formal meetings in which matters of mutual interest are discussed, but also tours of the cities; the promotion of cultural links; and experiences of success within the cities. No matter how long or short the visit, it always includes a full programme of activities. This is also the case when the cities come to Exeter.
- 8.12 Having sought the views of the Councillors who have attended the most recent of the outward visits (to Yaroslavl and Rennes) as to “how it was for them”, all who responded, have stated that whilst the visits were useful in continuing the links between Exeter and the relevant City, they did not maximise the opportunities that such links could bring.
- 8.13 Obviously whilst the ceremonial and civic side of twinning links will always play an important part in maintaining those links, the Lord Mayoralty cannot, due to the role’s political impartiality, be involved in developing matters along more business or political lines.
- 8.14 Bearing in mind the Council’s mission statement to “enhance Exeter as the regional capital working with our partners to improve the quality of life for all people living in and visiting the City”, it is felt that the current format for both inward and outward visits does not take advantage of other possibilities which may arise. These could include:-
- Links between other departments within the City Council (e.g. tourism; economic development; marketing;
 - Links between the University and College;
 - Links between the Chamber of Trade;
 - Links with other organisations and companies in the City;
 - Possibility of mutual exchanges and secondments between cities.
- 8.15 It is therefore felt that now is an opportune time to explore these possibilities so that the next time a visit to or from one of the City’s twin towns is organised, more of a civic and trade delegation can be drawn together to maximise and develop the benefits arising from the links with our twin towns.
- 8.16 Members attention is also drawn to the attached report and supporting International Cooperation Statement, from 2004, which attempted to do a similar exercise to that now proposed.
- 8.17 It is felt that many of the points contained within the Statement are equally as pertinent today as they were then, but that other aspects of the Statement need updating so as to better match the Council’s current priorities.

8.18 To this end, it is suggested that the Statement be updated accordingly, and be brought back to a future meeting of this Committee for consideration and onward recommendation to the Executive.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

9.1 It is felt that the above proposal, would, by utilising the experiences of our twin cities, and the organisations based within them, pick up the following points in the Council's current Corporate Plan (2015/16):-

- *Enhance the knowledge economy with particular emphasis on the Innovation Exeter initiative to raise the profile of the area for inward investment and to address skills development*
- *Work with the Business Improvement District (BID) Board to progress the City Centre Strategy*
- *Review the way we deliver and fund tourism activities in the city*

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

10.1 There are no risks associated with the proposed course of action.

11. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, community safety and the environment?

11.1 None applicable with this decision

12. Are there any other options?

12.1 To continue with the current arrangements whereby the twinning links are maintained on a civic and ceremonial basis only.

**John Street
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**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:-**

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