

REVIEW OF TOWN TWINNING

Cabinet Members	Councillor Henry Higgins Councillor Douglas Mills
Cabinet Portfolios	Culture, Sport & Leisure / Improvements, Partnerships & Community Safety
Officer Contact	Howard Griffin, Planning, Environment, Education & Community Services
Papers with report	Appendix 1 - Working Group Report

1. HEADLINE INFORMATION

Summary	This report provides information on the outcomes of the Member/Officer Working Group led by Councillor George Cooper to explore partnership arrangements with Hillingdon's twinned authorities.
Contribution to our plans and strategies	This report contributes to the Council's priorities for promotion of a Historically important and modern Borough.
Financial Cost	There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Residents' & Environmental Services
Ward(s) affected	All.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet:

1. Notes the findings of the Working Group;
2. Instructs officers to end the arrangement with Emden in Germany by mutual agreement;
3. Agrees, subject to annual review, to maintain an annual budget for town twinning;
4. Notes the Town Twinning Guidelines for the use of resources and;
5. Requests that the Leader of the Council formally assign responsibility, as lead members, for the provision and direction of town twinning jointly to the Cabinet Members for Culture, Sport & Leisure and Improvement, Partnership & Community Safety.

Reasons for the recommendations

The Working Group set up following the Cabinet decision of 17th February 2011 gathered the views of various witnesses and feedback from representatives of the twinned authorities involved. The findings were essentially that there is a need for strong Member involvement and for focused officer support. The Working Group also found that there was a desire to update arrangements, keeping them relevant to Hillingdon's priorities. Views were expressed that supporting two authorities in Germany is unsustainable, and that a tripartite arrangement with Mantes and Schleswig provides the best option for future development.

Alternative options considered / risk management

1. To abolish all twinning activity;

Terminating all twinning activity would generate an annual saving of £8,700 plus savings in officer time, depending on activity levels.

The Working Group found that residents who had taken part in twinning activities clearly valued the experience. Therefore, this option has not been put forward as a recommendation.

2. To expand links with Emden rather than Schleswig;

This option has been discounted because:

- Links with Mantes-La-Jolie and Schleswig provide greater opportunity for expansion;
- Mantes-La-Jolie and Schleswig have shown an interest in regional opportunities.
- There is an existing partnership with Mantes-La-Jolie and Schleswig for multi-lateral exchanges which attracts EU grant funding.
- A break in the partnership with Schleswig in favour of Emden would result in Mantes-La-Jolie being unable to continue to support a link with Hillingdon, due to its on-going relationship with Schleswig.
- Despite some success in re-establishing the link with Emden, contact remains limited. Whilst Emden may offer better connections with manufacturing, Schleswig has clearly demonstrated a greater willingness and commitment to seek expansion of the current links, including building on the recent trade fair held in Mantes, which both Hillingdon and Schleswig attended.

Policy Overview Committee comments

This report is in response to the RESPOC report taken to Cabinet on 17 February 2011, which included the recommendation to set up a Working Group to further investigate options for future delivery. The Committee met on 15 November 2011 to consider the attached Working Group report and thanked the Working Group for their diligence in preparing the report and wholeheartedly agreed to support the recommendations made to Cabinet.

3. INFORMATION

3.1 Supporting Information

Hillingdon inherited its current twinning arrangements, with two authorities in Germany, and one in France, following its formation in 1965 from a number of smaller authorities. Following the review by RESPOC, and as recommended at the Cabinet meeting on 17th February 2011, a Member and Officer Working Group was established to examine the benefits, developments and arrangements of twinning. The Working Group reviewed the extent of the links with the three authorities, and invited various individuals, groups and other local organisations to supply their comments about twinning activity and its merits.

The Working Group undertook the following tasks: -

- A review of recent links with all three twin authorities;
- A review of the use of current budget provision and officer time;
- Consultation with residents that have benefited from the current links;
- Eliciting feedback from the twin authorities;
- Examining opportunities for external funding of projects;
- Examining opportunities to expand twinning activity to wider regional areas.

3.2 Council Funding for Twinning Projects

Currently there is an annual budget of £8,700 for approved activity, including the annual youth programme, official visits to and from Hillingdon, community led activities and partnership or match funding in support of external grants. The Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993 controls spending in this area. For twinning activity, a limit is set at twice the amount spent or budgeted for in the previous financial year.

3.3 External Funding Options

The European Commission Twinning Programme - 'Europe for Citizens'. This supports activities and organisations promoting "active European citizenship" and promotes direct exchanges between residents, their participation in twinning activities and networking between twinned authorities.

The European Union 'Youth in Action' Programme. The programme promotes mobility within and beyond the EU's borders, non-formal learning and intercultural dialogue, and encourages the inclusion of all young people regardless of their educational, social and cultural backgrounds.

European grants do not always finance the full cost of projects and organisers may need to show commitment by finding partnership funding. Application processes may be drawn out and projects need to be planned well in advance in order to ensure that strict grant conditions are met.

The Comenius Programme. Part of the British Council's Lifelong Learning Programme, Comenius provides opportunities for schools and colleges to introduce or strengthen the European dimension in their curriculum.

Comenius Regio partnerships allow local authorities to participate directly. It is hoped that through this initiative, a programme may be set up with Uxbridge College, which is currently finalising an application to this fund with a similar institution in Schleswig.

There may be opportunities to exploit grants for twinning activities. These funds could be used to extend the reach of current projects, or develop new ones. However, it should be noted that grant funded projects are resource intensive, requiring additional monitoring and returns, officer input, and negotiation with the participating twin towns.

3.4 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

4. EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

4.1 Implementing the recommendations of this report should:

1. Rationalise existing arrangements to enable more projects with a wider reach.
2. Refocus resources and deliver projects that demonstrate better returns.
3. Potentially promote tourism from abroad and encourage civic pride;
4. Provide opportunities for young people to have positive experiences of other cultures before they are influenced by negative stereotypical images.

4.2 Consultation Carried Out or Required

To identify the current situation, gain feedback from participants and to identify any potential added benefits, the Working Group consulted representatives from the twinned authorities, and a wide range of community, business and educational organisations. The consultation process included a workshop at the Civic Centre and also written submissions. All consultees were posed questions set by the Working Group.

Summary of Feedback Received

The Working Group's recommendations in the report at appendix 1 effectively outline the feedback from the consultees. A list of the consultees can be found in appendix 1. The full consultation responses can be found in the background papers to this report.

5. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and is satisfied that the financial implication properly reflects the direct resource implications for the Council.

Legal

The Local Government Act 1972 gives power to councils to enter into twinning arrangements and to expend money on them. It is therefore open to Cabinet to confirm arrangements related to twinning.

The Leader of the Council can make for new arrangements to the Cabinet Scheme of Delegations, thereby enabling him to assign new responsibilities to Cabinet Members.

Corporate Landlord

Not applicable.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Cabinet report on RESPOC review of twinning, 17 February 2011

Detailed Consultation Responses:

1. Emden
2. Mantes- Le- Jolie
3. Schleswig
4. Ruislip Manor Chamber of Commerce
5. Individual Consultees