

# RESIDENTS' AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE REVIEW OF HILLINGON'S TOWN TWINNING RELATIONSHIPS

<b>Cabinet Members</b>	Councillor Henry Higgins Councillor Douglas Mills
<b>Cabinet Portfolios</b>	Culture, Sport and Leisure Improvements, Partnerships & Community Safety
<b>Officer Contact</b>	Natasha Dogra, Deputy Chief Executive's Office
<b>Papers with report</b>	Final Report

## HEADLINE INFORMATION

<b>Purpose of report</b>	To receive the Residents' and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee's report providing recommendations which seek to build upon the Borough's current Town Twinning arrangements.
<b>Contribution to our plans and strategies</b>	This report contributes to the Council's priorities for promotion of a historically important and modern Borough.
<b>Financial Cost</b>	There are no direct financial implications arising from this report and some potential savings of £4,000 for 2011/12 are identified.
<b>Relevant Policy Overview Committee</b>	Residents' and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee
<b>Ward(s) affected</b>	All

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Welcome the report from the Residents' and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee and note the general consensus it found in favour of improving Hillingdon's Town Twinning relationships; and
2. Agree to take forward the POC's recommendations as part of the wider community engagement agenda, as set out below:

**Recommendation 1: A Member and Officer Working Group should be established to explore the benefits, developments and arrangements of twinning with the departments in which Mantes-La-Jolie and Emden are situated;**

**Recommendation 1 a:** That the Working Party establishes set guidelines that Budget spending should be adhered to;

**Recommendation 1 b:** That the Working Party investigate the length of exchange visits and the number of representatives;

**Recommendation 2:** That, subject to the working group's findings, the town twinning relationship with Schleswig be ended;

**Recommendation 3:** Continue with attendance at the annual conference by Hillingdon Council Cabinet member/s, Chairman of the Twinning Working Party and relevant officer to maintain relationships and to agree on-going contact strategy/updating of links;

**Recommendation 4:** Update the contact directory of businesses / community / music / sports groups etc in the two departments for use by those Hillingdon groups looking to make links in these two areas - not just the towns - and publicise these contact via the Hillingdon web site.

**Recommendation 5:** Better use the Council's directory to pinpoint UK and EU funds available for such trips, including how to apply guides and to publicise this information via the Council's website;

**Recommendation 6:** The current officer arrangement be revised to ensure a cross directorate approach is taken in place when advising and organising twinning arrangements;

**Recommendation 7:** That a budget of circa £8,000.00 only be allocated for town twinning over in the years Hillingdon are hosting the annual conference or organising youth exchanges. The budget of circa £4,000.00 only should be granted in the year Hillingdon are not hosting the annual conference or the youth exchange;

## **INFORMATION**

### **Reasons for recommendations**

The recommendations are aimed at allowing Cabinet to take forward the POC's recommendations made in the Town Twinning Final Report.

### **Alternative options considered / risk management**

The Cabinet could decide to reject or amend the Committee's recommendations.

### **Supporting Information**

The review provided an opportunity to examine the benefits to Hillingdon residents of the current organisational arrangements the Council has in place with the three twin towns and what benefits there were in establishing an alternative arrangement with a similar sized authority or, indeed, authorities, overseas

The review included the current co-ordination of the programme, the value for money of the range of activities organised, if these arrangements should continue and, if so, whether they should be in the current format or be revised.

The review examined the scope of current twinning activities and any benefits to Hillingdon residents there were to expand this to other sectors, potentially including more arts related activities, professional / training opportunities, business links and programmes to address common issues such as health, community safety, civic pride, music events, town centre management and economic development.

The Committee chose 'Hillingdon's Town Twinning relationships' as a review topic in 2010/11 to enable the Council to build on its successes so far.

The review into the current arrangements Hillingdon has in place with Schleswig and Emden in Germany and Mantes-La-Jolie in France, was chosen to assess the value and benefit of the arrangements provided to Hillingdon residents and to consider the benefits that twinning with a similar size authority overseas may bring.

The review took place between September 2010 and January 2011. The Committee took evidence from the Head of Modern Foreign Languages at Uxbridge High School, Ruislip Rangers Football Club, Modern Foreign Languages Advisor, School Improvement Service, District Commissioner Uxbridge Scouts and Councillors involved with Town Twinning.

### **Committee Recommendations**

The review proposed the following eight recommendations. Comments from officers regarding the recommendations are provided for Cabinet's information.

**Recommendation 1: A Member and Officer Working Group should be established to explore the benefits, developments and arrangements of twinning with the departments in which Mantes-La-Jolie and Emden are situated.** This Group will nurture twinning opportunities and raise awareness of activities taking place in Hillingdon's twinned towns. The Group should comprise Elected Members, an Officer from Education and Children's' Services, a Youth Service Representative, Art & Culture officer, and a representative from Sport and Leisure.

Officer comments: This will enable opportunities for projects to be effectively planned with the relevant service area. An effective group will also ensure that there is accountability in relation to twinning activity and that it is delivered with appropriate use of resources with direction and member input to support and guide activities. It may also provide an opportunity to invite representatives from other sectors in both the private and public sector for specific projects. Expanding the geographical area of the current twinning arrangements to include East Frisia where Emden is located and the Yvelines Department to the West of Paris will open up opportunities to explore wider links that may be more beneficial to Hillingdon.

**Recommendation 1 a: That the Working Party establishes set guidelines that Budget spending should be adhered to.** Spending of resources should be monitored to ensure the resources are spent appropriately.

Officer comments: Currently there are no specific guidelines concerning use of resources for twinning activity. An agreed set of protocols will ensure that resources are allocated appropriately.

**Recommendation 1 b: That the Working Party investigate the length of exchange visits and the number of representatives.** The Committee believe that the length of visit has the

capacity to be cut down to 3 days instead of 4, with the number of representatives decreasing to 3 from 6; thereby reducing costs.

Officer comments: Currently it is usual for each of the twinned authorities to invite up to 6 persons for official visits for 4 days (Thursday – Sunday). Sending fewer paid representatives will help to reduce costs without affecting our relationship with the twin towns and cutting the number of days by travelling early on a Friday will reduce this further for both the host town and visiting groups.

To ensure that there is a consistent approach this should be raised with the other towns so that there is an agreed way forward for future visits to and from twin towns.

**Recommendation 2: That, subject to the working group's findings, the town twinning relationship with Schleswig be ended.** There are few benefits in maintaining relationships with this town as it does not reflect Hillingdon in terms of size and it has its own arrangements with Mantes-La-Jolie.

Officer comments: Twinning arrangements in Hillingdon are unusual in that we have two towns (Emden and Schleswig) in the same country. While it is sensible to review if such an arrangement is appropriate and consider ending one of the partnerships, there has been very little formal contact with Emden in recent years and it is not clear at present how committed they would be to extending current activity. However, there are significant opportunities to extend the links with Emden and the wider East Frisia region with large sea port and manufacturing sector including VW car plant and Wind Turbine companies located nearby.

Schleswig and Mantes are inextricably linked as the twinning arrangement is a three way pledge with Hillingdon that was agreed in 1958. Breaking the link with Schleswig may make our future relationship with Mantes more awkward and conscious that in order to expand the range of activities to the wider Yvelines Department will likely require some input from the town. It may therefore be prudent for the working group to first establish the extent that Emden or East Frisia are willing to extend the links before either terminating the Schleswig link or minimising the link two one or two key projects that also involve Mantes.

**Recommendation 3: Continue with attendance at the annual conference by Hillingdon Council Cabinet member/s, Chairman of the Twinning Working Party and relevant officer to maintain relationships and to agree on-going contact strategy/updating of links.** This will help identify opportunities for joint activities and assist in developing contacts with locally based elected representatives and officials.

Officer comments: This will aid development of future links and provide opportunity to see first hand what Hillingdon and the twinned regions will have to offer. Careful consideration will need to be taken to ensure that the most appropriate representatives are involved to ensure maximum value is gained from such events.

**Recommendation 4: Update the contact directory of businesses / community / music / sports groups etc in the two departments for use by those Hillingdon groups looking to make links in these two areas - not just the towns - and publicise these contact via the Hillingdon web site.** This will enable organisations to identify and make contact with relevant groups in these two areas as and when they wish.

Officer comments: The directory could be extended to include events to which groups and individuals may be interested in taking an active part.

**Recommendation 5: Better use the Council's directory to pinpoint UK and EU funds available for such trips, including how to apply guides and to publicise this information via the Council's website.** This will eliminate direct expenditure by Hillingdon.

Officer comments: Agreed although it should be noted that funding is subject fulfilling the necessary criteria and some match funding is likely to be needed. This may be part funded from the Council's budget, by a direct contribution from the participants or both depending on the nature of the activity.

**Recommendation 6: The current officer arrangement be revised to ensure a cross directorate approach is taken in place when advising and organising twinning arrangements.** This will reduce officer time, although he/she should be available to give personal guidance to Groups and individuals seeking to visit the two areas as and when required.

Officer comments: Currently all contact including official visits is co-ordinated by the Sport & Leisure team. Extending the current links and the type of exchanges to include more commercial, training and education projects with a wider regional area than the current towns is likely to require effective officer links that can support this role with knowledge of the local network in Hillingdon. Given the current level of restructuring throughout the Council a review of where the best resource is within the Authority to co-ordinate activity will enable the Sport & Leisure team to concentrate on links specific to that service area. Spreading the activity across directorates via the proposed working party in Recommendation 1 will also ensure that most appropriate team takes responsibility for events connected to their area or work.

**Recommendation 7: That a budget of circa £8,000.00 only be allocated for town twinning over in the years Hillingdon are hosting the annual conference or organising youth exchanges. The budget of circa £4,000.00 only should be granted in the year Hillingdon are not hosting the annual conference or the youth exchange.** This would be used to cover existing visit plans. However, this should be reviewed at the end of 2011 in the light of progress in implementing the above recommendations thereby reducing costs.

Officer comments: Agreed. Budget for twinning activity is lower one in every three years and the recommendation will still provide sufficient budget to take part events.

## **EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES**

### **What will be the effect of the recommendations?**

The Committee's recommendations will provide a springboard for the Council to take those steps necessary to improve the promotion and preservation of Hillingdon's Town Twinning relationships.

### **Consultation Carried Out or Required**

The Committee took evidence from residents, officers and experts as described in the attached report.

### **Financial Implications**

The Council is not due to undertake hosting any of the main events in 2011/12 and as a result a reduction in budget to £4,000 will not impact on planned activity. Responsibility for hosting the annual conference and youth exchange will take place in 2012/13 and 2013/14 respectively when the full year budget will be required. This follows the typical three year cycle for twinning activities. It is intended that all participants will make a contribution to future activities and where possible external funding will be obtained from the European Commission to support projects.

This will extend the reach of the resources available and enable as many groups and clubs as possible to take part in events.

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Corporate Financial Implication**

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and is satisfied that there are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report and that twinning activities will be contained within existing budgets. It is also satisfied that the budget be reduced every three years as this reduction in budget is not expected to impact on planned activities. For 2011/12 this could result in potential savings of £4,000. In addition applying and obtaining external funding, will extend the resources available to support any further projects.

### **Legal Implications**

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 town-twinning.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL