

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: CABINET

Date of Meeting: 14 July 2009
Report of: Borough Solicitor
Subject/Title: Twinning Arrangements

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 To establish the background facts, provide information on the twinning arrangements of the four demised councils whose administrative areas were in Cheshire East prior to Local Government Reorganisation and to consider the options for the new authority on how it might approach twinning.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That:

- (1) the Cabinet Member with the responsibilities of Performance and Capacity with appropriate consultation be requested to advise Cabinet further as to:-
 - whether to administer all twinning directly by Council officers or through a twinning association(s) to which financial support is given;
 - whether new twinning links appropriate to the size and profile of the Council should be developed and mechanisms for that; and
 - whether the continuation of existing international and twinning links should be supported by the Council in the future.

- (2) the request for a grant from Macclesfield Male Voice Choir be considered.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 To decide how best to develop twinning arrangements to promote the objectives and identity of the new Council.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 All

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 All

6.0 Policy Implications

6.1 Cheshire East Council currently has no policy on town twinning. Most of the constituent Councils did. It is now necessary to clarify Cheshire East Council's future arrangements if any for town twinning.

7.0 Financial Implications 2009/10 and beyond (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)

7.1 Cheshire East has inherited budgets of just under £10,000 specifically for twinning activities from the demised authorities. No costing of potential future twinning arrangements has yet been undertaken but it is recommended that all future costs are contained within this existing budget.

8.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

8.1 None

9.0 Risk Management

9.1 The risk issues are around reputational risk for Cheshire East Council and how this could be managed.

10.0 Background and Options

10.1 The Local Government Act 1972 gives power to councils to enter into twinning arrangements and to expend money on them. Each of the recently demised authorities had twinning arrangements, either managed directly or by supporting twinning associations.

10.2 The specific aims of town Twinning are:

- to encourage peace and friendship between people of different backgrounds and cultures and to encourage openness, fairness and inclusiveness
- to work in partnership with organisations in the community in building relationships links with communities abroad that will lead to mutual advantages in terms of learning about each other's cultures and enhancing the quality of life of the communities involved.
- to promote appreciation of heritage and the arts, and to promote a local community area as a place to be visited by tourists from its twin towns.
- to encourage organisations to take part in building up relationships with organisations and businesses in twin communities to bring advantage in learning from each other's methods of working and to promote trade between communities.

10.3 The Current Situation

Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council was twinned with Macon (51 years this year, originally twinned with Crewe Council before it joined with Nantwich), Bischofsheim (about 17/18 years) and had a Friendship Agreement with Dzierżoniów in Poland (the formal agreement was signed about 4 years ago). As last year was a special anniversary (50 years) with Macon, the Council commissioned the 'Macon Rose' with Fryers Nurseries and 50 were sent over to Macon as a gift from the Council. The Mayor visited Macon last October to be there for the planting.

The Council used to organise the twinning but in 2004 Crewe and Nantwich Twinning Association (CANTA) was set up as an independent body with its own constitution. The current Mayor of Crewe and Nantwich was to be the President.

The Council gave the Twinning Association a grant of £5,000 each year towards the cost of twinning events. Fund raising events were also held. The Twinning Association's monthly meetings were held at the Municipal Buildings and the Council paid for the room and refreshments.

The Council usually invited Mayors, Leaders of Councils and Twinning Association Chairs over each year (usually one weekend in summer) and other twinning guests would join the party. Most of the Bischofsheim group would stay with host families as they had made some very strong and lasting friendships. The Macon group liked to stay in hotels and Crewe and Nantwich Council paid for this. Dzierżoniów also stayed in hotels. This would be arranged jointly with CANTA as there were civic events to arrange as well as local visits. A civic dinner was held for the overseas guests and members of CANTA. CANTA would arrange visits to local tourist areas. Officers of Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council would book flights when its Members and officers were invited over to their twinned towns, usually booking for CANTA as well and then invoicing them for the fares.

Macclesfield Borough Council formed strong links with Eckernforde in Germany in 1949. The link with Eckernforde arose because initially the people of Macclesfield sent aid to that town, following information sent back by soldiers who were stationed there. The towns also have a common involvement with the Silk industry.

However, there was never a formally signed twinning agreement. The link just developed naturally between the two towns. Over the years there have been limited "Civic" exchanges, with most of the twinning events occurring locally between different community groups in the two towns. The last "Civic" visit made was by the Mayor in 2002 to celebrate the town's 700th anniversary.

Macclesfield Male Voice Choir is going to Eckernforde in October 2010 to join in their 150 year celebrations. The Choir is requesting support from the Council with this venture, or perhaps to join with them in some more tangible and involved way. If the Council is minded to establish a policy towards Town Twinning the Choir will then consider what support to seek.

Congleton Borough Council had long standing arrangements with two towns. One in Trappes, France and the other in Oosterhout, Holland. This is no longer the case.

It provided a grant of £5,000 to Congleton Twinning Association but stopped this when it was not being spent.

For twelve years Congleton Borough Council maintained economic links with Koprovence in Czech Republic but had no specific budget for it. In 2008/09 Congleton Borough Council spent £18,000 on Mayoral visits and hospitality as a Cabinet Delegation went over twice and a Delegation came here in November/December 2008.

Cheshire County Council had no formal twinning arrangements but there were some activities linked to economic development and European funding and it was known that it did receive international visitors from time to time.

10.4 Members need to decide on the best approach to twinning in future. This comprises two elements:

- whether to continue to support the previous twinning arrangements and in what manner for the immediate future
- whether in the medium to long term these arrangements could be augmented as the new council takes shape and develops its own identity and policies.

10.5 With regard to existing twinning links, Members may upon enquiry feel that they are worthwhile and valued by the public within the demised district council's areas. Each district has a different approach to direct and indirect financial support. Arbitrary immediate changes might be disruptive and unpopular unless financial constraints require a new approach to be taken immediately. Arrangements could perhaps be harmonised over a two to three year period.

10.6 At the same time, the attached advice papers from the LGA demonstrate that much could be done to re-launch twinning, to re-engage the public and to focus on the identity and objectives which Cheshire East Council seeks to promote. The LGA papers draw attention to the need to periodically "refresh" twinning arrangements.

10.7 Any Cheshire East-wide review of twinning and the formulation of the new Council's objectives present an opportunity to engage the public and voluntary organisations and to develop a new sense of identity. Consultation would be extremely important and the new council would need to be proactive in eliciting responses and involving all age groups. This could not be achieved in the short-term and such an initiative would have to be appropriately resourced. Consequently, the Cabinet may determine that this work be undertaken in the first twelve to eighteen months of the new Council's existence.

11.0 Community Governance Review and the Role of Parish and Town Councils

11.1 Cheshire East Council is in receipt of a valid petition calling for a Community Governance review in respect of the unparished areas of Crewe Town which identified three recommendations arising from a Review: That

- (1) a new parish be constituted under Section 87 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- (2) the new parish should have a council to be known as Crewe Town Council.
- (3) the area to which the review is to relate is the whole of the Electoral Wards of Coppenhall, Delamere, Grosvenor, Maw Green, St Johns, Valley and Waldron; and those parts of the following Electoral Wards which do not already fall into an existing parish: Alexandra, Leighton, St Barnabas, Wistaston Green.

11.2 The Council will now carry out the necessary procedures to complete the Community Governance Review by 30 March 2010. It will need to decide whether a new parish or parishes should be constituted.

11.3 If a new local council comes into being in Crewe it will be able to forge links and twin with other towns. It is also possible that Macclesfield people will petition for a Governance Review with the outcome being another Town Council that can become involved in twinning activity within Cheshire East Council's administrative area.

12.0 Overview of Year One and Term One Issues

12.1

13.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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