



HILLINGDON

LONDON

A Review of the benefits, developments and arrangements of the London Borough of Hillingdon's Town Twinning relationships

Members on the Working Group

Cllr George Cooper (Chairman)
Cllr Judith Cooper (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Josephine Barrett
Cllr Judy Kelly
Cllr Susan O'Brien



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Report on Findings of the Town Twinning Working Party

1.0 Background

The town twinning working party was set up following a Cabinet decision of 17th February 2011. The working party gathered the views of various witnesses and feedback from representatives of the twinned authorities involved.

2.0 Aims of the Working Party

The working party's aims were to examine the benefits, developments and arrangements of twinning. The working party 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 following groups and individuals were consulted;

- Tony Docherty – Ruislip Rangers Youth Football Club
- Jenny Glen – Youth Service
- Ahmed Sidiqqi – Member of Hillingdon Youth Council
- John Arnold – District Commissioner Uxbridge Scouts
- Les Drussel – Ruislip Manor Chamber of Commerce
- Cllr Shirley Harper-O'Neill
- Rainer Raup – Schleswig Council
- Jens Gerdes – Emden Council
- Nadège Racagel – Mantes-La-Jolie Council
- Gervase Craven – University of the Third Age / Petanque Club
- Graham Marshall – University of the Third Age
- Jill Rhodes – Former Councillor and past Mayor
- Chris Head – Head of Modern Foreign Languages at Uxbridge High

The detailed consultation responses are available as background papers.

3.0 Findings

To better publicise and develop town twinning in Hillingdon, the working party made the recommendations below. As well as making these 11 basic recommendations, the working party developed the set of guidelines referred to in point 11. The guidelines can be found at the end of this report.

1. That there is a need to retain the existing annual budget to support exchange programmes and to match fund any external bids.
2. That there is a need for more focused support and co-ordination from officers.

3. That clear direction is important. This could be achieved by having a lead member as advocate for town twinning and would provide continuity of support to the Mayor, who acts as organisational president for town twinning.
4. That there is a need to update and re-brand twinning activity, keep exchanges relevant to Hillingdon's priorities and to widen the reach of the scheme, encouraging input and ownership by residents.
5. Hillingdon needs to reaffirm its commitment to twinning and so restore confidence of the other twinned authorities.
6. That supporting two authorities in Germany is unsustainable and that the tripartite arrangement with Mantes and Schleswig is rather unique, providing the best option to expand delivery.
7. That the limited awareness of the twinning arrangements needs to be tackled, with more use of Council's website and regular articles in Hillingdon People. Officer links with schools and other organisations should also be developed. The working party noted that when groups were aware, they had made frequent use of the connections and clearly benefited from them.
8. That an officer contact and lead Member would help coordinate work inside and outside the Council, monitor delivery, publicise and expand current activity.
9. That there is a well established programme in Mantes and Schleswig allowing discussion and planning of key activities and a will to expand opportunities for residents. E.g. the trade fair in Mantes-La-Jolie.
10. That having two twinned authorities in Germany (Emden and Schleswig) leads to duplication of events in that country. The working party noted that links with Emden had been very limited in recent years, and there was no programme in place, as is the case with Schleswig and Mantes.
11. That there should be clear guidelines for Members and officers to provide consistency and the efficient use of resources. The guidelines would help ensure that twinning activity is of a high quality and a benefit to residents. These guidelines are shown below.

Town Twinning - Guidelines for use of Resources

1. Purpose of Document

- 1.1 This document is intended to ensure that twinning activity supported by the Council is of a high quality and makes effective use of resources. It provides guidance on the use of financial and other resources for twinning activities and includes advice on planning for council organised events and for those organised by local groups.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 To bring residents of member countries closer together, the European Commission introduced a programme to support twinning schemes as a way of involving people and their elected representatives. Twinning proposals can be aimed at the development of co-operation between communities, sporting or cultural exchanges, the promotion of tourism or development of economic ties.
- 2.2 In 1958, Schleswig in Germany, Mantes-La-Jolie in France and Hayes and Harlington Council agreed to enter into twinning arrangements. A similar arrangement between Emden, Germany and the then Uxbridge Council was made in 1961. Following the creation of the London Borough of Hillingdon in 1965, these agreements effectively then covered all areas of the new borough.
- 2.3 A co-ordinating officer and lead Member will maximise opportunities on behalf of the Council, taking into account the following:
- Promoting of links that contribute to Civic Pride;
 - Promotion of opportunities for personal development through exchanges;
 - Assist and enable schools, local organisations and individuals in twinned authorities to maintain and form new links;
 - Development of policy on the criteria and level of financial assistance to be awarded;
 - Monitoring of twinning activities.
- 2.4 Twinning activity must demonstrate a clear public benefit; show that it contributes to the principles of the original agreement, facilitate learning and understanding and use public money accountably. Key to the success of twinning arrangements is involvement by local residents in each of the twinned authorities and expenditure must be in furtherance of this purpose only.

3 Responsibility for Twinning Activity

- 3.1 The lead Member will act as advocate for twinning, with co-ordination of links via the Mayor's Office. However, specific Council services will be tasked to be actively involved with projects etc.

3.2 Key Council service areas involved include Arts, Culture, Sports & Leisure; Youth Services & Education; Partnerships; Events. Other Council services and external groups may also be identified and invited to take part as appropriate, such as educational establishments, chambers of commerce, commercial or professional organisations, residents groups and voluntary or charitable organisations.

4. Council Budget for Twinning Activity

4.1 The allocated budget can only be used for reasonable expenditure arising from twinning arrangements. To ensure transparency and accountability, and to maximise the budget available, the following questions should be considered before approval.

- i) How will the activity meet the objectives of bringing residents from Hillingdon and the twinned authorities closer together?
- ii) Has the best use of the itinerary during the planned visit been used to help meet these objectives?
- iii) Is the visit likely to result in further exchanges?
- iv) Will the visit promote projects in the following areas?
 - Civic Pride
 - Tourism
 - Sport, Arts and culture
 - Education
 - Commerce
- v) If not it must be possible to demonstrate how it will contribute to Hillingdon Council's corporate objectives, or those of the twinned authorities. Alternatively, it must be shown that the proposed activity has resulted from discussion / communication arising from official requests and meetings between the authorities.

5. Official Planning Meetings

5.1 Twinning visits include an official invitation to the Mayor and will take place annually, with each authority acting as host, in turn. Visits will generally take place over a 3 or 4 day period, including a weekend (Thursday – Sunday). However, whenever possible, the duration of the events should be the minimum required.

5.2 In preparing for official planning meetings, the Mayor's office will confirm with the lead Member to agree the make up of the Hillingdon group. In the event that the Mayor or Deputy Mayor cannot attend, the group will be lead by another representative from the administration.

- 5.3 Annual meetings to discuss and agree the twinning programme may include up to 6 people. The Mayor (who is the organisational president for twinning) will lead the group.
- 5.4 Funding for visits will only extend to a maximum of three persons, including the Mayor, one other Member and an Officer. However, deputies are permitted providing only the maximum of three are funded from the twinning budget. Should an invitation for more than three persons be received, others in the group must self fund their travel.
- 5.5 Planning visits will normally include local venues and places of interest. Where appropriate, visits to other venues of a more regional nature that are still relevant may also be included.
- 5.6 The itinerary for a Mayoral visit in Hillingdon will usually include a reception in the Mayor's Parlour, to which local representatives and relevant community groups having an interest in twinning events will be invited. During host visits, it may be appropriate to invite other representatives to meet the visiting delegations.
- 5.7 The overriding purpose must be a 'working' visit. However, for host visits in Hillingdon, providing the main themes for the meeting are adequately covered, some free time may be built into the itinerary for the visitors.

6. Funding for Other Twinning Events

- 6.1 Key to the success of any twinning arrangement is the involvement of residents, community groups and other organisations and agencies that can link with their counterparts. The annual programme of activities agreed should include as many members of the community e.g. schools or youth groups, local associations, commerce and clubs as possible.
- 6.2 To receive Council funding (either full or partial) the purpose of the exchange needs to match the criteria listed earlier. Contributions from the twinning budget may be made where reasonable and appropriate, on a similar basis to that for official planning visits. In any case, where the Council provides funding towards an exchange, the appropriate service representative should work with the Mayor's office to assist with planning and management of activities.
- 6.3 Where possible, the Council will seek to secure external funding to support the twinning programme, either directly, or by assisting local organisations to apply for funding as part of their project, in liaison with the Council's external funding officer.

7. Role of the Mayor's Office

- 7.1 Contact with the host borough in respect of the annual planning visit should be through the Mayor's Office.
- 7.2 For official planning visits, the Mayor's Office will invite Mayors of the twinned authorities, and also invite guests to the Mayor's Parlour / official dinner events.
- 7.3 The nominated contact officer will co-ordinate local organisations wishing to form links, providing assistance where possible, and including funding if this is within the agreed rules and properly authorised. The organisations will be expected to make their own arrangements for hosting or travelling.

8. Travel and Other Costs

- 8.1 The Local Government Act 1972 allows local authorities to cover the travel and related costs of Councillors making official visits overseas, and allows for the costs of receiving and entertaining official guests from overseas. Twinning activity must demonstrate a clear public benefit and contribute to the principles listed earlier.
- 8.2 The purpose of the Council's twinning budget is:
 - To provide funds for the Mayor and official delegation to travel to and from the twinned authority for the main official visit.
 - To provide funds to pay expenses while visitors from the twinned authorities are staying in Hillingdon.
 - To facilitate the agreed programme of twinning activities.
- 8.3 It has been agreed between Hillingdon and the twinned authorities that the host should cover the reasonable expenses of guests, once they arrive.
- 8.4 For a visit to Hillingdon, eligible costs would be:

Transport: Use of public transport, private vehicles, hire of standard mini-busses or taxis for movement to and from the airport and around the borough.

Accommodation: Room(s) to be booked at a standard local hotel for the visiting party, for the duration of the stay.

Food/ Refreshments: Main meals included. Other bar bills are excluded, being the responsibility of the individuals involved.

Entertainment: Reasonable and appropriate expenses arising from pre-planned entertainment organised as part of the agreed itinerary. This should principally include local venues and places of interest in Hillingdon and its environs.

- 8.5 For visits to the twinned authorities, expenditure incurred by Hillingdon must be limited to economy standard return air or rail tickets, necessary travel to and from accommodation, and any additional insurance needed for the Mayor's Chain of Office, if it is taken on the trip.
- 8.6 Incidental expenditure on bar bills, hotel bills and extras must be paid for personally and not charged to the Council, apart from reasonable subsistence costs, which will be paid up to the maximum in the policy relating to such claims.

9. Personal Expenses

- 9.1 Personal expenses may not normally be claimed. It is the responsibility of the hosts to provide all accommodation, meals, and basic refreshments. Any expenditure such as additional drinks, entertainment, travel during free time, shopping, etc. must be paid for personally.

10. Conduct

- 10.1 The Code of Conduct for Council Employees and the Behaviour Code for Members will apply in respect of all twinning activities. The guidance in this document should be considered alongside all other policies that apply when undertaking Council business.

11. Gifts

- 11.1 The codes of conduct for Council employees and Councillors state that all gifts and hospitality should be recorded in the register of gifts and hospitality. No special arrangements apply to town twinning, and all participants must consult relevant policy documents to ensure compliance.
- 11.2 The Mayor, and others attending, must courteously decline inappropriate or excessive gifts or hospitality.
- 11.3 As a matter of courtesy, the Mayor should present a gift to the Mayor of the host authority, which will be selected and purchased in consultation with the Mayor's office, and funded by the twinning budget.
- 11.4 It may also be appropriate to present a gift of nominal value to other representatives of the host authority. This should be a suitable civic token, purchased using the twinning budget.

12. Extension of Visits

- 12.1 Should a participant wish to extend a stay in a twinned authority beyond the planned itinerary, then additional expenses arising must be met by that individual. This includes funding additional travel arrangements to airports etc. Any such additional arrangements must be made by the participant.