

## **Links in Europe - Heinsberg and Komarom-Esztergom - Festival of Friendship**

### **Report by Director, Resources**

#### **1 Purpose of Report**

To update Council on the progress made with linking activity and in particular the Festival of Friendship which is scheduled to take place in Midlothian in October 2015. Further, the report seeks Council funding and if approved a commitment to proceed with the organisation of the event.

#### **2 Background**

At the Council Meeting on 24 May 2011, having noted a statement by the Leader of the Council that while the Administration appreciated the historical benefits of twinning and links in Europe, they felt that in the current financial climate, when throughout the public sector major cuts were faced, they needed to reign in expenditure in this area too, Council agreed:-

- (a) *To cancel the grant made annually to Midlothian Twinning Association; and*
- (b) *In future, all hospitality arrangements, including twinning and visits to all council premises, civic hospitality, receptions and civic gifts, be approved by the Director, Corporate Resources, in consultation with the Provost.*

The current policy of the Council is to agree:-

- (a) *to accept invitations to be represented at the Festival of Friendship, and, if appropriate, anniversary celebrations of the French Links and at any "reinvigoration" visits, such representatives to be the Provost and Chief Executive, on a "whom failing" basis and that if additional representation is envisaged, the invitation be remitted to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair and Convener of Cabinet;*
- (b) *to invite similar representation from the respective local authorities at any anniversary celebrations here; and*
- (c) *to provide assistance to Midlothian Twinning Association.*

Midlothian has a trilateral link with Kreis Heinsberg, Germany and Komarom – Esztergom, Hungary. Initially, the links with both areas operated more or less independently of each other since inception in 1973.

On 12 November 2013, the General Purposes Committee noted that, at a meeting of representatives of the Partner areas held in Komarom – Esztergom on 19 October 2013, there had been general agreement that the Festival of Friendship ought to continue in its current format. It is envisaged that this would involve thirty performers in music song and dance from each of the Partner areas, for possibly a reduced period; and consideration and implementation of the planning stages had been remitted to the Midlothian Partner. It was also noted that, in the current financial position, changes in approach may be required.

The salient features are as follows:-

- (a) the Festival of Friendship has been a feature of the Partnership(s) since 1978, taking place on a biennial basis since 1979, alternating in the Partner Areas. In the early days there were as many as 200 participants but recently, the number was restricted to thirty (and a delegation of five) persons from each partner area and the period had been shorter;
- (b) the costly items based on the previous Festival in Midlothian were (i) transportation; (ii) accommodation; (iii) meals; and (iv) hospitality, which had been shared between the Council and the Midlothian Twinning Association;
- (d) it is likely that the parties will travel by air. Therefore, there will be no possible reduction in the cost of hiring coaches for airport transfers and the visits to places of interest which traditionally have been a Twinning Association expense;
- (e) accommodation for the past few Festivals has been provided ~~in~~ exclusively in hostels and hotels for the participants, the cost of which for the last Festival in Midlothian in 2009 was met by the Twinning Association;
- (f) gatherings in the evenings took place at various venues throughout Midlothian where performances were given, usually in Schools which were provided free of charge in accordance with Council Policy and any associated costs absorbed by the Schools / Education Budget; and modest hospitality afterwards provided by the Council;
- (g) during the visits to places of interest, meals were provided by the Midlothian Twinning Association which the Association will not be able to replicate in the current financial climate; and
- (h) sponsorship from the Private Sector had never yielded much in the way of support; and applications for grant aid had met with varying levels of success but the perception was that gatherings of this nature were unlikely to attract financial assistance.

Based on the planning assumption that the event will take place during school holidays and using the programme for the last Festival as a model, a proposed outline has been drawn up and is shown in the **Appendix** based on four days and involving 60 visitors. The programme includes a familiarisation in Midlothian, which potentially might include heritage / workplace visits; performances; and gatherings to encourage contact between the participants and people in Midlothian; and a visit to the City of Edinburgh.

### **3 Report Implications**

#### **3.1 Resource**

The initial estimated cost of the Festival was in the region of £25,000. It is expected that this figure could be reduced markedly by rationalising costs across budget heads.

Historically, the costs were shared between the Council (generally for hospitality for participants and delegations) and the Midlothian Twinning Association (generally for accommodation and visits to places of interest); but the Association is no longer able to sustain this arrangement.

The Council reduced the hospitality budget to £5000 in 2011/12. The budget for 2014/15 has been fixed on a no-growth basis. Until 2011, the Association received an annual grant of just over £5,000 from the Council on the basis that it would use the funds to best advantage to support not only the Trilateral Partnership but also the French Twin Town and Village links with Jarnac (Dalkeith), St Cyr L'Ecole (Bonnyrigg and Lasswade), L'Isle sur la Sorgue (Penicuik), Angres (Danderhall) and Harnes (Loanhead) (and Ivry le Temple (Temple – now Moorfoot)). Whilst, that funding has remained in place, no disbursements have been made and the level of access for Partnership and Twinning activity has been reduced. With the benefit of the funding, the Association had always been enabled to sustain an appropriate level of support, including the Festival of Friendship.

As reported to Council on 23 September 2014, the projected General Fund Reserve as at 31 March 2015 is £11.413million. Council agreed on 4 February 2014 that a prudent minimum level of general reserve be £8million or 4% of net expenditure. Whilst the uncommitted element of the General Fund Reserve exceeds £8.000 million, it is anticipated that the extent of change will require continued one off investment or one off costs over the period.

Furthermore, as at September 2014 projected budget shortfalls/surplus respectively were:-

2015/16	Surplus	£1.334 million
2016/17	Deficit	£3.299 million
2017/18	Deficit	£7.488 million.

Work is ongoing to address the predicted budgeted shortfall and the Head of Finance and Integrated Service Support will update Council regularly about future projections.

Any approved funding to underwrite the cost of the Festival of Friendship would require to be funded from the utilisation of reserves.

### **3.2 Risk**

By not supporting the Festival of Friendship, there is a risk of reputational damage specifically from the Council's Partners in Kreis Heinsberg and Komarom - Esztergom; and also amongst the Midlothian participants.

There is also a risk that in times of financial austerity allocating resources to twinning activities is not seen as directly core Council business and there is a likelihood of criticism from residents who rely on key Council services.

The proposal links to the Councils Corporate priorities.

### **3.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation Themes addressed in this report:**

- ☒ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☒ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☒ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☒ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

### **3.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan**

There are links. to lifelong learning, positive destinations, musical achievement, across Midlothian.

### **3.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes**

Not applicable

### **3.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach**

Not Applicable

### **3.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders**

This report has been prepared following meetings of the Partners and Midlothian Twinning Association.

### **3.7 Ensuring Equalities**

This report is not proposing any new policies or services. Therefore an EQIA is not required. However, the whole thrust of linking activity is that it is all inclusive.

### **3.8 Supporting Sustainable Development**

This report is not proposing any new policies or services. Therefore there are no Sustainable Development implications.

### **3.9 IT Issues**

There are no IT implications.

## **4 Summary**

The Festival of Friendship is scheduled to take place in Midlothian in October 2015. The Festival has been the mainstay activity for the Twinning Partnerships. In order to sustain the trilateral link, financial support is required for the event to progress.

Endeavours can be made to secure external financial and other support for the event by the Twinning Association. However, in order to provide stability, a commitment to underwrite the costs by the Council is required to allow provisional reservation of accommodation to be placed.

Continuing support for the links in general and to the Midlothian Twinning Association will provide help to sustain and develop the contacts and the goodwill of the Partners in relation educational and cultural links.

## **5 Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Council consider the funding request of a maximum of £25,000 to provide the Festival of Friendship in 2015 based on the indicative programme ie on the basis that other avenues of support will be explored by the Director, Resources.

Contact person Bob Attack  
[attackb@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:attackb@midlothian.gov.uk)

28 October 2014

Background Papers : None

## APPENDIX

### Draft Starter Programme FESTIVAL OF FRIENDSHIP - October 2015

Date	Time	Activity	Venue
Wednesday 14 October 2014	Am/pm	Arrival	Edinburgh Airport (International Arrivals)
		Transfer to Midlothian	
		Welcome by Provost and light meal.(Welcome Packs)	Council Chambers
		After meal travel to Accommodation	
		Introduction	Accommodation
		Dinner	Accommodation
	Evening	Ice breaker Ceilidh	Accommodation
Thursday 15 October 2014		Visit to places of interest in Midlothian starting at 09.30 and finishing at 16.00 with Guide, Member of Midlothian Twinning Association + Council staff member.	Rosslyn Chapel and Scottish Mining Museum
	19.00	Performance	Penicuik High School / Town Hall, Penicuik
		Followed by	Supper
Friday 16 October 2014	Start 09.30 finishing 16.00 hours	Visit to Edinburgh	Panoramic tour in the morning
	19.00	Individual Performances at various venues across Midlothian	Various as guests of groups, clubs and others.

Date	Time	Activity	Venue
Saturday 17 October 2014		Free time	
	1700	Meal for all visitors and hosts followed by welcome by Provost and official responses and presentations to visiting group leaders.	Midlothian House
	19.00	All Music and Dance groups Gala Concert followed by light refreshments in the adjacent flexi area for the participants and selected guests.	Newbattle High School Assembly Hall
Sunday 18 October 2014	9.30	Visit to places of interest on way to Airport	
		Departure	