

Twinning - Report by Director, Resources

1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Committee with regards to the Council's relationship with our Twinning partners.

2 Background Information

- 2.1** The District Council had twinning arrangements in place with Kreis Heinsberg in Germany and Komarom-Esztergom in Hungary. In addition, some towns/villages in Midlothian were twinned with towns in France.
- 2.2** Twinning continued following the formation of Midlothian Council in 1996 and Midlothian was represented at successful events hosted by the other 2 twinning "partners". Midlothian also hosted events the most recent of which was a Festival of Friendship held in 2015. Midlothian Twinning Association, an outside organisation consisting of volunteers with an interest in establishing and maintaining links in Europe have been involved with the organisation of these events. The Council can be represented on the Association by up to four Elected Members one of whom is the Provost.
- 2.3** On 24 May 2011 the Council agreed that whilst it appreciated the historical benefits of twinning and links in Europe, that in a financial climate of major cuts throughout the public sector, expenditure in the area of twinning had to be reduced. At that time, it was agreed to cancel the grant made annually to Midlothian Twinning Association and that all future hospitality arrangements including twinning and visits to all Council premises, civic hospitality, receptions and civic gifts, be approved by the Director, Resources in consultation with the Provost.
- 2.4** On 4 November 2014, the Council agreed to fund, up to a maximum of £25,000, a Festival of Friendship which was held in Midlothian in October 2015. At that time concern was raised by some Elected Members that funding should not be provided due to the ongoing need to provide savings throughout the Council. Similar concerns in this regard had been expressed in 2011. After the Festival of Friendship hosted by Midlothian in 2015 where the full costs to the Council were considerably higher than the figure approved, it was felt that the value of such events taking into account the considerable financial and other resources costs incurred by the Council, could not be justified.
- 2.5** In recent times, twinning events have been limited to visits by school children in France to Dalkeith organised and operated by a member of staff at Dalkeith High School and visits by small groups of people from the two districts. Midlothian Twinning Association has continued to be involved in some of these events and the Council, in accordance with the decision made on 24 May 2011, has hosted visits to Midlothian House primarily from groups from Germany and France. These visits have been facilitated by Dalkeith High School or Midlothian Twinning Association

with the Provost hosting a small reception in the Council Chamber to formally welcome the groups to the district.

- 2.6** On 5 September 2017, following internal discussion, the two twinning partners of Midlothian were informed that the former twinning arrangements involving upwards of £30,000 per visit of specific expense associated to Twinning Festivals could not be repeated and would require to cease. This decision was taken as a result of the severe financial position the Council is facing and with the knowledge that the two twinning partners had an expectation that the Council would continue to be involved including financing the Festivals and other related events. Notification of the Council's decision was relayed to the two twinning partners in advance of a meeting whereby future festivals would be discussed with decisions made with regard to their future and content. In this format the Council had experienced Twinning Festival exchanges in which extensive hospitality, travel and accommodation fell to the Council to pay. The events concerned were facilitated by Midlothian Twinning Association but fell under loose agreements between the respective Councils to fund. Historically such exchanges were on the basis of home hosting.
- 2.7** The separate arrangements which still exist between Dalkeith and Jarnac; and Penicuik/L'Isle de la Sorgue are not affected by the Council's decision on its county-wide twinning. The level of the Council's involvement with regard to the town twinning arrangements does not extend beyond that described in paragraph 2.9 below. The Midlothian-level connection involves Kreis Heinsberg, a municipality in the Rhineland close to the Dutch/French borders in northern Germany; and our Hungarian partner Komaron-Esztergom County which lies south of the Danube and north of Budapest.
- 2.8** In my letters of 5 September 2017 to Kreis Heinsberg and Komaron-Esztergom I emphasised that the Council would continue to encourage links established by our schools. However, the letter was silent on other types of exchange outside the Festival of Friendship model. A copy of the letters are appended to this report.
- 2.9** Following an approach by office-bearers of Midlothian Twinning Association, the Provost wishes to propose that the Council continues with a twinning concept but on a different basis in which parties visiting Midlothian would enjoy the same basic hospitality as afforded to groups in general visiting the Council. Typically this extends to a light sandwich lunch or tea /coffee reception as part of the official welcome from the Provost and Deputy Provost and approved in advance by the Director, Resources.
- 2.10** The proposal by the Provost is to wholly move away from touristic exchanges to more specific areas in which an additional activity benefit above fraternisation occurs. These would be in the areas of:-
- Music
 - Sport
 - Cultural Exchange
- 2.11** The Provost and Deputy Provost have indicated their willingness to continue to support twinning on the basis outlined in this report thus creating a model in which the Council act as a catalyst for cross-border purposive exchanges and continue the tradition in Midlothian of welcoming partners from the twinning areas.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Resource

There are no additional resource implications as a result of this report. The small financial outlay proposed by this report in terms of paragraph 2.5 above can be met from the budget set aside for Provost hosted receptions.

3.2 Risk

There are no risk implications arising directly from this report.

3.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

- 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

Not applicable.

3.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Not applicable

3.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Not applicable.

3.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The proposals set out in this report will ensure the Council continues to welcome partners from the twinning areas of Kreis Heinsberg and Komaron-Esztergom whilst they take part in exchanges and/or other gatherings in Midlothian involving our communities

3.8 Ensuring Equalities

There are no equality implications arising directly from this report.

3.9 Supporting Sustainable Development

Not applicable.

3.10 IT Issues

Not applicable.

4 Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note the terms of this report and approve the proposal by the Provost as outlined in paragraphs 2.9 to 2.11 above, namely, the Council -

(a) continue with a twinning concept but on a different basis in which parties visiting Midlothian would enjoy the same basic hospitality as afforded to groups in general visiting the Council. Typically this extends to a light sandwich lunch or tea /coffee reception as part of the official welcome from the Provost and Deputy Provost and approved in advance by the Director, Resources;

(b) wholly moves away from touristic exchanges to more specific areas in which an additional activity benefit above fraternisation occurs. These would be in the areas of:-

- Music
- Sport
- Cultural Exchange

and;

(c) continue to support twinning on the basis outlined in this report thus creating a model in which it acts as a catalyst for cross-border purposive exchanges and continues the tradition in Midlothian of welcoming partners from the twinning areas.

16 August 2018

Report Contact:

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Background Papers:-

Appendix 1 – Letter dated 5 September 2017 to Kreis Heinsberg

Appendix 2 - Letter dated 5 September 2017 to Komarom--Esztergom

5 September 2017

Landrat Stephan Pusch
District Administration of Heinsberg
Valkenburger Strasse 45
D-52525 Heinsberg
Germany
By email to Stephan.pusch@kreis-heinsberg.de

Dear Mr Pusch,

**Twinning Links – Kreis Heinsberg, Komarom-Esztergom and Midlothian Council
Festival of Friendship Kreis Heinsberg 2017**

I hope this letter finds you well.

Office-bearers of Midlothian Twinning Association, have advised the Council that your district is hosting a Festival of Friendship in October and that an invitation has been extended to Midlothian Council to attend. Following discussion within the Council and in particular taking into account the current financial position the Council is facing, it has been decided that the Council will not be officially represented. However, I am aware that the district of Midlothian will be represented by the school children who are attending and that individual members of the Twinning Association will also be present.

Since the formation of the various twinning arrangements and friendships in Europe, I am sure we will all agree that times have changed and travel and friendships across the region are much more frequent and easier. Whilst Midlothian Council will continue to support and encourage the established links through our schools, we are no longer able, from a financial perspective, to fund twinning and this includes hosting a Festival of Friendship in the years to come.

On behalf of the Council and the wider Midlothian area, I hope this year's Festival of Friendship is successful.

Yours sincerely

John Blair

Director, Resources

5 September 2017

Mr Gyorgy Popovics
President of the General Assembly of Komarom-Esztergom County
H-2800 Tatabanya
Foter 4
Hungary
By email to elnoki@kemoh.hu

Dear President Popovics,
**Twinning Links – Kreis Heinsberg, Komarom-Esztergom and Midlothian Council
Festival of Friendship Kreis Heinsberg 2017**

I hope this letter finds you well.

Office-bearers of Midlothian Twinning Association, have advised the Council that the District of Kreis Heinsberg is hosting a Festival of Friendship in October 2017 and that an invitation has been extended to Midlothian Council to attend. Following discussion within the Council and in particular taking into account the current financial position the Council is facing, it has been decided that the Council will not be officially represented. I have written to Kreis Heinsberg in appropriate terms in relation to their invitation.

Since the formation of the various twinning arrangements and friendships in Europe, I am sure we will all agree that times have changed and travel and friendships across the region are much more frequent and easier. Whilst Midlothian Council will continue to support and encourage the established links through our schools, we are no longer able, from a financial perspective, to fund twinning and this includes hosting a Festival of Friendship in the years to come.

Yours sincerely
John Blair
Director, Resources