Development of Twinning Arrangements
14th November 2006

Report of the Head of Democratic Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT
To give consideration to the future development of twinning arrangements in particular requests for the City of Lancaster to formally twin with a city in China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Decision</th>
<th>Non-Key Decision</th>
<th>Referral from Cabinet Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Date Included in Forward Plan | February 2006
This report is public

RECOMMENDATION
That Cabinet considers the options with regard to the future of twinning as set out in paragraph 6.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Twinning is a term used to describe a special relationship between two communities. These relationships can be either formal or informal and can be between community groups, twinning associations or local authorities. Some of the best and most active twinnings are between local community groups, i.e. Colleges, Schools, Sporting Associations and Musical Groups.

1.1.2 The City of Lancaster has a history of twinning starting in 1962 when it first twinned with Perpignan in France, the most recent addition being Vaxjo in Sweden in 1996. There are five formal twinning agreements currently in place; these are with Perpignan (France), Rendsburg (Germany), Aalborg (Denmark), Lublin (Poland) and Vaxjo (Sweden). We have also two long standing associations with Almere (Holland) and Viana do Castelo (Portugal), although there is more contact with Almere.

1.2 Lancaster International Twinning Society

1.2.1 The City Council enjoys a good working relationship with the Lancaster International Twinning Society. The society has a very dedicated membership who work hard to strengthen ties with all our twin towns. There are currently 3 council representatives who attend the Society meetings, appointed by Council on PR.
1.2.2 The Society was formed in 1970 and wherever possible works closely with the Council on all aspects of twinning. The Society receive a Council grant currently set at £3800 per year (linked to a Service Level Agreement) towards their administration costs and also to enable them to give support to individual local groups travelling to twin towns or offering hospitality to visiting groups.

1.3 The Cost of Twinning

1.3.1 Apart from the grant to the Twinning Society there is a sum of £2000 (for 2006/07) in the budget for the civic side of twinning. This money is used to pay for flights and civic gifts to twin towns when they have invited a delegation from Lancaster to visit their city. These delegations have usually in the past been made up of the Mayor and Mayoress, one member (chosen by ballot) and an officer (nominated by the Chief Executive).

1.3.2 Invitations are received from our twin towns for various reasons, to join in a special celebration of that particular town or to attend various conferences or seminars on subjects that may be of interest.

1.3.3 This money also has to cover the cost of hosting visits by twin town visitors to Lancaster. If a civic group request a visit to Lancaster, a programme for their visit is put together which could cost anything from a few hundred pounds to a few thousand depending on the size of the party and what it is they wish to do.

1.3.4 Funding is also included in the budget for the participation in the International Youth Games. Until 2005 this comprised a grant to the Sports Council (of a varying amount according to the venue - £8,200 for 2006/07) to subsidise the children taking part in the event and a further £1,600 ‘sundry expenses’. This was previously utilised for the travel arrangements of the civic party, supplemented where necessary from the twinning budget. Following the change to the organisation in 2005 arrangements are now made direct by the City Council with the sporting/cultural and civic parties travelling together and the two budgets are therefore now combined.

1.4 Twinning Activities

1.4.1 Over the last forty years Lancaster has become well known for its commitment to twinning and was honoured by the European Union by being awarded the Flag of Honour in 1971 and the Plaque of Honour in 1991, both of which are on display in the Mayor’s Parlour.

1.4.2 More recently, budgetary restrictions have limited the Council’s activities with its current contacts, and the main contact has been via participation in the Youth Games each year.

1.4.3 The Ceremonial and Members Officer in Democratic Services organises all the twinning visits and arranges student/work placements within the City Council whenever possible. In particular there is now a longstanding arrangement with Aalborg, Denmark where we place one or two of their trainees for a three-month period each year and an arrangement through Ripley School for two students to work in the Electoral Registration office for a short period each year. Successful placements have also been arranged recently for an additional Danish trainee and also for a student from Perpignan. There is however no capacity within Democratic Services to extend the Council’s involvement beyond the present level.
2. **Future Development**

2.1 Some time ago an invitation was received via the Council’s twin town Lublin from one of their twin towns, Pernik in Bulgaria, for the Council to attend an international forum there with a view to discussing twinning links with Pernik. Although at the time the invitation was not accepted by the City Council the then Internal Affairs Review Board considered a report and recommended that the possibility of extending twinning arrangements with Pernik should be further considered.

2.2 Should Cabinet feel that further investigation should be carried out into developing additional European ties, approaches have also previously been received from cities in Romania, Ukraine and Israel none of which have been followed up.

2.3 In approving the Fairtrade Strategy in August 2003, it was suggested that twinning with a third world city as an economic rather than a civic link could be considered. The Local Government International Bureau have been contacted in this respect and some brief information obtained which indicates that such a project should include the following aims:

- improving urban livelihoods;
- developing council and community leadership;
- increasing participation;
- empowering communities;
- encouraging better local governance;
- improving accountability; and
- increasing community resources.

Partnerships are currently being sought for cities in Ethiopia, Gambia, Uganda and Sierra Leone. It is clear however that taking this any further is a significant piece of work.

2.4 During 2006, two requests have been received from cities in China for Lancaster to consider a formal twinning agreement. The first of these is from the City of Harbin, the capital city of Heilongjiang province and the political, economic, cultural, scientific, technological and communications centre of the province with 8 districts and 11 counties (towns) under its jurisdiction. It has a total area of 53,068km² and a population of 9.543 million people. It is situated in the far north east of the country. Harbin claims to be a city which merges Chinese and Western cultures. There are 23 colleges and several hundred scientific research institutions. The Harbin Institute of Technology has a high reputation for its Research and Development capability in high technology, and has made contributions to the aerospace industry, robot making and laser technology. It is also a base of heavy industry in China.

2.5 The second Chinese invitation has been received from Luohe, which is located in central-south Henan province and covers an area of 2,617 km². With a population of 2.52 million people, it has 2 counties and 3 districts under its jurisdiction. Luohe is located in central China to the south of Beijing and in 1994, was designated by the state as an experimental city for implementing comprehensive reform. Over 100 kinds of products are turned out from various industries, the major ones are ham, instant noodles, processed meat, steel, iron, construction materials, paper, cigarettes, biological and chemical goods, medicines, leather, shoes, knitted fabric, detergent, pumps, agricultural machinery, flour mills and chemical fertilizers. There are 2 universities in Luohe.
3. **Benefits of Twinning**

3.1 The Local Government International Bureau offers assistance to all local authorities in setting up twinning arrangements and believes that international co-operation is a flexible concept that covers a wide range of activities, involving all members of the community and covering a diverse range of local government services. There is much to be gained by involving as many members of the community as possible in such international partnerships. A link that has its roots in the community may develop into a school partnership or a technical exchange project, for instance. Exchange visits can provide a unique experience and insight into the lifestyles and environment of another community, with the opportunity for contact with people in a variety of fields.

3.2 Listed below are some of the key benefits provided by international partnerships and twinning links.

**People to people benefits:**

- promoting tolerance and increased understanding of different cultures
- promoting stronger community interaction at home by involving people in partnerships abroad, stimulating civic pride and self esteem
- enhancing youth activities, offering exchanges for young people giving them the opportunity to explore social and political issues, deepening their awareness and increasing their self confidence.

**Local authority benefits:**

- increasing global and European awareness
- offering a source of partners with whom to work in accessing EU Funding
- improving service delivery and solving problems through shared experience
- low cost staff and member development and training

**General Benefits:**

- improving social welfare and health by sharing expertise and experience
- raising public awareness and learning
- enhancing education
- developing economic and business links between small and large organisations in both the public and private sectors. Tourism in particular can benefit from the promotion of an area through overseas partnerships.

4. **Process**

4.1 The first step is to ensure compatibility by making an exploratory visit, checking that there is enough in common to sustain a relationship and that there is consensus on the way forward. A decision must also be made on the type of relationship to pursue. There are many different types of partnership. Some are formal agreements or twinning links, involving the signing of a document, charter or memorandum of understanding, some involve time limited projects and some are informal links with no kind of written agreement or protocol.

However, whatever the nature of the link, it is important to consider the following principles:
• there should be common understanding between the partners;
• there should be effective communication;
• the aims and objectives of the partnership need to be clear and transparent; and
• mechanisms need to be in place to involve the wider community, if appropriate.

4.2 Step two is to formalise the relationship through the Council’s decision-making processes. Twinned communities usually have some sort of written agreement or charter, drawn up by both partners and signed by senior elected representatives from the two communities. The document is not legally binding but should describe the rationale for setting up the link and reflect the interests and aspirations of both communities. It should also include a strategic plan, setting out the aims and objectives of the partnership, encompassing all components of the organisation and community; a methodology explaining how the aims and objectives will be achieved; and a list of desired outcomes and benefits, providing a starting point for reviewing and evaluating the project.

It is customary for charters to be formally signed at official ceremonies in both communities. While this procedure is important, in order to maximise the benefits of a visit to the partner community, the ceremony can be organised as part of a much wider programme, with a number of other activities.

4.3 Step three is to augment the partnership, setting a schedule of activities, assigning responsibilities for each function - planning, consulting and informing.

4.4 Step four is to follow up, monitoring activities, reviewing procedures and improving as necessary. There must be continuation in communicating aims, objectives and achievements to the wider community.

5. Details of Consultation

5.1 The Civic Task Group has been meeting during the preparation of this report and their views were sought on the approach from cities in China. Members of the Task Group considered that a further formal twinning agreement would be inappropriate there being 5 formal twinning agreements already in place. It was suggested however that if would be beneficial for the Council to strengthen the links that currently exist with the local Chinese community.

5.2 The Lancaster International Twinning Society and the international departments of both Lancaster University and St. Martin’s College have been consulted and in view of the specific approaches from cities in China comments have also been sought from the Chinese consulate in Manchester.

5.3 The Twinning Society has responded that twinning at local government level now encompasses business, commerce, working in partnership on sustainable projects etc and there is European funding available to support this. They feel however that the City Council is not in a position to pursue this option and they believe it would be unwise to consider any further twinning links in the foreseeable future, their preferred option being option 3. If the Council does choose to extend its twinning links it is the Twinning society’s view that an accessible (in terms of travel) third world town should be considered.

5.4 The response from St Martin’s College indicates that given that they recruit international students, have established research and teaching links with various
institutions overseas and that they promote study abroad to their home-based students they are very much in favour of supporting links of this kind, particularly with China with who they already have formal links. Whatever decision the Council reaches with regard to which twinning with a Chinese city the College would, where possible, seek to play an active role in the twinning process and would fully support the Council's endeavours in practice and well as in principle.

5.5 This view is also re-iterated by Lancaster University who have similar links with China.

5.6 The Consul has responded that China is keen to improve the relationship with the UK and twinning contributes to the mutual understanding between the 2 peoples and the development of co-operation. They too have offered to provide assistance with twinning and to support any co-operation between Lancaster and a Chinese city.

6. **Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)**

6.1 Option 1 – that the Council extend its current twinning arrangement and take the necessary steps to pursue a further twinning agreement with one of the two cities in China who have approached Lancaster.

6.2 Option 2 - that the Council extend its current twinning arrangement and take the necessary steps to pursue a further twinning agreement with a city elsewhere in the world.

6.3 Option 3 – that the Council confirm its commitment to its existing twin towns and community links in Europe, retaining the present level of involvement and budget allocation, but that no further twinning arrangements be considered for the present time, at least for the life of the current Medium Term Financial Strategy (to 2010/11).

6.4 Option 4 – that the Council cease to pursue any further activity with its twinning partners.

6.5 Option 5 – that the Council investigate involvement in the development of closer ties with a Chinese city or region in conjunction with the Universities.

7. **Officer Preferred Option and Comments**

7.1 The officer preferred option is to take forward Options 3 and 5.

7.2 A decision must be made as to whether the Council wishes to enter into a sixth twinning arrangement, when maintaining the existing links with twin towns is not considered a priority. Budgetary constraints have been a major factor in the reduction in twinning activity, and any extension of this area of work will require additional investment.

7.3 The City Council does not have a dedicated twinning department, the twinning duties are encompassed within other workloads. The four steps of Twinning outlined in section 4 of this report should be carefully considered, in particular whether the Council can fully support the aims and objectives prior to making any decision to extend involvement in twinning.

7.4 At the same time the benefits of twinning arrangements should be acknowledged and it is recommended that those ties which already exist, particularly in relation to the
International Youth Games should be maintained and strengthened where possible within the constraints of the current resource allocation.

7.5 Particularly in view of the comments received from St. Martin’s College and Lancaster University in paragraph 5 above, Members may wish to consider the development of closer ties with a city of region in China where recruitment to the universities is already taking place or is planned for the future. This would stop short of a formal twinning arrangement but would look at how the City Council could be involved in links already being forged by the universities.

8. **Conclusion**

8.1 The City Council already has five active twinning agreements, and aside from annual participation in the Youth Games is unable to give regular commitment to maintaining the links with these towns and cities, some of which have been in place for decades. Any growth in twinning activity can only be pursued with additional funding and to develop new links will require substantial investment and the inclusion of this area of work as a Council priority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT  |
| (including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability etc) |
| None.                          |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are no specific financial implications at this stage. Should Members wish to pursue options 1 or 2 it would be necessary to allocate significantly more funding to twinning than is currently the case. It is difficult to give an exact estimate of costs at this stage. Various factors would have to be taken into consideration but estimated set up costs could be in the region of £5 - 10,000 with recurring costs of £2 - 3,000. This would largely depend on the distance to any proposed twin town (return flights to China for example are in the region of £500 per person), the format and numbers attending any ceremony and the level of ongoing involvement. There is no capacity at the present time in Democratic Services to undertake this role and costs would therefore also be incurred to fund at least a temporary project manager, if not create additional permanent capacity in Members Services. A further report on the cost implications would be necessary once Members have given an indication of the extent to which they wish to extend any twinning activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION 151 OFFICER’S COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Section 151 Officer would advise that should Members wish to consider extending current twinning arrangements, then it should be considered in context of Cabinet’s proposed priorities and the outcome of the consultation exercise as well as other potential growth bids.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Local Government Act 2000, section 2(5) gives local authorities wide powers to promote the well being of their area and this covers most twinning activities. The Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993 also gives local authorities the specific discretionary power to provide advice and assistance as respects any matter in which they have skill and experience to a body carrying on local government activities overseas. This power shall not be exercised except with the consent of the Secretary of State or in accordance with a general authorisation given by him.

There are no legal implications at this stage. Although twinning agreements are not legally binding, if any new partnership were to be pursued, Legal Services would be consulted on the wording of an agreement.

**MONITORING OFFICER’S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

**Contact Officer:** Lisa Jackson  
**Telephone:** (01524) 582070  
**E-mail:** ljackson@lancaster.gov.uk