



Ross-on-Wye Town Council

Twinning Policy

Introduction

Town twinning was developed in Europe after the Second World War as a way of building strong links and friendships with communities in other countries to avoid another war and to bring unison across Europe.

There are approximately 2000 twinning arrangements in Britain and 75% are with French and German authorities. There is no fixed definition or model of town twinning or partnership arrangement. A twinning link is customarily defined as a friendship agreement involving co-operation between two communities in different countries, endorsed by both local authorities.

The idea is to pair towns and cities in different countries with the focus being to foster human contacts. Twin towns often, but not always, have similar populations and characteristics.

The two twinned communities organise projects and activities around a range of issues and develop an understanding of historical, cultural and lifestyle similarities and differences. These activities involve a wide range of community members.

For the purposes of this policy, it is simple to see twinning links as formal, indefinite agreements. Partnerships (or friendship arrangements) are more likely to be time limited arrangements where each authority receive short term benefits. Partnerships can, of course, be renewed or converted into twinning arrangements. The Council will need to be clear what form of arrangement it enters.

The Council already has three twinning arrangements. They are with Condé-sur-Noireau in France, Betzdorf in Germany, and Namutumba in Uganda.

The Purpose and Benefits of Twinning

There is no fundamental requirement to have twinning relationships with other local authorities. Twinning arrangements can however bring mutual benefits to the Council, the town and its twinned partners.

Twinning represents a long-term commitment between the partners, not a short-term project partnership. It should always be able to survive changes in political leadership and short-term difficulties of one or other partner, and support each other in times of need.

The twinning charters refer to promoting freedom and peace through mutually friendly relationships and fostering close links through the association. It encourages citizens of both towns to contribute by close contacts within the range of possibilities to provide a sound basis for personal friendships as a practical contribution to the unity and harmony of the two countries and a better international understanding.

Potential benefits include:

- exchange of knowledge, skills and experience
- increasing cultural awareness, including knowledge and understanding of the places of origin
- increased tolerance and understanding
- enhanced opportunities for youth activities
- close friendships built up over many years

Council Support & Funding

It must be recognised that the Council has scarce resources, which need to be focussed on improving service delivery and value for money to residents. Twinning arrangements can also create reputational risks as well as benefits for the Council and the town. For this reason, there must be clear, objective criteria for entering into and maintaining twinning arrangements. Criteria will establish whether a proposed twinning arrangement will benefit and contribute to the life of the town and its residents.

Community Links

The creation and running of any traditional Town Twinning should be a community led process and may arise from demand and interest from within the community either seeking a new link or responding to a request from elsewhere. An alternative to a formal twinning arrangement is for the Council to adopt a role of initial enabler and facilitator and thereafter have a limited, informal role that would fit within the looser Partnership Agreement model.

Town Twinning Criteria

These are examples of what the Council might be seeking to gain when considering proposed links with another town;

Why

- Does the proposal fit in with the Council's aims (as set out in the Mission Statement)
- Is there any other benefit for Ross-on-Wye
- Are there pre-existing links within the town
- Is the "twin" authority a good match for Ross-on-Wye in terms of
 - (a) Size of population.
 - (b) Population profiles (age, gender, race)
 - (c) Industrial/rural/commercial/services mix
 - (d) Type of governmental structures – is there a sufficient similarity in powers and span of competence of each local authority
 - (e) Its ability to bring tangible benefits to Ross-on-Wye

What

- What is the Council seeking to gain
 - (a) Social and cultural exchanges
 - (b) Technical/knowledge sharing regarding common problems.
 - (c) Tackling environmental issues, regeneration, community safety, health promotion and community cohesion.
 - (d) Increasing educational opportunities for pupils (language learning, global awareness).
 - (e) adaption to, and resilience from climate change through shared experiences.

How

- What form of arrangement will be entered into? (Twinning or Partnership)
- Is the arrangement sufficiently sustainable
- Is there is a sufficient commonality of interest to sustain and grow the link within the specific and broader communities in the area
- Are the proposed outcomes for the relationship measurable
- Are there any current links, e.g. commercial, educational, sporting, cultural etc.

This is not an exclusive list and therefore the Council might see fit to recognise other benefits from an association.

Decision-Making

Before entering into any new twinning arrangement, the Council will make an assessment of the proposal against the criteria set out above. The assessment will determine:

- Whether a formal twinning or partnership agreement is appropriate.
- If so, the recommended terms and nature of the arrangement.
- If not, whether an informal, community based arrangement should be facilitated.

Current twinning arrangements should also be reviewed periodically against these criteria. If an arrangement is felt to be no longer bringing benefit to the Council or town, consideration should be given whether to seek to revive or terminate the arrangement.

Roles and Responsibilities

Councillors who are nominated as representatives to twinning associations must ensure the following:

- Regular reports to Full Council with updates
- Facilitate two-way communication
- Obligations to meet with and visit representatives from the twinned town

Finances

It is recognised that the Council must play its part in hosting civic events for visitors and there will be an annual review undertaken as part of the budget setting process to ensure that sufficient funding is made available. The need for flexibility is noted due to the scheduling of visits and it is therefore accepted that there might be some circumstances that necessitate ad-hoc expenditure in this situation. Expenditure must be approved through the Finance & Property Sub-Committee but can be delegated to the Town Clerk. Income and expenditure reports will be monitored to ensure that budgets are kept under control and to assist with future financial planning.

In the event that gifts are exchanged the Council's policy stipulates when the mayor makes a presentation of a personal gift it will be paid for from the Mayor's Allowance and in other circumstances where it is appropriate that a gift from the community is provided that the expenditure should be made from the Twinning Budget.

Conclusion

It is without doubt that twinning and partnership agreements can bring many benefits to the Council and residents of the town but only if they fit within the Council's priorities and are vibrant and active.

*Adopted by Full Council, November 2017
Reviewed by the Finance & Property Sub-Committee February 2022*