

COUNCIL

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MEDWAY TOWN TWINNING AND CULTURAL EXCHANGES

Portfolio Holder Councillor Jane Chitty, Strategic Development and
Economic Growth

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1. **Summary**

- 1.1 This report proposes to look at the current situation regarding Medway's town twinning agreements, with recommendations to modernise the agreements and provide suggestions for new and future activities.

2. **Decision Issues**

- 2.1 The formation of a Member level Committee to oversee twinning issues is a matter for Council.

3. **Background**

- 3.1 Medway currently has twinning type arrangements with four towns; these are as follows (the Councils set out against each town relates to the Councils Medway inherited the arrangements from):
- Valenciennes, 50 years (Rochester Upon Medway City Council)
 - Cadiz, 20 years (Rochester Upon Medway City Council)
 - Yokosuka, 32 years (Gillingham Borough Council)
 - Ito, 32 years (Gillingham Borough Council)

Members have also recently agreed to officers investigating the possibility of a fifth twinned town in Foshan China. This will depend on providing an economic case for a suitable agreement.

- 3.2 There is twinning association in place known as Medway Valenciennes & Overseas Twinning Association (MVOTA) and this has recently celebrated 50 years of twinning with Valenciennes. The budget for the twinning association is £1000; this comes within the Social Regeneration budget. There are currently 64 members on the MVOTA and they meet quarterly.

Current Activities regarding Twinning

3.3 Valenciennes

3.3.1 The main activities to date with Valenciennes have been as follows:

3.3.2 In Valenciennes there has been a four-year interreg programme for which there have not been exchanges but visits mostly from French students.

3.3.3 Valenciennes have taken part in many events, such as:

- Visits on a regular basis to attend special events that are organised as social trips, which are self-funding and open to members and non-members.
- Costumed visits have been made to schools in Valenciennes where special projects have been set to study Dickens.
- Medway lace makers have attended a lace-making weekend in Valenciennes.
- A football match has been organised between school children in Valenciennes and Medway.
- Work experience placements have been organised.
- Art exchange has been organised by the Arts Team.
- A display of work by French artists has been organised in Medway.
- The European team works closely on funding projects with Valenciennes.

3.4 Japan

3.4.1 The main activities to date with Japan have been as follows:

3.4.2 Exchange visits to Ito and Yokosuka four times in the last five years. Last year due to funding problems it was only a one-way experience with the Japanese visiting Medway.

3.4.3 Ito and Yokosuka have taken part in the following:

- Student Exchanges
- Social Email Exchange
- Working in conjunction with the Japanese Embassy in London and the Japanese Business Association in London
- Visits from Yokosuka Ladies Choir and Mr Shigkei Mochizuki.
- Ministerial visit to Dickens Festival.
- Japanese attendance at the Will Adams Festival.
- Mayoral visit in December 2004
- 30 June – 6 Members from Yokosuka City Council visited Medway
- 15 July 2005 – 30 person delegation from Ito, Japan. Mayor of Ito in attendance

- 19-22 July - Ito Soroptomists visited Medway
- 7 August – Medway and Japanese student visit to Japan
- 10 August – Ito held its Will Adams celebration festival
- 26 May 2006 – there will be a service to commemorate the death of Will Adams in **HIRADO**. Mayor to commemorate in Medway
Sunday 28 May 2006.

3.4.4 Student exchanges have reduced recently largely in consequence of the September 11 terrorist attack, SARS, and Foot and Mouth. This may be exacerbated by the recent bomb attacks in London.

3.4.5 However, one over arching message arising from the recent trip to Japan was their wish to continue with exchanges of students.

3.5 Cadiz

3.5.1 MVOTA representatives recently visited Cadiz when they were on a holiday, where they were well received but felt that the only twinning opportunities lay in the promotion of business development. However, there is no immediate evidence to support this. Internet based searches to ascertain Cadiz's industry makeup provides no information, and direct contact with the Commercial Officer at the British Consulate in Seville, suggests opportunities beyond tourism are limited. They mentioned the aeronautical sector as a growth area, but this is based in the neighbouring municipality of Puerto Real.

3.5.2 It is recommended that an assessment of Cadiz's main industry sectors as a benchmark against those in Medway be conducted before progressing any major partnering activity. Otherwise, the twinning arrangement should be kept at a cultural level, and provide an information exchange at most.

3.6 Foshan

3.6.1 Medway's potential to twin with Foshan is listed below.

- Links with senior Chinese officials involved in Olympic Games can provide useful contacts and experience, and also lead to improved relationships with Beijing which may be useful for London 2012.
- Twinning with Foshan in China has the possibility of opening new tourism markets (there are 150 million people in China who currently holiday abroad) The U.K has only just become an approved destination for Chinese tourists. Guangdong Province, which is home to Foshan, is well placed in Southern China and close to Hong Kong to take advantage of the potential tourism market.

- There is significant twinning activity already taking place with China. Medway would be one of thirty-three cities and towns already twinned with China.
- Thamesport is owned by one of the largest companies in China – If we have one company here there could be the potential to attract more and offer a U.K base, which has great links into Europe.
- The Medway Universities are interested in gaining a foothold in the Chinese market and already proactively market the Universities in China. There are currently many Chinese students in Kent & Medway.
- There is also the potential for support to develop the east end of Chatham High Street into a small Chinatown.

4. Levels of Town Twinning and Agreements

- 4.1 There is little evidence of a legal basis for the twinning agreements that Medway Council currently has. There are signed, formal agreements posted in the Civic Suite for Ito, Yokosuka and Cadiz. However, these are general in their form of words to describe partnership activity that each city enters into. Officers believe they need to be revisited and a more specific and detailed commitment by way of a programme of planned activity could be put in place in order to develop valuable partnerships in the future.
- 4.2 The Local Government International Bureau (LGIB) based in London is a lead organisation for the promotion of Town Twinning initiatives. However, they have not conducted a study to benchmark the relative levels, legal or otherwise, of town twinning initiatives. LGIB has not undertaken any research on the issue of benchmarking or grading links. Its main efforts have been concentrated on promoting, publicizing and helping people and organisations to develop new and manage existing links.
- 4.3 LGIB believes the issue of benchmarking levels of twinning activity is worth further research, particularly as more local authorities are developing concrete international strategies. It may become an issue for the new regional network of International Officers that LGIB is forming.
- 4.4 Officers suggest that city partnership agreements could be set at three different levels, depending on the level of activity that is considered appropriate with each city. These are:

1. Level 1 - Information exchange

A simple exchange of information between cities on cultural and economic issues, as well as methods of authority working practices (e.g. Beacon award status), could provide a useful initial basis for a city partner programme. This may be appropriate where the economic and cultural links between cities might be seen as less vital.

2. Level 2 - Academic / Economic visits for policy / working practice exchange, plus cultural promotion / research activity

In addition to information exchange, there would be a commitment to exchange policy views on the above areas, coupled with development of cultural events. This could be formalised in a short document to agree areas of responsibility and hosting arrangements prior to exchange visits by dignitaries and / or officers on both sides.

3. Level 3 - Academic / Economic / Cultural exchange, including formal student placement exchange, trade mission activity, and consultative infrastructure development (e.g. Foshan) – tangible activity.

This would be a far more committed level of tangible activity, requiring buy-in from other institutions in Medway (including HE representatives). Visits would take place to a clearly laid out agenda that would strive to gain formal commitment to assist university student exchange, the development of trade initiatives in specific industry sectors, and cultural development that could also lead to positive economic spin-off activity. Visits would include representatives from the council as part of an 'expert' team with their own areas of specific interest (ED team or Portfolio Holder, sports development, academic representatives; tourism team or Town Centre Managers).

- 4.5 With the methods and levels of activity as described above, it is essential that a city champion operates on behalf of Medway Council for each city. It is desirable for each partner city to also have a person in place to coordinate a programme of activity. This would allow for drive and commitment to be given to partner city initiatives. Each level of activity would be agreed in a concisely written document (maximum 2 pages). In essence, this would be a memorandum of agreement relating to the level of activity to be undertaken.

5. Advantages/Disadvantages of town twinning

- 5.1 There are advantages and disadvantages arising from town twinning:

- Inward investment – historically from Japan five companies moved to Gillingham Business Park; more opportunities with China are possible.
- Increase in students studying in Medway from abroad. University College for the Creative Arts (formerly KIAD) currently has forty students from Japan and hopes to increase this. The idea of a Will Adams Scholarship being promoted throughout Japan could not only promote the Will Adams/Ito offer, it also promotes town twinning and potentially lead to an increase in Japanese students
- Improved cultural knowledge through student exchange
- Increase take up of Japanese language and culture in all schools
- Increase tourism in Valenciennes, good practise of events and festivals, Japanese tourism could be encouraged if Medway increased the Will Adams offer. China tourism has massive

potential for the UK, this has been identified as a new market potential as the UK now approved destination, and also universities insist in gaining new students.

- Great understanding of cultural differences leading to employment and friendship between the people of Medway and twinned towns.
- Greater collaboration and opportunities regarding the Olympics

5.2 However maintaining town twinning has budget implications. To date the Medway Twinning Association has concentrated on Valenciennes due to restricted budgets. The Youth service has also had to restrict student exchanges and they manage to continue exchanges by Medway public sector contributions and increasing cost to parents. This strategy of continuing charging parents can lead to excluding students from disadvantaged areas.

6. Advice and Analysis

6.1 Cabinet considered a number of options on 13 December 2005 regarding town twinning and cultural exchanges including maintaining the status quo; assigning an officer to work with the MVOTA to change the way it operates; developing an International Twinning Committee and deciding whether twinning with Foshan, China is appropriate and desirable.

6.2 The Cabinet recommended to Council the following course of action:

- Develop an International Twinning Committee ITC to oversee town twinning and have sub groups to deal with each country, MVOTA will be one sub group. Make additional increased budget transferred from Economic Development and Tourism budgets for ITC to manage (see appendix 1).

6.3 The Cabinet also agreed that further work would go ahead with Foshan with a view to having a formal agreement in place.

6.4 Officers suggest that this way forward will provide a dedicated budget to be used for developing twinning and give focus to all towns not just Valenciennes. It will also encourage the champion of each country / group to fundraise externally to match Council funding.

6.5 It is proposed town twinning sub groups are developed that report to the ITC at agreed intervals. There would be sub groups for Valenciennes (MVOTA), Cadiz, Japan and possibly China (if Members agree to go ahead), each with a champion representative to take forward an agreed work programme in line with an updated Memorandum of Understanding.

6.6 The proposed champions would work closely with the Local Government International Bureau (LGIB), who has representatives with

excellent experience in their respective country areas of partnerships and twinning.

- 6.7 Each sub group would apply to the ITC for funding to support proposed activities, with funding applications being supplemented by bids for funding from external organisations and also through fund raising activities.
- 6.8 Further work will continue to look at closer collaboration with Foshan, with meetings to be set up with LGIB and the China Britain Business Council to discuss the possibilities of collaboration, and guidance from the Foreign Office.

7. Finance and Legal Implications

- 7.1 The current budget of £1,000 is not adequate to cover the cost of being informally twinned with four towns and most definitely not for a fifth town in China. The Cabinet noted that a budget of £10,000 could be transferred to twinning activities from within the Economic Development budget.
- 7.2 The current twinning association concentrates mostly on Valenciennes and does not oversee or practically encourage development of the twinning in other towns to the same extent. However, after discussion with the chair and other members of the MVOTA it is apparent that there is a willingness to change the way it currently operates if requested. They are open to the suggestion of broadening memberships, having a 'champion' for each of the four towns, having officers report to it regarding issues such as Youth exchange, Tourism, Events, Economic activities, Waste, Transport etc if Members wished.
- 7.4 Under the Local Government Act 2000, the Council has the power to do anything which it considers is likely to promote or improve the economic or social well-being in its area.
- 7.5 This power may be exercised for the benefit of some or all of the Council's entire area as well as for residents in the area. The well-being powers permit expenditure to be incurred outside Medway's area provided there is a demonstrable social, economic or environmental benefit for Medway.
- 7.6 The Council's authority includes the power to incur expenditure, give financial assistance and enter into agreements with any person. In determining whether or how to exercise this power, the Council must have regard to its strategy for promoting the well-being of its area.
- 7.7 Section 176 of the Local Government Act 1972 permits the Council to defray the costs of members who make official and courtesy visits outside the United Kingdom on behalf of Medway. The section also permits the Council to defray the expenses incurred in the reception

and entertainment by way of official courtesy of distinguished persons or representatives of local government and public services whether from inside or outside the United Kingdom.

- 7.8 It is proposed that five Members (3:1:1:0) sit on the Committee supported by Officers and that the terms of reference, as set out in appendix 2, be approved.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 The Cabinet recommends to Council that an International Twinning Committee (ITC) consisting of Members supported by officers be formed to oversee all twinning matters.
- 8.2 That the draft terms of reference for the Committee, as set out in appendix 2, be approved.

Lead Officer

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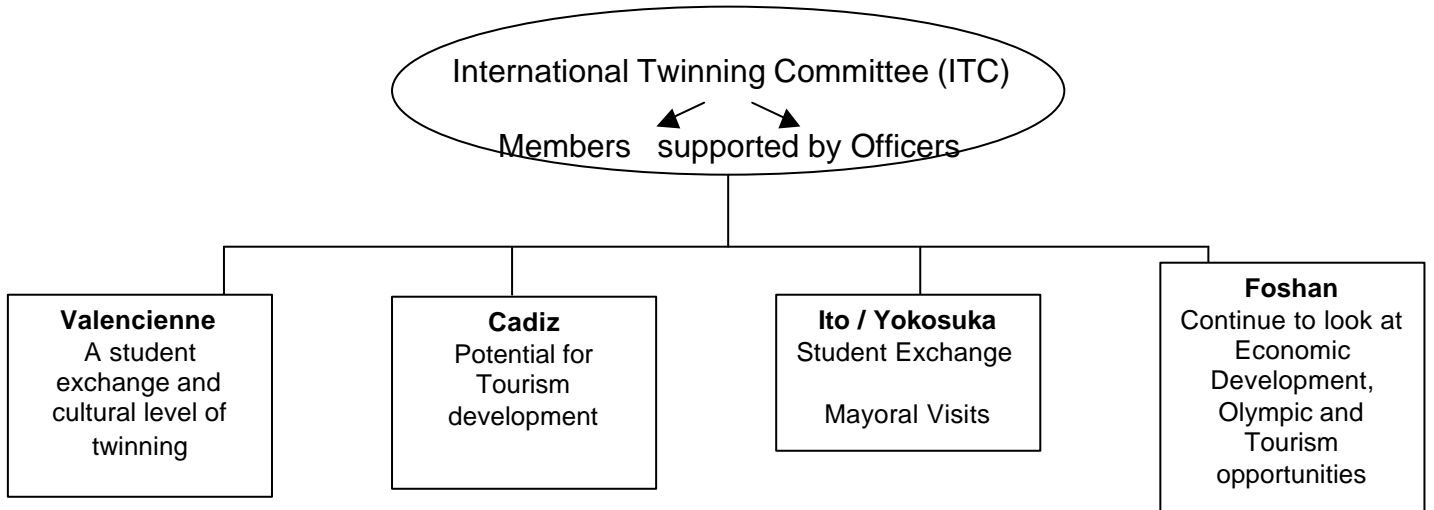
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Background Papers

None

International Twinning Committee



International Twinning Committee – Draft terms of reference

1. The International Twinning Committee (ITC) shall consist of five Council Members, supported by officers, for the purpose of determining the level of twinning activity between Medway and Valenciennes (France), Cadiz (Spain), Yokosuka (Japan) and Ito (Japan) as follows:
 - **Level 1 - Information exchange**
 - **Level 2 - Academic / Economic visits for policy / working practice exchange, plus cultural promotion / research activity**
 - **Level 3 - Academic / Economic / Cultural exchange, including formal student placement exchange, trade mission activity, and consultative infrastructure development**
2. The ITC shall have responsibility for the allocation of up to £10,000 per annum to develop twinning as described above.
3. The ITC shall meet no less than four times a year on twinning activities including any decisions requiring funding from the budget.
4. The ITC shall form Sub-Groups for Valenciennes, Cadiz and Yokosuka/Ito plus any other Sub-Groups as appropriate. The Sub-Groups will nominate a champion representative to take forward an agreed work programme in line with an updated Memorandum of Understanding. The Sub-Groups will report on progress to the ITC at regular intervals.
5. The champions will work closely with the Local Government International Bureau (LGIB), who has representatives with excellent experience in their respective country areas of partnerships and twinning.
6. Each sub group will apply to the ITC for funding to support proposed activities, with funding applications being supplemented by bids for funding from external organisations and also through fund raising activities.