

## COUNCIL

18 SEPTEMBER 2008

### REQUEST FOR MEDWAY TO ENTER INTO SISTER CITY STATUS WITH THE CHANCHENG DISTRICT OF FOSHAN, CHINA

Portfolio Holder	Councillor Jane Chitty, Portfolio Holder for Strategic Development and Economic Growth and Chairman of International Relations Committee
Report from:	Neil Davies, Chief Executive Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture
Author:	Julie Keith, Head of Democratic Services Clem Smith, Social Regeneration Manager

#### Summary

This report sets out a recommendation from the International Relations Committee that the Council enter into Sister City Status with the Chancheng District of Foshan, China.

#### 1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The decision as to whether Medway enters into Sister City Status with another area is a matter for Council.

#### 2. Background

- 2.1 On 19 January 2006, the Council considered a detailed report setting out an overview of Medway's town twinning agreements and recommending proposals to modernise these agreements basing future activities on three different levels:-
- 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 – tangible activity.
- 2.2 An International Twinning Committee (subsequently renamed International Relations Committee) was established comprising five Members, supported

by officers, to oversee all international relations matters. Under this Committee sub-groups were established, initially for Valenciennes (France), Cadiz (Spain) and Ito/Yokosuka (Japan) and the International Relations Committee was also requested to investigate possible links with a fifth town in Foshan, China. At that time it had been noted that officers had undertaken work on progressing a relationship with Foshan due to the Olympics and possible economic opportunities, and the International Relations Committee had been requested to consider whether it wished to move forward with formal arrangements with Foshan and, if so, to recommend to Council that exchange arrangements be entered into.

2.3 The International Relations Committee at its meeting on 1 November 2006 subsequently recommended to Council that exchange arrangements be entered into with Foshan, China and that the level of activity with Foshan be set at Level 3.

2.4 The recommendations of the International Relations Committee were subsequently approved by Council on 7 December 2006.

### **3. Request for Medway to enter Sister City Status with Foshan Chancheng District (China)**

3.1 At its meeting on 19 June 2008, the International Relations Committee was advised that an approach had been received from the District Governor and the Director of Economic Development of the Chancheng District of Foshan expressing a wish to further relationships with Medway to build Sister City Status, develop a closer friendship and create opportunities to work together on building economic ties with businesses in Medway. More recently this request was formalised in a letter to the Council requesting that the Council enter into Sister City Status with the Chancheng District of Foshan.

3.2 This letter had been received following exchange visits involving a delegation from Foshan visiting Medway between 13 and 14 September 2007 and a subsequent visit to Foshan by a delegation from Medway in February 2008. Those participating in the visit from Medway to Foshan included:-

- The Mayor of Medway, Councillor Val Goulden
- The Mayor's Escort, Councillor Tony Goulden
- Councillor Jane Chitty, Portfolio Holder for Strategic Development and Economic Growth
- Wendy Mesher, Medway Renaissance
- Tracey Manley, Chief Executive, Thames Gateway Chamber of Commerce
- Christina Wells, Director of Education, Mid Kent College
- Steven Batchelor, Head of Creative Arts, Mid Kent College
- Ashley Davis, International Relations Manager
- Ming Yau, Translator on behalf of Medway Council
- Lee Parker, local businessman who imports from China
- Russell Penfield, travelling companion of Tracey Manley
- Lloyd Davis local businessman/special constable
- Elaine Higham - Member of the China Sub Group

- Robert Russell – Chairman, Thames Gateway Chamber of Commerce
- Two representatives from the Kut O Association

3.3 Those places visited in Medway by the delegation from Foshan included the following:-

- BAE Systems – Presentation
- Medway Innovation Centre Tour
- Thamesport – Chinese Business in Medway
- SEEDA – Role in Regeneration
- Medway – Creating a new City
- Tour of Key Medway Regeneration Sites
- Rochester Riverside/St Mary's Island
- Historic Dockyard, Chatham
- University Campus/University of Kent
- Black Lion Leisure Centre
- Jumpers Centre – Meeting 2012 Team
- Gillingham Library
- Tour of Historic Sites in Medway

3.4 Those places visited in Foshan by the delegation from Medway included the following:-

- Foshan – Chancheng City Planning Department
- China Ceramics City
- HSBC Data Processing Ltd
- Foshan Valeo Icikoh Lighting Systems
- South China Precision Engineering Innovation Centre
- Foshan University
- Rong Shan Middle School
- No 25 Junior School
- The New Lotus Sport Stadium – Olympic Development
- Foshan New Sports Centre – Olympic Development
- Nanfeng Ancient Kiln
- Shiwan Artistic Ceramics Co Ltd
- HuaSha Ceramics City
- Historic Ancestral Temple
- Folk Art Research Institute
- Creative Industries Centre

3.5 The following table sets out the costs to Medway of the visit to Foshan in February 2008:-

Funded from the Mayor's Budget Mayor and Mayor's Escort	£ 1,186
Funded by the International Relations Committee International Relations Manager representing the Mayor's Office and as travel organiser and group support for internal travel costs in China	£ 1,000
Funded by Medway Economic Partnership/SEEDA Ming Yau as translator and travel organiser, Councillor Mrs Jane Chitty, Portfolio holder for Strategic Development and Economic Growth	£ 1,093
Funded by Medway Renaissance Partnership/SEEDA Medway Renaissance Partnership Strategy and Support Manager	£ 593

10 other people travelled at their own expense as follows:-

Three from Thames Gateway Chamber of Commerce  
Two from Mid Kent College/University of Kent  
Two local business people  
Two representatives from the Kut O Association  
One member of the Chinese Sub Group

- 3.6 The International Relations Committee, in considering the request for Medway to enter into Sister City Status with Foshan, noted that the purpose would be to pursue and expand on existing links for economic, educational and creative industries.
- 3.7 The Chancheng District of Foshan is the main historic area of Foshan and the key area of local government for the whole of Foshan and contains the University and schools which would like to link with Medway's schools. Chancheng is the city centre and has a population of 1.1 million.
- 3.8 There is significant sister city status activity already taking place with China, and Medway would be one of 31 cities, towns and counties (Source LGA) already linked with China. It is considered that links with senior Chinese officials involved in the Olympic games can provide useful contacts and experience, and may also lead to improved relationships with Beijing, which may prove useful for London 2012.
- 3.9 The benefits of strengthening Medway's links with Foshan are set out below:-

#### **Educational benefits**

- The China Sub Group of the International Relations Committee is currently working with Medway schools to develop links with schools in the Chancheng District of Foshan.
- Chatham Grammar School for Boys, a specialist language school, has expressed an interest in developing ties and closer relations with schools in the Chancheng District of Foshan and has already been in

touch with two schools that would like to work with them to develop programmes for Chinese students to study to A level. There is also the potential of Mandarin Chinese being taught at the school. In addition, the Chatham Grammar School for Boys is keen to have a Chinese Assistant based within the School, funded by the British Council, who would be able to work with students who attend the Saturday morning Chinese School at the Kut O Association. The School is keen to have the Kut O School operating on the site of the Chatham Grammar School for Boys and there is potential for this to also provide facilities to a wider community. The Head of Chatham Grammar School for Boys is keen to strengthen existing ties, develop language connections and expand cultural links. A number of Chinese students already attend the school.

- St John Fisher RC School are already in email contact with the education department in Foshan with a view to creating mail pen pals and also the school is starting a Dragon Dance Team, which will be supported by members of The Medway Dragon and Lion Dance Association.
- Temple Secondary School are also in email contact with the education department in Foshan to discuss ways of supporting English Language classes in the Chancheng District by email or by pen pals and the possibility of pursuing sporting interests.
- Investigations are underway to identify potential links for junior schools as a means of creating links with younger children in Foshan. This will cover language and art as potential projects.
- Where possible, the potential for introducing Chinese links for other Medway secondary schools will be developed and there is potential to gain funding from the British Council to work on this and other projects.
- The Medway Universities are interested in gaining a foothold in the Chinese market and already proactively market their universities in China. There are currently many Chinese students in Kent & Medway.
- The University of Greenwich has expressed an interest in supporting further activities and being part of developing ties.

### **Economic benefits**

- The future prosperity of Medway is dependent on the growth of existing businesses, emerging sectors and inward investment. One of the identified emerging sectors is environmental technologies. The global opportunities within this sector are huge and commentators identify China as one of the largest. The most recent visit to Foshan highlighted the economic possibilities and, the importance placed on this sector by the Chinese. For example, the precision engineering institute is working on regeneration and development in the field of "green" production and this links to regeneration and development at BAE Systems and the Universities in Medway.
- The "Eco Region" agenda being promoted by Communities and Local Government (CLG) provides an opportunity for Medway and its businesses to be a global player. Eon's investment programme of £1.75 bn at Kingsnorth and Grain can provide the platform for an environmental technologies cluster, possibly involving activity in

China. Eon has already offered to be involved in meetings and visits from delegates with Foshan. If the Carbon Capture System goes ahead at Kingsnorth then the site will be the biggest regeneration and development facility in Europe. China is currently the world's biggest builder of coal fired power stations and is actively seeking assistance from the UK to cut emissions.

- The Chinese also wish to pursue environmental technologies and there is a willingness to bring added value to the area by promoting innovation and educational activity focused on environmental technologies. The University at Greenwich is working with Gallaghers on specialist contamination and products such as Carbon8 and Lafarge are involved in product development. China is the world's biggest consumer of concrete and Foshan's development programme includes large scale regeneration and brownfield sites.
- Thamesport is already operated by a Chinese owned company, Hutchinson Ports Ltd. Emerging work on the environmental technologies sector has identified further opportunities linked to activity in China, involving both import and export of materials.
- Importantly for Medway there is a growing number of smaller businesses who are starting to develop trade with China and would welcome the added benefit of an established relationship. For example, Wozair at Gillingham Business Park export specialist fire dampers to China and the Food Machinery Company at Fenn Corner import industrial food machinery which they then modify for the UK market.

### **Creative Industries benefits**

- In terms of economic links and ties with existing businesses, a visit to a Creative Industries Centre in Foshan elicited requests for links with fashion and design businesses in Medway. Meetings with the officials responsible for urban planning generated the need to explore opportunities for design and regeneration professionals to be involved.
- The University for the Creative Arts has expressed an interest in linking with designers in China and companies visited in February 2008 specifically requested contact with the Fashion faculty. One company had worked on sportswear designs for the Beijing Olympics.
- The Chancheng District has a highly regarded reputation for the creative art industries and is world famous in the areas of porcelain and fine china.
- The Nanfeng Kiln and The Chancheng Folk Art Institute are two of the major organisations in the promotion of the creative art industries in South West China.
- The potential of working directly with the Medway University of Creative Art and the growing strength of Medway's creative industry sector offers a wealth of opportunities.
- The China Sub Group of the International Relations Committee is planning to review projects that have the potential to link the creative industries in Medway with those in the Chancheng District of Foshan. There is the potential to bring artists from China to demonstrate and teach paper cutting, Chinese calligraphy and china crafts such as pottery and modelling. There is also the possibility of gaining match

funding from the British Council to assist with this project. The target date for this would be February 2009 to tie in with The Chinese New Year celebrations and it is planned to involve The University of Creative Art, Mid Kent College and The New Chatham Art Centre so as to reach the widest audience.

- There is also potential to display the locally produced Peace Flags in Beijing. This is still being considered for funding by the college and is linked with Mid Kent College and the flags painted by their students.
- Two members of the China Sub Group, who are also members of the Medway Dragon and Lion Dance Team, along with a team from the Dance Alley Dancers based in Chatham have been asked to participate in a competition being held in the Chancheng District in February 2009. This invitation was as a result of the Dragon & Lion Dance Festival held in Gillingham at the Black Lion Leisure Centre in June.

3.10 Establishing Sister City Status is not as formal as creating twinning links. To enter into Sister City Status would mean that Members, officers, businesses or community groups from either city can visit or contact each other thus creating links for economic, educational or creative purposes. In addition, it becomes easier to apply for funding from the British Council and from Chinese Government Agencies to support exchanges or opportunities for business meetings for the mutual benefit of both cities.

3.11 Medway has already signed documents of intent to work together on projects relating to economic, education and creative industries. If it is agreed to enter into Sister City Status then a more formal agreement could be signed at the next visit by a delegation to either city.

3.12 Medway continues to build on its friendships and links with Foshan and, following the recent earthquake in China, the Chairman of the International Relations Committee sent a letter of condolence on behalf of the people of Medway to Mr Liang Weidong, Vice-Secretary of Foshan Chancheng District Committee of Chinese Peoples Congress. Mr Liang Weidong subsequently responded. At the request of the International Relations Committee, copies of both letters are appended to the report at Appendices A and B.

#### **4. Advice and Analysis**

4.1 In the light of the work already taking place within Medway utilising existing links with Foshan, and, in addition the potential to build on these links resulting in the economic, educational and creative benefits to Medway as set out within the report, the International Relations Committee has recommended that the Council enter into Sister City Status with the Chancheng District of Foshan.

#### **5. Financial implications**

5.1 Any funding required specifically resulting from the decision to enter into Sister City Status will fall within the existing budget of the International Relations Committee and from external sponsorship.

5.2 The benefits to Medway outlined within this report set out the opportunities of raising funds to support certain projects with regard to economic, education and creative industries from external bodies.

## **6. Legal implications**

6.1 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.

6.2 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 wellbeing powers permit expenditure to be incurred outside Medway's area provided there is a demonstrable social, economic or environmental benefit for Medway.

6.3 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 community strategy prepared under s4 of the 2000 Act.

## **7. Recommendation**

7.1 That taking into account the economic, educational and creative industries benefits outlined within the report, Medway enter into Sister City Status with Foshan – Chancheng District (China).

## **Background papers**

Letter from the District Governor and the Director of Economic Development of the Chancheng District of Foshan

### **Contact for further details:**

Julie Keith Head of Democratic Services

Tel 01634 332760

[julie.keith@medway.gov.uk](mailto:julie.keith@medway.gov.uk)

Clem Smith Social Regeneration Manager

Tel 01634 338119

[clem.smith@medway.gov.uk](mailto:clem.smith@medway.gov.uk)

Appendix A - Letter from Chairman of International Relations Committee to Vice Secretary of Foshan Chancheng District Committee of CPC

Appendix B – Letter of response from the Vice Secretary of Foshan Chancheng District Committee of CPC