

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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COMMITTEE	Finance, Policy & Resources
DATE	20 September 2016
DIRECTOR	Chief Executive
TITLE OF REPORT	Twinning & International Partnerships
REPORT NUMBER	OCE/16/030
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to bring before Committee applications for financial assistance from the International Twinning Budget 2016-17 and to make recommendations.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- a) That Finance, Policy & Resources Committee approve the following grants from the International Twinning Budget 2016-17:
- i) Contribution of £8,200 towards a visit by Bucksburn Academy pupils to Stavanger in a STEM-based educational exchange, 10-15 February 2017
  - ii) Contribution of £2,000 towards the attendance of a civic delegation and musicians from Stavanger at the lighting of the Christmas Tree, 24-25 November 2016

### 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Full council approved the International Twinning Budget for 2016-2017 of £137,250. The approved budget from the Common Good Fund provides £102,000 of monies towards the support of twinning projects and/or visits. Remaining funds support the infrastructure of the programme, such as salary and ICT costs. A total of £102,000 is available to support projects in 2016-17.

	<b>Balance of budget available as at April 2016</b>	<b>£102,000</b>
	<b>Opening Balance</b>	<b>£20,659</b>
i)	Contribution towards a visit by Bucksburn Academy pupils to Stavanger in a STEM-based educational exchange, 10-15 February 2017	£8,200
ii)	Contribution towards the attendance of a civic delegation and musicians from Stavanger at the	£2,000

	lighting of the Christmas Tree, 24-25 November 2016	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£10,200</b>
	<b>Closing Balance (if recommendations approved)</b>	<b>£10,459</b>

#### 4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The health and safety implications of all visits are taken into account during planning, with any exceptional implications addressed at the time of application. The Twinning & International Partnerships Officer receives automatic updates with regards to situations in countries from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and is in close contact with counterpart officers in the twin cities to ensure information provided to participants is accurate and up-to-date. All travel guidance issued by the Twinning & International Partnerships Officer is based upon the advice of the FCO and local intelligence, such as the police and local government authorities. All individuals/groups who have been supported by the Twinning Grant must follow the advice of these authorities when visiting the twin cities, including changing travel or programme arrangements if required. If any of these authorities advice against travel to an area, then travel and the project must be postponed with immediate effect until it is deemed safe to continue.

Where individuals/groups from Aberdeen are travelling overseas, comprehensive pre-visit briefings are offered by the Twinning & International Partnerships Officer and all have the opportunity to ask questions and request support. When participating in overseas visits, Council employees are covered by the Council's insurance policy while non-Council employees are instructed by the Twinning & International Partnerships Officer to obtain comprehensive travel insurance.

A review of the financial systems used to administer the Twinning Grant was undertaken in July 2016. As per recommendations in the Local Code for Practice (Approved FPR Committee September 2015), Following the Public Pound Tier 4 procedures are adhered to:

“Where annual funding is less than £15,000, an officer may still chose to follow the procedures laid down for Tier 4, as although the level of funding does not fall within the following the public pound guidance, the level of risk may be such that it would be prudent to follow these procedures.”

Following this review, existing measures were strengthened and new practices implemented to ensure that the Twinning Grant is fully accountable in its allocation of the public pound.

Long established twinning links will not be maintained without regular reciprocal visits and ongoing projects being initiated by communities, groups and individuals and there is the potential for the city's international image to be damaged if we don't continue to support established relationships.

Grants provided through the twinning budget provide individuals and communities from throughout Aberdeen City with the opportunity to engage with international twinning activities. In addition, incoming visitors to the city on twin city projects support the local economy through their participation at events and hospitality and retail expenditure while visiting the city.

The Twinning & International Partnerships Officer will provide a strong link between Aberdeen and our twin cities who also provide organisational support, advice and guidance when required.

They will also make recommendations on funding available to the group and offer support to foster a relationship with the city so that it is long lasting and beneficial to the people of Aberdeen without requiring on-going financial support from the public purse.

All groups participating in twin city activities are encouraged to develop sustainable relationships with their partner groups. Links between most of the twin cities of Aberdeen are active, and links which have not recently been engaged have been contacted to re-establish communications. It is important that all visits and projects through twinning are long-standing and fruitful to ensure their benefit to the local people of Aberdeen, to establish and promote positively the overseas image of Aberdeen and for best practice to be shared between cities.

## 5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

a) These recommendations involve the allocation of funds made available from the 2016-17 budget:

i) **Contribution of £8,200 towards a visit by Bucksburn Academy pupils to Stavanger in a STEM-based educational exchange, 10-15 February 2017**

Bucksburn Academy have recently initiated a school exchange programme with St Olav VGS in Stavanger. The schools have developed the partnership through a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) project – the promotion of which is a key priority in local and national agendas in both countries. Bucksburn Academy hosted the Stavanger group in September 2015 for the first part of this visit and would like to make a reciprocal visit to Norway to enhance their learning in February 2017.

St Olav VGS is a secondary school in Stavanger which specialises in STEM subjects. A group of teachers and pupils visited Aberdeen in September 2015 to participate in TechFest, Aberdeen's Science Festival. Whilst in the city, arrangements were made for the group to visit a local secondary school to experience science learning with in a Scottish framework. Bucksburn Academy hosted the school and

allowed pupils to participate in various science classes and organised a Scottish Culture Evening in the school for them. The two lead teachers from both schools maintained contact and have devised a new STEM project which will enable young people from both cities to enhance their learning and understanding of environmental science topics.

The STEM project which has been developed involves young people from the two cities exploring sustainability through lowering carbon and increasing renewable energy resources. This will be achieved by pupils attending STEM subject classes in schools and identifying immediate actions which schools can take to implement changes through observations and sharing of knowledge. Students will also explore policies at local and national level through local authority and government agendas. Field trips will take place to promote hands-on STEM learning at local outdoor greenspace and national reserves to highlight the impact of pollution and global weather change. Pupils will complete logbooks about their experiences which will contribute to them obtaining a John Muir Discovery Award which supports the Curriculum for Excellence and pupils' individual Records of Achievement.

This project provides local young people with the opportunity to develop an international understanding of sustainability, including legislation, targets and economic, political and social issues. Scotland's Eco School's programme is currently reviewing its' aims to include the United Nation's sustainability goals as a measurement of success and this project provides an opportunity to implement this. The Scottish Government have identified the improvement of STEM education as a key priority for the Curriculum for Excellence and Aberdeen City Council have adopted a STEM Development Policy which this project supports. Providing opportunities for young people in the city meets with the Shaping Aberdeen outcome of 'People Matter'. Several key components of the Curriculum for Excellence are also met through this project, such as the 'Global Citizen' strand. The achievement of a John Muir Discovery Award enhances the portfolio of young people in the city and encourages a positive post-school destination, particularly within a STEM-related industry.

This is the first year of the project and both teachers hope that it will evolve. Bucksburn Academy have proven experience of leading a multi-partner Comenius project and are exploring the options of developing this project so that it is eligible for Erasmus+ funding. Bucksburn Academy are currently applying to other sources to assist with funding this initial visit, such as Statoil's Heroes of Tomorrow Programme and the Young Scot's Group Project Support Fund.

This application seeks a total of £8,200 to contribute towards a visit by 2 teachers and 16 pupils from Bucksburn Academy to Stavanger in February 2017. Match funding will be sought from partners in Stavanger, grants, fundraising and personal contribution.

<b>Expenditure</b>	
Flights	£7,200
Accommodation	£2,700
Food	£4,500
Activities	£2,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£16,400</b>
<b>Income</b>	
Contribution from participants	£1,800
Contribution from partner	£2,000
Fundraising	£2,000
Grants	£2,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>£8,200</b>
Expenditure-Income	£16,400-£8,200
<b>Total Applying For</b>	<b>£8,200</b>

**ii) Contribution of £2,000 towards the attendance of a civic delegation and musicians from Stavanger at the lighting of the Christmas Tree, 24-25 November 2016**

A symbolic event which marks Aberdeen and Stavanger's twinning relationship is the annual lighting of the Christmas Tree – a gift from the city of Stavanger. A service which is free to the public to attend is held before the lighting to mark this accord and the beginning of the festive period. The Mayor of Stavanger will be invited to attend the ceremony as a measure of thanks and to maintain civic relations. Stavanger will also asked to send traditional performers to enhance the event and celebrate twinning relations.

Aberdeen and Stavanger celebrated 25 years of the twinning partnership in 2015. Several projects have been cultivated between organisations in Aberdeen and Stavanger over this period and existing partnerships continue to flourish. As well as these continued relations, new partnerships have been created this year between the cities including a school exchange with Bucksburn Academy and new cultural projects through the Sound and Spectra Festivals.

A key event which marks the twinning relationship between the two cities is the lighting of the Christmas Tree which Stavanger gifts to Aberdeen each year. The lighting of the Christmas Tree, based in the Castlegate area, is a popular event in the city's Winter Festival

Programme and can attract an audience of up to 1500 people to the city centre. During the event, local audiences are entertained by musicians as local and Norwegian churches mark the festive season with civic dignitaries in attendance.

Stavanger regularly sends musicians to the event to celebrate Norwegian culture and the twinning relationship. The presence of a Norwegian music group at the event will engage local audiences with different music traditions and raise the profile of Aberdeen's twinning links with Stavanger. The group have been asked to dress in traditional costume and will promote Norwegian customs and traditions in keeping with the festivities. As well as playing at the Christmas Tree Ceremony in the evening, the group will perform at various venues throughout the day such as city libraries and shopping centres to raise the profile of the twinning relationship to different audiences and promote the event with the aim of increasing audience figures that evening.

The Lord Provost will also send an invitation to the Mayor of Stavanger, as is custom, to attend the event and civic reception afterwards. Whilst in Aberdeen, a programme will be created for the Mayor which will also include visits to existing and prospective educational, cultural and economic partnerships and projects between the two cities. Extending an invitation to the Mayor of Stavanger to attend the Christmas Tree Light Switch-on Ceremony recognises the importance of town twinning activities and ensures that civic relations are maintained between the two cities.

Aberdeen and Stavanger share strong business and economic links and efforts continue to build more cultural and social links into the twinning and business partnership. An invitation to Stavanger to participate in the Christmas Tree Light Switch On demonstrates Aberdeen City Council's continued desire to work together and develop cultural and business links with their city. Contributing to the portfolio of the city's events calendar and networks promotes the Shaping Aberdeen vision of 'Place Matters'.

This application seeks a total of £2,000 to support costs associated with hosting a civic delegation and musicians from Stavanger in Aberdeen. Stavanger Kommune will contribute towards air fares of the group.

<b>Expenditure</b>	
Flights	£2,400
Accommodation	£1,200
Food Costs	£600
Transport	£200
<b>Total</b>	<b>£4,400</b>

<b>Income</b>	
Contribution from Stavanger Kommune	£2,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>£2,400</b>
Expenditure-Income	£4,400-£2,400
<b>Total Applying For</b>	<b>£2,000</b>

## 6. IMPACT

### **Improving Customer Experience –**

Twinning & International Partnerships supports the principles of the Common Good Fund:

- Upholding the dignity of the City: The expense of civic ceremonies; and of the provision of suitable hospitality on appropriate occasions and for appropriate persons, and guests would fall under this purpose;
- Any other purpose which, in the bona fide and reasonable judgement of the Council, is for the good of the community as a whole, or in which the inhabitants at large may share: to be distinguished from the separate interest or benefit of any particular individual or group of people, however deserving or needy.

### **Improving Staff Experience –**

The Twinning and International Partnerships Officer works closely with internal departments to create partnerships and projects between Aberdeen City Council and twin cities, regularly working with the Education, City Events and Civic Teams amongst others.

### **Improving our use of Resources –**

The International Twinning Grant is funded through the Common Good Fund. Recommendations for grant allocations are presented to council committee and all reports detailing grant allocations are readily available through the council website. Twinning & International Partnerships will be reviewed in 2016-17.

### **Corporate -**

Promoting and supporting international exchanges, involving various communities of interest, significantly contributes to Aberdeen City Council's Smarter City Vision and to the actions of the Single Outcome Agreement. The outlined twinning projects also align with the cultural strategy vision as it allows for improved communication of cultural opportunities, helps with changing the perception of the city, to develop a stronger cultural identity and to have increased levels of effective partnership working.

### **Public –**

Human Rights, Equalities and Diversity: Aberdeen City Council has in place a range of statutory and discretionary plans, schemes and policies to promote equality. Officers endeavour to target groups and

communities which have not previously had experience of international visits or exchanges, or have been under-represented in twin city activities. Applicants complete an equal opportunities monitoring form as part of the application process.

#### 7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Twinning & International Partnerships upholds the principles of the Common Good Fund. The cessation of the programme could result in failure to 'uphold the dignity of the city' and a breakdown in projects 'which are good for the community as a whole'.

Should this diverse and engaging programme not continue, then Aberdeen could potentially cease to be an attractive destination for visitors and local residents with economic spend being distributed elsewhere in Scotland and international partnerships could be at risk.

#### 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None used.

#### 9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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