

TWINNING ADVISORY GROUP

MINUTES OF A MEETING of the Twinning Advisory Group held on Thursday 29 September 2011 at 8:15am in the Executive Meeting Room, The Guildhall, Portsmouth.

(NB These minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda and reports for the meeting.)

Present

Councillors Hugh Mason (Chair)
Lord Mayor Cheryl Buggy (Vice Chair)
Peter Eddis
Terry Hall
Frank Jonas
Michael Blake

Representatives and others

Honorary Alderman Robin Sparshatt
Councillor Steve Wemyss (Duisburg Committee Chair)
Charles Stunell (Haifa Committee representative)
Pauline Stirling (Portsmouth Grammar Junior School)
Louise Wilders (Head of Customer, Community & Democratic Services)
Stewart Agland (Local Democracy Manager)
Vicki Plytas (Senior Local Democracy Officer)
James Fitzgerald (PCC Accountant for Corporate Resources & Services)
Sue Page (Finance Manager)
Peter Smith-Parkyn (Local Democracy Assistant)

1 Welcome and introductions

At this first meeting of the Twinning Advisory Group (TAG), Councillor Hugh Mason welcomed Councillors, representatives and all others present.

Councillor Mason then explained why the TAG has been established. The primary reason resulted from the conclusions drawn by a Scrutiny Panel which highlighted various concerns over the manner in which PCC had been running our international relations. Councillor Mason said that Duisburg and Haifa Committees were operational but there was no Caen Committee and the operation of Caen Foundation was solely in the gift of the Cabinet Member for Resources. To date PCC's links with Caen and others have been serviced predominantly by either the Lord Mayor's office or by Democratic Services and a particular concern was that no single officer had responsibility for oversight of international relations. This had contributed to a situation where some matters had not been dealt with and some international relationships being allowed to wither.

Councillor Mason went on to explain that the secondary reason for the establishment of TAG was that Council needed to make budget savings and the administration therefore decided in the last budget process that the current level of council provided support for twinning could no longer be sustained. The budget available for twinning activities was reduced by more than half and serious consideration had been given to cutting the budget altogether.

Councillor Mason then advised the Group of the decisions that he, as the Portfolio holder responsible for twinning has taken.

1. The establishment of the Twinning Advisory Group, to advise the portfolio holder of how the budget is spent and where and how PCC's international links should be developed.
2. The appointment of Mr Peter Smith-Parkyn as the single point of contact for all international relations communications.
3. The establishment of a Caen Committee.
4. The Portfolio holder, for the time being to maintain oversight of Portsmouth's sister links to reinvigorate these links for the benefit of the City of Portsmouth
5. That the twinning committees operate in a semi-autonomous fashion, seeking relevant interested parties from the City to strengthen the links
6. That secretarial and administrative support from Democratic Services, can no longer be afforded and will therefore no longer be provided..
7. That the committees will not receive an annual budget but will be invited to bid, through the Twinning Advisory Group for funds for projects but not for day to day administration.
8. That both the Duisburg and Haifa Committees shall retain and disperse the funds they have already accumulated as they see fit.

The Finance Manager confirmed that Financial Services would continue to provide statements and accounts to the committees.

2 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

3 Declaration of Members' Interests (AI 3)

Councillor Wemyss expressed a personal non prejudicial interest with matters relating to Duisburg as a co-opted member and Chair of the Duisburg Committee.

4 Update on current projects

- a) Peter Smith-Parkyn reported from the Lord Mayor's Office that the following events are in the diary.
- i. 4th October – Visit by Duisburg exchange students linked with priory school
 - ii. 6th October – Visit by Duisburg exchange students linked with Highbury College
 - iii. 5th December – proposed Duisburg Christmas meeting (usually held in the Lord Mayor's Parlour)

The Lord Mayor also added that on 1st November 2011 she was hosting the Ports Dinner. VIP guests will include Mr Waterman the City Engineer (and port manager) from Haifa, Israel.

- b) Peter Smith-Parkyn tabled a summary report which showed the known projects currently being proposed and worked on.
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- i. Caen, France
 1. Caen International Fair (10th to 14th November 2011)
 2. Interreg Project
 3. Pen pal request from two French Schools
 4. Request for Portsmouth work experience placement
 - ii. Duisburg, Germany
 1. Xenos Project
 2. Crossroutes 51^o
 - iii. Maizuru, Japan
 1. International Children's pictures exhibition (supported by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in November 2011.
 - iv. Portsmouth, New Hampshire, US
 1. Gifts and letters were exchanged on behalf of the Lord Mayor by the Royal British Legion Band who played there on 4 August 2011.
 - v. Marondera, Zimbabwe
 1. Contact has been made with the British Embassy appointed Consular Representative for British Nationals, Mr Carpenter, to establish the interest in this link.
 - vi. Request to form a sister-link
 1. Request from Yichang, Hubei Province in China.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Local Democracy Assistant bring to the next meeting a draft proforma that can be sent to Cities requesting links with Portsmouth to be able to determine their value to the City and;
- (2) that the current projects summary be noted.

5 Updates from the Twinning Representatives and grant proposals

Councillor Wemyss, representing the Duisburg Twinning Committee, provided an update to the TAG stating with regret that if the actions put forward by Councillor Mason at the beginning of the meeting were carried out then he felt that it is likely that the current Duisburg Committee would resign en-masse. Councillor Wemyss expressed his concern over the double handling of grant applications, in that applications would need both the Duisburg Committee and the Twinning Advisory Group's agreement before then being approved by the Resources portfolio holder. Councillor Wemyss asked whether an annual grant could be given to the Twinning Committees, Councillor Mason reaffirmed that grants would only be available for specific projects and given the overall twinning budget (£8,000pa), admin costs and annual grants cannot be an option. Councillor Wemyss went on to express his sadness that City to City links in his view were being eroded and the Anglo-German Friends Association might as well take over from the Duisburg Committee.

There was a general agreement that it would be a great loss should the Duisburg Committee all resign. It was agreed that Councillor Mason should attend the Duisburg Committee meeting when they were due to consider resigning en masse. Councillor Mason expressed his great regret that the Duisburg Committee felt this way but subject to agreement at their formal meeting he would, with sadness, accept their resignation.

Councillor Blake expressed his concern over the funding implications and stated that the Portsmouth – Duisburg link has been mutually beneficial to date. However he went on to say that in his opinion the links have not been used to their fullest potential. Councillor Mason said that this was one of the reasons for the establishment of the Twinning Advisory Group.

Councillor Hall and the Lord Mayor also expressed their disappointment that the Duisburg Committee seemed unwilling to try to operate under the new arrangements.

Councillor Hall asked whether it would be possible to see a statement of accounts for the Twinning Advisory Group budget at the next meeting so that the group may be better informed before proposing grant applications to the Resources portfolio, and this was agreed.

Councillor Hall also asked if the committees could provide to the TAG details of their budget and a 5 year plan. This way the TAG will be more able to provide support to larger projects, such as anniversaries of the links.

Two grant application bids were submitted.

The first grant application was from Charles Stunell on behalf of the Haifa Committee for £1,500 to support the visit of Haifa's City Engineer to Portsmouth and also to support a tourism exhibition in the city later this year.

The second grant application was from Peter Smith-Parkyn for £1,000 to support nominal twinning costs including printing, postage and telephone costs provided by Democratic Services.

Honorary Alderman Robin Sparshatt accepted an invitation to him from Councillor Mason to take the lead on the establishment of the new Caen Committee. Councillors Terry Hall, Peter Eddis and the Lord Mayor expressed their interest in being involved and would therefore be invited to the first meeting.

Councillor Mason suggested that as Dr Louis Shurmer-Smith from the University of Portsmouth has expressed an interest in the Caen Committee, that he should also be invited.

Councillor Wemyss suggested that Portsmouth University students should be approached, through the Students' Union.

Peter Smith-Parkyn advised the Twinning Advisory Group that he had received two expressions of interest in being part of the Caen Committee. These were from Mrs Pauline Stirling (Portsmouth Grammar Junior School), and Mrs Caroline Sharman (New Theatre Royal). Both would be invited to the Caen Committee meetings.

RESOLVED (1) that Councillor Mason is invited to the next Duisburg Committee meeting;
(2) that financial statements be brought to the next Twinning Advisory Group meeting;
(3) that each Twinning Committee brings to a future meeting a suggested plan for its future activities for the period of 5 years
(4) that the proposed grants be recommended to the next Resources decision meeting for approval
(5) that Honorary Alderman Sparshatt takes the lead on the newly established Caen Committee, inviting all those that expressed an interest in being involved

6 Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 24 November 2011 at 8:15am.

The meeting concluded at 9:10 am.

Chair

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