

Title of meeting: Cabinet Meeting

Date of meeting: 25th March 2019

Subject: Sister City Link with Sylhet

Report by: Director Culture, Leisure & Regulatory Services

Wards affected: All

Key decision: No

Full Council decision: No

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To consider a request to establish a formal Sister City link between Portsmouth and Sylhet in Bangladesh as proposed between the Leader of Portsmouth City Council and the Mayor of Sylhet City Corporation.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To recommend that Portsmouth enter into a Sister City relationship with the Sylhet City Corporation and for the Economic Development Manager to devise a formal work plan linked to operational economic development results which will benefit both cities.**

3. Background

- 3.1 Historically Portsmouth City council has supported and maintained a number of relationships with other cities throughout the world as part of a twinning, sister and friendship city process.
- 3.2 The oldest links we have were established out of a desire for the UK Government to foster improved relationships between UK and German cities following the Second World War. The rationale for Portsmouth to have such links has changed with the more recent emphasis being to support economic development and business development.
- 3.3 With the critical feature for any new city relationship being to support economic development Portsmouth is very aware that the current core base of our strongest links are with European countries. In this period of economic uncertainty we are keen to ensure that we have links and opportunities for working with other partnerships and are therefore wishing to establish a link with another Commonwealth country to support new relationships and encourage business growth through another partnership route.

- 3.4 A considerable proportion of the Bangladeshi community in Portsmouth are from Shylet and the immediate region of Bangladesh and there would be clear opportunities for business development between both cities through community members. We are also aware that members of the Bangladeshi community here in Portsmouth also have good political links as a number of key figures in the national Bangladeshi political framework come from the Shylet area.
- 3.5 Sylhet is the major city in the north west of Bangladesh supporting one of the largest oil and gas producing areas of the county as well as being the hub for tea production for the county with the earliest commercial tea plantation being opened in 1857.
- 3.6 Situated on the banks of the Surma River the city hosts two universities with a focus on Technology and Agriculture along with a number of notable colleges with a diverse range of specialisms. The city also has a wide and diverse cultural offer including a strong sporting outlook including being a host city to the ICC World Twenty20 cricket matches in 2014.
- 3.7 The focus for the agreed work plan should consider supporting economic development between the two cities along with development of student growth between the Universities and shared learning opportunities initially at a higher education level.
- 3.8 The University of Portsmouth, through the Global Engagements Team has indicated that it would welcome an agreement between Portsmouth and Sylhet as they are currently seeking to increase their presence in Bangladesh. At the current time this is primarily through their current advanced discussions to open an office in Dhaka in order to increase their presence in the county but also they would welcome any opportunities Portsmouth's link with Sylhet would present.
- 3.9 Such support would also be in line with a current British Council objective which is aiming to strengthen academic and research collaboration between Higher Educations institutions in the UK and Bangladesh.
- 3.10 Mark Pembleton, Economic Development Manager, will also be supporting the setting up of a Portsmouth, or potentially a Solent Bangladesh Business Association in order to support local businesses and maximise the opportunity such a city link would bring.
- 3.11 It should however be noted that currently there are not specific funds available for twining support and that any financial commitment has to be considered from Resources Portfolio Reserve and time resources found from within existing staff time as we do not have dedicated officers solely working to support the international links in the way most of our twin and sister cities do.

4. Reasons for recommendations

4.1 Portsmouth needs to ensure that the twin, sister and friendship links it has are working to support new avenues for economic trade. Historically we have had a focus on working with European countries and establishing a new link with a Commonwealth country in a post Brexit period would help to balance out any challenges with European trade in the short term.

5. Equality impact assessment

A preliminary Equalities Impact Assessment is attached.

6. Legal implications

Such legal implications as are relevant are outlined within the report itself.

7. Director of Finance's comments

There is no specific budget provision to support twinning arrangements. Any costs arising from the recommendation will have to be met from existing budgets or from Portfolio reserves (subject to agreement by S151 Officer and the Portfolio holder)

.....
Signed by:

Appendices: EIA

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by on

.....
Signed by: