

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET - 16 AUGUST 2007

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

INTERNATIONAL LINKS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an analysis of the current international links which exist within the Borough following a decision taken by Cabinet in the summer of 2005 to develop a link with a township or province in Africa in response to the Live8 activities.

1 Background

- 1.1 The decision of the Cabinet in June 2005 was a significant one in that as research began to be undertaken into the prospects of developing meaningful links with Africa, what began to be uncovered was the significant amount of activity which already takes place with the continent of Africa involving, not just the Local Authority itself, but also schools and other Wirral-based organisations.
- 1.2 It also became very apparent indeed that the Borough of Wirral has spawned an enormous range of links, contacts and associations across the world, once again involving a very wide range of organisations and institutions in both the voluntary, public and private sectors in the Borough.
- 1.3 This report brings to Members' attention some of those links and also suggests the adoption of a new approach to international links and relations building on the existing traditional twinning arrangements.

2 Local Authority Connections

- 2.1 Most of the formal connections between the Borough of Wirral and other countries are based upon the formal traditional twinning links which have been put in place over the years. The former Borough of Bebington twinned with Lorient, Brittany in 1957 and the former Borough of Birkenhead twinned with a suburb of Paris, Gennevilliers, in 1963.
- 2.2 More recently, Wirral Council itself twinned with Latina in Italy 1998 and developed a formal business twin link with Midland Texas in 2000.
- 2.3 Activity in relation to those twinning links has been varied; however, Appendix 1 to this report describes some of the activity which has taken place over the years. These links, I believe, are important and need to be maintained; however, if Members agree to the implementation of the strategy which is being advocated, it will be the intention to review these links and perhaps refresh them, in order to maximise the benefit which could be derived from them.
- 2.4 In addition to these formal arrangements, Wirral Council, through its different departments, has also established other international links over the years and these are

very briefly summarised, once again, in Appendix 1.

3 Other Links

- 3.1 Appendix 1 to the report also contains details of other links which have been established from groups and organisations within the Borough with an enormous variety of places across the globe. Some of those links will be known to Members; for example, the work which a dedicated group of Wirralians do to support children affected by the Chernobyl disaster benefited from last year's Mayor's Charitable Fund. However, Members may not generally be aware of the increasing number of links which our schools are establishing in countries as diverse as South Africa, China, Russia, Sri Lanka and Uganda (see Appendix 2).
- 3.2 This list of activities and linkages demonstrates a true and genuine commitment on the part of many Wirralians to recognise the mutual benefits which the establishment of this international dimension can bring.

4 Benefits of International Relationships

- 4.1 The benefits which can be derived from the relationships which have been established are many and varied and there can be no question but that those organisations listed in the appendix are seeing those benefits.
- 4.2 For a number of years now, the Council has promoted and supported the International Schools' Award which not only promotes the learning of languages, but also rewards our schools for the work that they do in the area of international links. Those Members who have enjoyed the opportunity of attending an Awards' evening will have witnessed the many ways in which our schools are supporting those less fortunate than themselves but also, perhaps more importantly, the beneficial effects which these programmes have on the learning and development of our students.
- 4.3 The mission in Africa referred to in the appendix which has been supported over many years by the Reverend Dr Pat Nickson of St Mary's Church in Upton, with the help and support of the former Bishop of Birkenhead, has developed into a medical centre providing quality health care to one of the most troubled and disease-ridden parts of the world.
- 4.4 The Local Government Association has produced a new international policy that welcomes the involvement of Local Authorities in England and Wales in international partnerships and asks that each Local Authority does three things:
- (i) become more actively involved in all forms of international co-operation;
 - (ii) adopt an international policy and develops a strategy for engagement and activities;
 - (iii) appoint an Elected Member to promote the international dimension.
- 4.5 In November 2004, the then Department for Education and Skills launched an international strategy for education, skills and children's services. The main goal of that strategy is to equip our children, young people and adults for life in a global society and

work in a global economy and includes a target for all schools to adopt at least one sustainable International Partnership by 2010.

- 4.6 In addition to all of these things, the development of more economically focused links with other parts and regions in the world, could produce significant and enduring benefits to the Borough and this is an area which we have not developed over the years to maximum effect.

5 The Way Forward

- 5.1 Subject to the approval of Members, we would like to develop a strategy for international links which builds upon the existing work which is being undertaken but which perhaps draws the strands of the activity together in a more cogent form.
- 5.2 The strategy would embrace basic principles of the importance and significance to the Borough of an international dimension and would encourage the development of links and opportunities which would prove to be of mutual benefit.
- 5.3 The development of this international dimension will enhance the work which has been done with events such as the Open Golf Championship to put the Borough of Wirral firmly on the international map and will serve to underline the ambition we have set for ourselves in the Investment Strategy, particularly in relation to inward investment opportunities.
- 5.4 A group of keen, committed people from a range of organisations from both within and outside the Council have been meeting now for some months and, once again subject to Members' approval, it would be the intention to formalise this group and to charge it with the responsibility of developing a more coherent strategy along the lines described with a view to reporting back to the Cabinet as soon as ever possible.

6 Financial and Staffing Implications

- 6.1 There are none arising directly out of this report and the work which is envisaged will be done within existing resources. Clearly this situation will need to be kept under review; however, the financial position of the Authority is recognised and will dictate the pace at which this strategy can be developed.

7 Equal Opportunities Implications

- 7.1 The links which have already been developed and those which might be developed in the future promote a greater understanding of different societies and cultures essential to the promotion of a sound and balanced approach to equality and diversity.

8 Community Safety Implications

- 8.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

9 Local Agenda 21 Implications

- 9.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

10 Planning Implications

10.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

11 Anti-Poverty Implications

11.1 Developing awareness of international links will encourage a deeper understanding of economic interdependence and our joint responsibilities as global citizens, eg via Fairtrade.

12 Human Rights Implications

12.1 Our strategy for international links would embrace fully the fundamental principles of respect for human rights.

13 Social Inclusion Implications

13.1 Respect for other cultures will be enhanced and deepened through the wide range and variety of international links. This should enhance and improve relationships within our own community.

14 Local Member Support Implications

14.1 This report affects the entire Borough.

15 Background Papers

15.1 No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council agrees to the principle of establishing a strategy which will endorse and support the international links which are currently in place within the Borough and that this strategy be brought back to this Cabinet for endorsement.

STEPHEN MADDOX
CHIEF EXECUTIVE