

Areas for Discussion and Future Possibilities - Suggested Starting Points

Adopt an international approach and strategy for engagement and activities in Wirral's Strategic plan and in individual Council Departments' plans and appoint an elected member to promote the international dimension as per LGA guidance.

Provide an annual update to Council on international issues and activities.

Create specific web pages within the Wirral website developed to support and promote Wirral's international programme.

Development of current work with Africa

A range of activities undertaken by Wirral people and organisations already exists across Africa and it would be mutually beneficial if they could be linked together to give added momentum. Research could be undertaken as to what contribution Wirral could make, as these links should not solely be based on "charity" from Wirral to Africa but should be seen as a platform for exchanging experience and best practice, expertise and information; for example, on topics such as climate change, recycling, resource management, school links, transport, healthcare, gender equality, local authority practice, etc. It is important that the above takes place in consultation with the community or communities abroad and local Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and also that we take a holistic view, that is to say that we should provide support so that the benefit is sustainable. A group could be sent from Wirral to help with, for example, elections in Congo and environmental health in Malawi. Also items which could be of use to African communities, for example, computers for schools that have the necessary infrastructure, could be sent. Wirral could perhaps help with Plexus offices in Africa, for example, with the help of our road builders.

Association for twinning and international links

A re-established association for twinning and international links would help to support and develop Wirral's programme, raise its profile, give it more of a focus and increase the opportunities for people to participate. This association would make it easier to gather information on local community links with abroad and to help support them where necessary. As in the past, members of the public, Elected Members and Council Officers would be invited to be part of this association.

Tall Ships Race 2008

In July 2008 Liverpool will host The Tall Ships Race and Wirral could invite the three twinned towns and Midland to this event, and build into the programme meetings to discuss the future development and direction of the links.

Twinning with Alicante

Alicante is interested in twinning with Wirral and if Members are interested in this proposal, the suggestion is that this should be a strategic link. Alicante has twenty-four secondary and fifty primary schools. Alicante's main industries are tourism, agriculture and the production of shoes. The European Trademark Register is based there. Alicante is comparable in size to Wirral with a population of 300,000 and is twinned with Nice and a town in Cuba. There are direct flights from Liverpool and Manchester airports to Alicante. A formal exploratory visit to and from Alicante could be undertaken.

International Officer

There is a need for a strategic lead with regard to twinning. The establishment of a new post of International Officer or the additional responsibility for coordinating at a more senior level across Wirral Council added to somebody's post, could be very useful in implementing new initiatives. The International Officer's role would be cross-departmental and would be responsible for re-evaluating the current situation, for co-ordinating the subsequent programmes, including a proposed association for twinning and international links (see g below) and for liaising with Wirral's linked towns on issues relevant to our corporate objectives. The International Officer would also be responsible for coordinating corporate visits to Wirral and abroad, and for organising related events. The International Officer would in addition liaise with the Merseyside Brussels Officer (partly funded by Wirral Council), research the possibilities of European funding for events and projects, and pass on that information to the relevant parties, for example, community groups, businesses and Council Departments.

Develop current school links to include the wider community

Wirral schools have links with different countries, for example, China, Russia, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Uganda, and these could be developed to include other parts of the Local Authority, the local community and businesses, to help to ensure wide-ranging and sustainable links. Individual links can of course continue but if it is discovered that several schools, community organisations, businesses, etc. already have links in the same geographic area, networks can be set up, expertise, knowledge and best practice shared and also costs, for example, of sending out resources, hosting visitors, etc. It is beneficial to Wirral if different groups can work together, for example, local businesses and schools. The Headteacher of Calday Grange Grammar School has a long-standing link with a school in China and is interested in working on a Borough-wide approach to developing links with China. Peel Development is interested in developing links with China.

Kyotanabe, Japan

Four representatives from Wirral visited Kyotanabe in February 2006 to look at schools, funded by the DfES. Two teachers could be invited from Kyotanabe as well as The Mayor and officers to discuss areas of cooperation e.g school and potential trade links.