



Annual Council Meeting 14 May 2025

Report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources

International Partnering Arrangements

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Council
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	Three Appendix 1: International Partnering Protocol Appendix 2: International Partnering Assessment – Nablus 2025 Appendix 3: Equalities Impact Assessment
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Minesh Patel Corporate Director of Finance & Resources 020 8937 4043 Minesh.patel@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report proposes that the Council adopt an International Partnering Protocol (IPP) and reviews a proposed arrangement with Nablus in accordance with the protocol.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To adopt the International Partnering Protocol in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 To consider the community Assessment contained in Appendix 2.
- 2.3 To consider the Equalities Assessment contained in Appendix 3.
- 2.4 To agree that a Twinning Agreement be established with the city of Nablus.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to the Borough Plan and Strategic Priorities

- 3.1.1 The proposals contribute to the Borough Plan priority of Thriving Communities by allowing residents to come together, discuss what matters most to them, and work with the Council to develop and test new ideas. The approach outlined in the International Partnering Protocol will also help to utilise Brent's diverse cultures to celebrate and acknowledge key events and encourage residents to come together in celebration and commemoration of different cultures.

3.2 Background

- 3.2.1 International partnership arrangement programmes have been developed primarily as a result of the devastation caused by the world wars. They aimed to build trust and understanding across cities, countries and cultures in Europe, in the hope that they could help prevent similar catastrophes in the future. These arrangements are not now confined to European towns and cities however, and many authorities are partnered with towns and cities outside Europe with which they have particular connections.
- 3.2.2 International links promote tourism, cohesion and economic development. They create opportunities for groups, schools, individuals, families and businesses in different countries to get together in person and digitally to exchange and learn from each other. They help to expand horizons, build new friendships and establish useful commercial links as well as to practise languages and other skills and sample each other's countries' cultures.
- 3.2.3 Many international partnership arrangement projects involve clubs, schools and other agencies as well as individuals on work experience and or learning a foreign language, in addition to any activities initiated by the Council itself. The experience of other authorities is that involvement from local people is key to the success of any partnership arrangement and this is often underpinned by local people arranging exchange visits or digital activities between the residents of the partnered towns, often through a locally based town partnering associations and community groups and other organisations and agencies linking with their counterparts.

Governance of International Partnering Arrangements

- 3.2.4 In 2006, the Council adopted updated Twinning guidance. Following the passing of a motion by Full Council in November 2024, this guidance has been reviewed and a more comprehensive International Partnering Protocol has been developed as a basis for reviewing current and potential future partnering arrangements. The Protocol has been attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.2.5 The Protocol provides criteria against which proposed International Partnering Arrangements can be assessed and reviewed. The categories of information to be included in assessment or review are, in summary:

- **Location Overview** - Information about the potential Partner town, city or region.
- **Strategic Fit** - How partnering would fit with the council's strategic objectives.
- **Profile** - Will the proposal be positive for the profile and shared objectives of Brent and the proposed?
- **Purpose** - What is the rationale or the aims and objectives behind collaboration?
- **Due Diligence Considerations** - Reputational and other risks.
- **Connections** - Existing local connections and interest.
- **Resources** - Are there sufficient resources, financial and staffing whether the council's or other stakeholders?
- **Inclusions and exclusions** - What is covered by the arrangement?
- **Mayoral Budget** - Confirming resources with the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources.

Brent Council International Partnering Arrangements

- 3.2.6 Brent entered into its first International Partnering Arrangement when it twinned with South Dublin in September 1997, on the basis of their common geographical, historical, cultural and trading links and their wish to continue to develop those links for the mutual benefit of the councils and their communities. At this time, Brent also had the largest Irish-born population in mainland Britain. This relationship is currently dormant, with the last Brent Mayoral visit to South Dublin taking place in April 2008. The only current recognition of this twinning seems to be the annual flag raising on St Patrick's Day by the Mayor's Office on 17 March.
- 3.2.7 If the Protocol is adopted, the current arrangement with South Dublin will be reviewed using the new assessment criteria.
- 3.2.8 The Council passed a Motion in November 2024 to consider twinning with the city of Nablus in Palestine. Since then, officers have been liaising with the Brent & Harrow branch of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and other groups to consider what arrangements would be feasible and productive.
- 3.2.9 Nablus is twinned with many cities across the world, including towns and cities in Ireland, France, Russia and Morocco. In addition to a petition evidencing community support, there is also support from faith organisations, businesses and local groups in Brent as well as a cross-sector interest in Brent, from schools, youth groups, charities, faith organisations, and community centres that already have links or interest in the region.
- 3.2.10 The 2021 Census results shows that Brent currently has the second highest Arab diaspora in England and Wales, second only to Birmingham. Arabs make up 5.3% of the Brent population (17,924 people), although it is hard to know what percentage of this are Palestinian.

- 3.2.11 As outlined in Appendix 1, in cases where it has been evidenced that there is substantial community support and backing for a proposal, the Council will be asked to approve a formal twinning arrangement.
- 3.2.12 Like Brent, Nablus has a long and rich history of culture, diversity and dynamism, ranging from historical architecture, a lively economy and a youthful population. A growing number of community and charitable organisations, including Brent Trades Union Council, Brent NEU and Brent Friends of Palestine have developed productive relations with Palestinian organisations and diaspora, further strengthening bonds to the city of Nablus.
- 3.2.13 Through the joint work of the Brent Trades Union Council, Brent NEU and of Brent and Harrow PSC, CADFA and the Palestinian Forum in Britain, opportunities have been provided to young Palestinians to meet Brent young people, Councillors and MPs, and share and develop a bond over their experiences in education, sports and culture. Opportunities for visits to Palestine by young Brent residents are also being planned.
- 3.2.14 The establishment of the “Brent-Nablus Twinning Project” organisation provides an opportunity for Brent to explore the potential of a formal international partnering arrangement with Nablus through community engagement, with the support of community organisations and official representatives in Nablus.
- 3.2.15 As set out in Appendix 1, there are various examples of what a Twinning arrangement is designed to deliver and also what it may aspire to achieve in the future.
- 3.2.16 Since the motion at Full Council, officers have been liaising with other Councils working on similar International Partnership Arrangements in Sheffield, Barnet, Hounslow and Oxford councils to consider what arrangements would be feasible and productive. Conversations covered parameters of such agreements, the types of events, competitions, activities and knowledge sharing sessions planned by councils and local groups, inadvertent consequences (such as increased Fol requests), and managing expectations.
- 3.2.17 Appendices 2 and 3 contain an assessment of a proposed International Partnering Arrangement with the City of Nablus by reference to the proposed Protocol.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 4.1 A key part of the application process includes showing there is resident interest and engagement to initiate an International Partnership Agreement and keep it going. A petition has been submitted on behalf of the Brent-Nablus Twinning Association in support of the partnering arrangement and has received 1849 signatures.

- 4.2 Showing continued resident and community interest in such International Partnering Arrangements remains the responsibility of the proposers and will remain a fundamental part of any arrangement.
- 4.3 The report was shared and discussed with members of the Constitutional Working Group at its meeting on 22 April 2025, where the recommendations were agreed to proceed to Full Council for consideration and formal approval.

5.0 Financial Considerations

- 5.1 International Partnering Arrangements would fall under the remit of the Mayor of Brent, but costs related to International Partnering Arrangements must be met by the organisation leading on this. This includes costs for entertaining, gift swaps or costs for printing certificates. There should be no additional financial cost for the Mayor's Office, or other parts of the council.

6.0 Legal Considerations

- 6.1 In entering into its International Partnering Arrangements and undertaking associated activities, the council relies on the general power of competence set out in S1(1) of the Localism Act 2011 whereby a local authority has power to do anything that individuals generally may do and power to do it for, the benefit of the authority, its area or persons resident or present in its area.
- 6.2 If any new partnership were to be pursued, an agreement would need to be drawn up setting out the outcomes the partnership aspires to, and how it is hoped the desired outcomes and benefits will be achieved. The arrangement will not create any legal binding obligations.
- 6.3 Under section 176 of the Local Government Act 1972 the Council has power to defray any travelling or other expenses reasonably incurred by official or courtesy visits on behalf of the authority.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

- 7.1. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the council has a duty when exercising its functions to have "due regard" to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act and advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not. This is the public sector equality duty. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 7.2 "Due regard" is the regard that is appropriate in all the circumstances. The weight to be attached to the effect is a matter for the council. As long as the council is properly aware of the effects and has taken them into account, the duty is discharged. Depending on the circumstances, regard should be had to the following:

- the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic. In other words, the indirect discriminatory effects of a proposed decision;
- the need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- the need to take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes taking account of disabled persons' disabilities. There can be a positive duty to take action to help a disabled person. What matters is how they are affected, whatever proportion of the relevant group of people they might be;
- the need to encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life (or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low); and
- the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

7.3 A complete Equality Impact Assessment is appended at Appendix 3. Twinning with Nablus poses both positive and negative implications around race and religion/fait. The IPP assessment outlines the range of synergies, benefits and opportunities related to Twinning with Nablus. The potential challenges mainly relate to community cohesion and tension and these will be monitored through our existing mechanisms (e.g. complaints and community safety channels). It is difficult to fully determine any implications or the scale of them as they become clearer as initiatives and opportunities are realised as part of the Twinning arrangement. Additionally, existing data does not tell us the size of some of the relevant groups that may be more directly impacted in Brent.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 None

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

9.1 None

10.0 Communication Considerations

10.1 A formal International Partnering Arrangement would need to be signed by all parties involved and formally translated into one of the official languages of the partnering country. The cost of this would be met by the Mayor's budget.

Report sign off:

Minesh Patel

Corporate Director of Finance & Resources