



Standards Committee 14th November 2005

Report from the Borough Solicitor

For Action/Information
* delete as necessary

Wards Affected:
ALL

Twinning Update

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The latest draft of the twinning guidance is attached for comment by the Standards Committee (Appendix 1). This was prepared for the June and October meetings but as they were inquorate is being presented again.
- 1.2 Other members including the former Mayor and current Mayor have been consulted on the draft. The Standards Committee was also invited to make comment on an earlier draft at the April meeting.
- 1.3 The aim of the new guidance is to ensure that twinning activity supported by London Borough of Brent is of a high quality and makes effective use of resources.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Standards Committee note and comment on the draft guidance.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

4.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Members are subject to the Brent Code of Conduct. The Code says that a member must not in his or her official capacity or in any other circumstance conduct himself or herself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing his or her office or authority into disrepute. Nor must a member in his or her official capacity or in any other circumstances use his or her position to improperly confer on or secure for himself or herself or any other person an advantage. The Code of Conduct will therefore apply when the Mayor and other councillors participate in a twinning visit either overseas or in Brent and must be carefully observed. Adherence to an approved protocol for twinning will assist members in complying with the main Brent Member Code of Conduct.

6.0 DETAIL

- 6.1 Brent has been twinned with South Dublin County Council since 5 September 1997. Recent visits have included a visit to South Dublin on the 6-8 April by the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councillor Jim Moher and a visit by the Brent Mayor on 21 June to South Dublin.
- 6.2 To meet the objective of bringing citizens closer together the European Commission introduced a program to support town twinning schemes as a valuable way of involving people and their elected representatives in European integration. The basis on which twinning proposals can be developed includes objectives for the development of co-operation between the communities involved as well as cultural exchanges, the promotion of tourism, artistic, musical, economic and industrial projects.
- 6.3 Members will recall that the topic of twinning was discussed at the April meeting of the Standards Committee when members were provided with background information and some draft guidance for initial comment.
- 6.4 Since that time, those comments have been incorporated into a second draft which is now circulated for further comment by this Committee. Once agreed by the Committee, the guidance will be forwarded to South Dublin officers to attempt to obtain their agreement on the mutual terms.
- 6.5 The Local Government International Bureau has recently released guidance for local authorities on conducting twinning visits (Appendix 2 attached). This coupled with a few cases recently before the Standards Board and the Adjudication Panel for England, as well as press coverage of the issue, has emphasised the need for Brent to draft a guidance note on twinning visits.

7.0 Background Information

- Take Your Partners; the Local Authority Handbook on Twinning and International Partnerships, International Report no. 10 Local Government International Bureau.
- Report to Standards Committee April 2005

Any persons wishing to inspect the papers in connection with the above proposals should contact Jane Alver at the Town Hall Annexe:

Forty Lane

Wembley Middx HA9 9HD

Tel: 020 8937 1368

Twinning guidance for [London Borough of Brent]

1. Purpose of document

1.1 This document sets out the role of the [London Borough of Brent's] Mayor's Office in organising twinning visits, the purpose of the twinning budget, what expenses can be claimed, guidance on conduct and gifts and the protocol on officers and members accompanying the [Brent] Mayor on twinning visits. The aim of this guidance is to ensure that twinning activity supported by [London Borough of Brent ('Brent')] is of a high quality and makes effective use of resources.

1.2 This has been agreed with [South Dublin County Council].

1.3 This guidance will be given to members to assist them when a visit is being planned.

2. Background

2.1. The Preamble to the Treaty of Rome states that member states of the European Community are determined to lay the foundations of an even closer union amongst the peoples of Europe. To meet that objective of bringing citizens closer together the European Commission introduced a program to support town twinning schemes as a valuable way of involving people and their elected representatives in European integration. The basis on which twinning proposals can be developed includes objectives for the development of co-operation between the communities involved as well as cultural exchanges, the promotion of tourism, artistic, musical, economic and industrial projects.

2.2 [Brent has the largest Irish born population in mainland Britain]. In 1997 South Dublin County Council and the London Borough of Brent agreed to enter into twinning arrangements 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. The agreement was signed on 5 September 1997.

2.3 The agreement is based on the wish to foster and develop mutual understanding and respect between the people of South Dublin and Brent and to encourage and assist youth and adult organisations, clubs, companies, groups and all persons and organisations in South Dublin and Brent to take part in this twinning agreement.

3. Purpose of twinning

3.1 The purpose of twinning is to develop civic relationships between linked municipalities, to share approaches and experiences in relation to local governance and the development of civic pride, to encourage communication and exchange visits between citizens and organisations within the two communities.

4. Budget

4.1 There is a limited budget for twinning of £4000 (in financial year 2005/06) which cannot be exceeded. The budget can only be used for lawful and reasonable expenditure arising out of the twinning arrangements. In order to ensure transparency and accountability the following questions will need to be answered prior to any expenditure being incurred in respect of any twinning activity:

1. How will the visit meet the objectives of bringing citizens from the European Community closer together?
2. Which parts of the itinerary will help meet these objectives?
3. Will the visit result in any cultural exchanges? If so how and which part of the itinerary will achieve this?
4. Will the visit promote musical projects? If so how and which part of the itinerary will achieve this?
5. Will the visit promote tourism? If so how and which part of the itinerary will achieve this?
6. Will the visit promote artistic projects? If so how and which part of the itinerary will achieve this?
7. Will the visit promote economic and industrial projects? If so how and which part of the itinerary will achieve this?
8. How will it achieve Brent's Corporate Objectives?
9. How will it achieve South Dublin's corporate objectives?

5. Itinerary

5.1 The [Brent] Mayor's Office plans and co-ordinates twinning visits and organises an itinerary which fits with the objectives of the twinning programme.

5.2 The itinerary for a Mayoral visit to [Brent] will usually include a reception in the Mayor's Parlour to which the leader, leaders of opposition groups, executive members and relevant local community leaders are invited. A visit of [Brent (the Mandir, Wembley Stadium etc)] may be organised for one afternoon and for at least one evening both Mayors will have dinner together. Usually some free time is built into the programme for the visitors to go shopping or visit central [London].

The itinerary should also include a discussion on the objectives of twinning visits, and how they might be achieved.

5.4 Twinning visits will normally take place during the week so that visitors are able to participate in weekday events and meetings of the host borough and to ensure that officers and members of the host borough are available

and can be as attentive to visitors as possible. This also makes it clear to the public that this is very much a working visit.

5.6 There will usually be a maximum of one Mayoral visit each way per year, but this can be increased to two each way for very special occasions eg the anniversary of the Twinning Arrangement.

6. Role of the Mayor's Office

6.1 All contact with the host borough should be through the Mayor's Office Manager in order to ensure good planning and to avoid confusion.

6.2 For a visit to South Dublin the Brent Mayor's Office will organise return travel to and from the host borough for those invited to attend the twinning visit.

6.3 For a visit to Brent the Brent Mayor's Office will organise the itinerary, travel, meals and accommodation arrangements.

7. Travel and other costs

7.1 Under the Local Government Act 1972 local authorities may pay for the travel and related costs of councillors making official and courtesy visits overseas and for the costs of officially receiving and entertaining guests. However, twinning activity must demonstrate a clear public benefit, facilitate true learning and understanding and use public money accountably. Expenditure must therefore be in furtherance of this purpose only.

7.2 The purpose of the twinning budget is:

- to provide funds for the Mayor to travel to and from the twin borough and
- to provide funds to pay for expenses while the visitors from the twin borough are staying in [Brent].

7.3 The protocol that has been agreed between Brent and South Dublin County Council is that the receiving borough pays for the reasonable expenses of the guests once they arrive in their country.

7.4 For a visit to [Brent] the twinning budget would normally be used for:

Transport:	Hire of a standard vehicle or taxi to transport the visitors from the airport and around the borough if not using the Mayoral car.
Accommodation:	Room(s) to be booked at a medium standard local hotel for the visiting party for the duration of the stay.
Food/ Refreshments:	All meals plus reasonable drinks such as soft drinks and a moderate amount of wine with dinner. Other bar bills will not be paid out of the budget.

Entertainment: Any reasonable and appropriate expenses arising from pre-planned entertainment organised by the Mayor's Office.

7.5. For a visit to [South Dublin] expenditure incurred by [Brent] is for economy standard return air tickets to Dublin and if necessary travel to and from the hotel. This budget would also be used to provide additional insurance for the Mayor's Chain of Office if it is taken on the trip.

7.6 Any incidental expenditure on bar bills, hotel bills and extras must be paid for personally and not charged to [Brent] apart from reasonable subsistence costs which would be paid up to a maximum as outlined in the subsistence scheme for Officers.

7.7 When accepting hospitality from the host borough or any of its members the Mayor should be mindful of the limitations on the use of the twinning budget to pay for the expenses incurred by the visitors during their return visit to Brent, and the number of visitors to be accommodated. Embarrassment could be caused to all parties participating in the visit if this protocol is not followed.

8. What personal expenses can be claimed?

8.1. It is not normally expected that any personal expenses would be claimed. It is the responsibility of the hosts to provide all accommodation, meals and basic refreshments. Any expenditure such as additional alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, entertainment, travel during free time, shopping, etc. must be paid by the Mayor.

9. Officers, Members and Others accompanying the Mayor

9.1 The Mayor's Consort is normally invited to accompany the Mayor and his or her flights are paid for out of the twinning budget.

9.2 In some circumstances other Members or Officers may be invited by the hosts. Before Officers can accept such an invitation they must seek the approval of their Director. According to the nature of the visit, who the meeting is with and their position within the council, the twinning budget may be used to pay for other Members or Officers. However there needs to be a clear rationale for their visit, taking into account that public money is being used. In any case, the costs associated with this will not exceed the total budget available.

9.3 It is not expected that any other personal guests would attend the visit.

9.4 Members and Officers should not attempt to solicit an invitation to attend a twinning visit. Nor should invited parties ask for additional visitors, whether councillor, officers or others, to accompany them.

9.5 A twinning visit may involve members of the community e.g. school children. The purpose of the visit needs to be clearly identified as part of the planning for the visit. The costs can be met from the twinning budget where reasonable and appropriate in all the circumstances. In any case where

school children or others attend the visit advice must be taken from the appropriate officers about arrangements for the visit including supervision, insurance, etc.

10. Chain of Office and Robes

10.1 The Chain of Office can be taken to [South Dublin] provided insurance is obtained beforehand. Dress protocol for a particular event should be checked in advance.

11. Conduct

11.1 It is important to remember that the Code of Conduct will apply when the Mayor and local authority representatives are participating in a twinning visit either overseas or in [Brent] and must be carefully observed.

12. Gifts

12.1 Whilst gifts of a purely nominal value may be kept by the recipient any more substantial or valuable gifts should on return be given to the authority. All gifts and hospitality over £25 should be recorded in the members' register of gifts and hospitality which is kept by the Democratic Services Manager.

12.2 The Mayor and others attending will be mindful to courteously not accept inappropriate or excessive gifts or hospitality.

12.3 As a matter of courtesy the Mayor should give a gift to the Mayor of the host borough which will be selected and purchased by the Mayor's office. This will consist of some suitable civic token.

13. Political Neutrality

13.1 Twinning should be neutral and above party politics. It is designed to promote friendship and should not be tied in to any party political agenda or a specific viewpoint.

14. Planning and reporting twinning activities

14.1 The key objectives for the visit need to be agreed in advance between the boroughs. This will be done through the Mayor's Office. This will serve to explain and give the aims of the visit, a list of desired outcomes and benefits providing a starting point for evaluating the visit. This will also serve to ensure participants have a clear idea about the purpose of the visit.

14.2 A report on the visit will be published on the web to inform the community about the visit and to ensure transparency.

15. Extending the stay

15.1 In some cases the Mayor may wish to extend the duration of his or her stay in the country in which case any additional expenses will be paid for personally. Travel back to the airport for the journey home will, in these cases, need to be arranged and paid for personally. Return air travel will be included

in the expenses paid by [Brent] provided it is no more expensive than it would be had the return travel not been delayed because of the extended stay.

16. More information

16.1 For more information contact the Mayor's Office and Member Development Manager at [Brent] Town Hall.