

Brent Council – International Partnering Protocol

Introduction

International Partnering Arrangements aim to build trust and understanding across cities, countries and cultures to promote tourism, cohesion and economic development.

This Protocol sets out key principles to guide the Council's international Partnering work, ensuring that relationships are nurtured and managed with a focus on mutual benefits between Brent and the partner town, city or region.

Developing links or partnerships can contribute to other policy objectives such as culture, sports, heritage, links with diaspora, economic development and tourism. Potential mutual benefits include:

- Exchange of knowledge, skills and experience;
- Increasing cultural awareness, including knowledge and understanding of the town, city or region;
- Increased tolerance and understanding;
- Enhanced opportunities for youth activities, and
- The development of close friendships and ties built up over many years.

Different types of relationship

This Protocol uses a hierarchy of relationships, informed by good practice elsewhere:

1. Friendship Agreements have become more popular in recent years where partners identify areas of interest in which the partner town, city or region are committing themselves to explore and a timeframe for any proposed collaboration, or to trial an arrangement between the partners. These Agreements can also be renewed multiple times. These are time-limited arrangements, where each party receives short-term benefits but does not make a long-term commitment, at least until the relationship has had time to mature. These Friendship Agreements may be renewed or converted into Twinning Agreements at a later date if appropriate.
2. Twinning Agreements are formal longer-term arrangements (albeit with the inclusion of agreed review points). They represent a long-term commitment between the partners, not a short-term project partnership. They should always be able to survive changes in political leadership.

Relationship	Focus	Proposed by	Managed by	Budget	Duration	Review
Friendship Agreement	More civic and communal in nature, with language focusing on a commitment to fostering understanding; co-operation and mutual benefit (as opposed to specific projects)	Organisation or charity led	Community-led, with minimal officer input from the Mayoral team and no budget.	Budget raised and managed externally	Short-term	Every 24-36 months
Twinning	Agreement to exchange information, knowledge & expertise, and develop joint projects in defined areas e.g. Education; Culture; Sport;	Organisation or charity led	Community-led, with formal elements of officer and departmental input on specific projects	Budget raised and managed externally, but some monies set aside from the Mayoral budget.	Longer term	Every 5 years

Both types of arrangement have their respective benefits.

When considering new requests, the Council will form a view at the outset as to what form of arrangement it wishes to enter into. The approach outlined above is for a two-tiered system, whereby initial requests usually lead to a Friendship Agreement, with the potential, that if the Agreement is continually renewed over a certain period of time and there is clear community-driven support for maintaining such links, this could be developed into a Twinning Agreement. This process will require the Assessment criteria template to be completed to evidence this and reviewed at CWG followed by agreement at Full Council.

In exceptional circumstances, a request may be considered for the international partnership arrangement to be formalised into a Twinning arrangement without being a Friendship Agreement first. This will be based on substantial community support (such as over 1500 signatories on a petition) being evidenced.

Community Links

The experience of other authorities shows that involvement and ownership starts with the community and the key to the success of any partnering arrangement is often underpinned by local people arranging exchange visits between the residents of the twinned town, city or region, often through locally based town twinning associations and community groups and other organisations and agencies linking with their counterparts

In considering existing and potential International partnering arrangements we will be looking for a demonstration of community support. This support could form a willingness to donate time, money or their expertise to making its ambitions a reality.

Assessment Criteria for Decision Making

With limited time and resources, deciding on what Twinning or Friendship Agreement opportunities to pursue requires decision-making criteria and robust assessment. Whilst we may choose to maintain existing relationships, new opportunities for partnership working will undoubtedly arise. All relationships should be established for a fixed period of time and reviewed at the end that period and at other agreed intervals.

Opportunities for International Partnering must be sponsored by a councillor, with the backing of the local community. We will require measured assessment to determine value for the Council and other stakeholders. Using objective criteria, each new opportunity and each current relationship will be evaluated against a range of tourism, cultural, historical connections, educational, and operational factors before providing recommendations to Council on the merit of any new opportunity. Shared values of Brent Council such as the ability to demonstrate the promotion of human rights, gender equality and advocacy for social justice, respect and diversity of cultures, will also be taken into account.

International partnerships can offer benefits especially when there is a clear objective, with a strong, shared interest, community involvement and commitment of the partners involved. Such partnerships can offer an important opportunity to learn, share ideas and support community engagement. In a borough as diverse as Brent, this presents many opportunities to be explored.

Over the last 14 years, Brent Council's workforce has decreased by 52% alongside budget cuts of £210m over the last 13 years. This means that the council must also be realistic about the amount of resource (financial and in officer time) it can commit to International Partnering activities. We will only consider one new international partnering arrangement per administration with a maximum of three at any one given time (one fixed, one being implemented, and one being assessed).

The criteria detailed over the following pages will be used to assess new opportunities and approaches and to review existing relationships.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Before entering into any new international relationship, there will be an assessment of the proposal against the criteria set out below. The assessment will determine whether an International Partnership Arrangement would be appropriate and valuable and whether a formal Twinning Agreement or a Friendship Agreement is to be pursued, and the recommended terms and nature of the arrangement. As noted, the intention is for all arrangements (unless in exceptional circumstances) to start as a Friendship Agreement which will be reviewed after a set period.

Parties or Members proposing a Twinning or Friendship Agreement must answer each of questions in the first **eight** categories in this Assessment Criteria to put together their proposals. Please note that while residents can request Twinning or Friendship Agreements, this will only be considered by the Council if a current Member takes up the request on their behalf.

Please note that all answers require more than a Y/N response

1. Location Overview

- Is the proposed location a “good fit” for Brent in terms of:
 - a) Population size;
 - b) Population profiles (e.g. age, gender, race);
 - c) Business profile - Key sectors / main industries etc;
 - d) Type of governmental structures – e.g. sufficient similarity in powers and span of competence of each local authority;
 - e) Its ability to bring potential benefits to Brent
- Is the town, city or region making progress against similar challenges to Brent and are they doing so in a progressive manner?
- Does Brent have any existing partnerships in the same country?
- What other existing international town/city links does the partner, city or network already have in place?
- Key dates to be aware of – e.g. Independence Days; City Days; Keys Dates in the Civic Calendar.

2. Strategic Fit

- Does the proposal fit in with the Council’s stated aims as set out in its Borough Plan?
- Will there be tangible benefits for Brent’s residents, businesses or partners?
- Does Brent have any membership or affiliations to organisations in common with the proposed partner city or network?

3. Profile

- Will Brent Council's involvement help boost the profile of the proposed partner town, city or region and Council, helping them to achieve mutually shared objectives?

4. Purpose

- What is the rationale or the aims and objectives behind the approach – what are the perceived benefits of the arrangement either TO Brent or FROM Brent e.g., cultural opportunities, education, civic elements etc?
- What is the Council seeking to gain through establishing a formal relationship with this partner city or network?
 - a) Social and cultural exchanges;
 - b) Technical/knowledge sharing regarding common problems;
 - c) Tackling environmental issues, regeneration, community safety, health promotion and community cohesion;
 - d) Increasing educational opportunities for students (language learning, global awareness);
- What is the partner town, city or region seeking to achieve from collaboration?

5. Due Diligence Considerations

- Are there any potential risks including reputational issues through association with the location and/or key individuals such as Human Rights issues or any conflicts of interest?
- Are there any political circumstances or special relationships or causes being championed that the Council needs to be aware of?

6. Connections

- Are there pre-existing links with the partner city or network in respect of projects, networks or people to people dialogue?
- Is there local interest in this?
- Is there an existing diaspora community in Brent?
- Are there significant numbers of international students from the proposed partner studying in Brent?
- Are there any established businesses located in Brent from the proposed partner?
- Is there is a sufficient commonality of interest to sustain and grow the link within the specific and broader communities in the area?

7. Resources

- Does the Council or other Brent stakeholders have sufficient resources (both staffing and financial) to enter into the project or partnership? Consider which officers and departments are likely to be involved.
- How would the stakeholder group be run? Would they be set up as a charity or a CIC, or more informally run?

- At least 2 named Brent Council Members should take responsibility in supporting the stakeholder group with the Twinning or Friendship Agreement. Who might they be?
- Does the project have the potential to generate additional revenue or capital resources for Brent?
- How will the arrangement be sufficiently sustainable over its proposed lifespan? ‘
- How will the success of this programme be measured, monitored or reviewed?

8. Inclusions and exclusions

- What does this arrangement include and exclude? All agreements must be apolitical in nature. Are any particular activities intended as part of the arrangement? If so, the arrangement should also spell out who is responsible for what activity This agreement should loosely confirm how a trip for example would be funded, for how many people, how often trips can be made, how long a typical trip should last, purchase and exchange of gifts, and reciprocal arrangements.

9 Mayoral Budget

- The Mayoral Office is likely to spend some of its annual budget on hosting the occasional visit (if in a Twinning arrangement). A maximum budget per twinning or friendship agreement per financial year should be identified and confirmed with the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources by the officer(s) assessing the proposal to ensure funds can be allocated to this budget before any new Internal Partnership Arrangement is agreed.

Review Criteria

All arrangements will be reviewed at the end of their agreed time period. If there is no longer any benefit to the Council or to Brent at large, the review will consider whether to seek to revive or terminate the arrangement. Reviews will be on a case-by-case basis using the same criteria as for an original assessment, including assessing historical benefits derived from the association and considering potential opportunities if the relationship were to be continued or reinvigorated.

If a decision is made to terminate an existing agreement, formal communication will be issued to inform the other party and to thank them for their association with Brent.

APPENDIX

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND GOVERNANCE

Decision-making

1. To initiate the international agreement process, the Council must hear a motion in support for this. If the Motion is passed, the group will be asked to complete the assessment template.
2. If the Deputy Director, Democratic & Corporate Governance considers the request reasonable on the basis of the assessment template completed, the Assessment will then go to the Constitutional Working Group (CWG) for initial consideration, and exploration. If the CWG have further questions or require further clarification, then this should be answered and ready for the next CWG meeting.
3. The outcome of the assessment will be confirmed by the Chief Executive following the consideration by CWG.
4. If applicable, the request will be reported to Full Council for decision. The report will include a recommendation of whether the Council should enter into an Agreement (and if so the nature and proposed terms of the agreement), and its review date. It should also include a completed Equalities Assessment form.
5. If a decision to proceed is made, formal communications will commence with the relevant city/town/region and an agreement between the two cities/towns/region will be developed.

Relationship Management

Members and Officers involved in the conduct of any international relationship must note the need to:

- Facilitate two-way communication and commit to regular engagement with representatives from the location, whether that be meetings (in-person or online), engaging in visits or hosting representatives from the location in Brent, while taking care to ensure that no information will be shared that may contravene the principles of data protection contained within the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations or other duties of confidentiality;
- If the relationship includes proposals for any commercial agreements, ensure that this is the subject of a separate decision made in accordance with the Council's Constitution