

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
INVERNESS CITY COMMITTEE
8 DECEMBER 2008

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| Agenda Item | 10.5 |
| Report No | 99/08 |

The City of Inverness Town Twinning Committee

Joint Report by Inverness City Manager and Chairman, The City of Inverness Town Twinning Committee

SUMMARY

This report briefs the Members on the activities of the Town Twinning Committee. The City Committee is invited to continue supporting the maintaining of the historic Town Twinning links with Augsburg, La Baule and St. Valery-en-Caux as well as with developments to sustain Town Twinning and to strengthen those links through youth participation.

1. The Origins of Town Twinning

- 1.1 Town twinning is a concept whereby towns or cities in geographically and politically distinct areas are paired, with the goal of fostering human contact and cultural links.

The earliest form of town twinning in Europe was between the German city of Paderborn and the French city of Le Mans in 836.

The practice was continued in the European Union after the Second World War as a way to bring European people into a closer understanding of each other and to promote cross-border projects of mutual benefit. For example, Coventry twinned with Dresden as an act of peace and reconciliation, both cities having been heavily bombed during the war.

The Inverness Town Twinning Committee was formed in 1956 when the first link was made with the city of Augsburg in Bavaria.

2. The City of Inverness Town Twinning Committee Aims

- 2.1 The Aims of the Town Twinning Committee are to:

Promote and foster friendship and understanding between the people of the Inverness area in Scotland and those of **Augsburg** and district in Bavaria, Germany; **La Baule** in Brittany, France; and **St Valery-en-Caux**, Normandy, France.

- 2.2 Actively encourage and co-ordinate visits by individuals and groups to and from the linked towns by both adults and young people and the development of personal contacts, and by so doing to broaden the mutual understanding of the cultural, recreational, educational and commercial activities of the linked towns.

3. The Contemporary European Situation

Within Europe, town twinning is now supported by the European Union with an annual budget of more than 12 million euros. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions works to promote modern, high quality twinning initiatives and exchanges that involve all sections of the community.

First, town twinning relies upon the voluntary commitment of citizens, in collaboration with their local authorities and local associations. It is therefore both a sign of, and an incentive to active participation.

Second, it encourages exchanges of experiences on a variety of issues of common interest, thereby raising awareness on the advantages of finding concrete solutions at European level.

Finally, it provides unique opportunities to learn about the daily lives of citizens in other European countries, to talk to them and very often to develop friendships with them.

Thanks to the combination of those elements, town twinning has a real potential to enhance mutual understanding between citizens, fostering a sense of ownership of the European Union and finally developing a sense of European identity.

4. What The City of Inverness Town Twinning Committee have done

There have been exchanges arranged with football teams, swimmers, schools, disabled groups, musicians and dancers, to name but a few, both young and not so young. Groups have travelled by various modes of transport, from a double decker bus to Augsburg, to bicycle to all three towns. Visits have been cultural and educational – as well as fun! Exchange visits normally include staying with host families. This allows the visitors a unique opportunity to experience day to day living in the host city.

5. Benefits for the City of Inverness

The first, most obvious benefit is the opportunity to showcase the City of Inverness to civic dignitaries who visit us and to the citizens of our twin towns when we visit them.

This includes the beautiful geographical setting of Inverness, and the friendliness of our citizens.

When the Junior Chamber went to Augsburg in 1996 to participate in the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the twinning, they took with them an exhibition as well as samples of Highland produce.

Town Twinning provides groups and clubs of all sorts with the opportunity to engage with people with similar interests from our twin towns. Not only do we benefit from cultural, linguistic and educational experiences but, importantly, friendships develop between individuals, organisations and civic groups.

6. Current and Future Plans

It is important to maximise the skills and experience of the current City of Inverness Town Twinning Committee and to ensure this continues with future generations. The City of Inverness Town Twinning Committee has established links with local schools to promote eTwinning as a means of engaging young people in Town Twinning activities.

This approach is reciprocated by our twin town partners who also recognise the importance of cultivating this model of twinning.

eTwinning enables schools across Europe to work with each other on projects using Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Working with schools in other countries provides a great opportunity to enthuse and motivate children, as well as being a rewarding professional experience for teachers.

eTwinning provides a context for using ICT in the classroom, not just to communicate and collaborate with partners in our twin towns but as a means of delivering the curriculum in a relevant and exciting way.

By using the secure and fully funded ICT infrastructure provided by the European Union, eTwinning can:

- Motivate children by bringing the curriculum to life
- Help create greater cultural awareness
- Enhance key skills such as ICT, languages, literacy and numeracy
- Make contact with education professionals across Europe
- Discover teaching approaches from other countries
- Foster international relationships that can endure over time

The City of Inverness Town Twinning Committee is committed also to hosting a Highland Town Twinning Conference that will enable towns from across Highland that are involved in town twinning to share good practice; learn about eTwinning; develop a Highland Twinning Forum; and consider hosting an international event.

Such a conference may encourage more people to get involved in Town Twinning and promote innovative ways of making town twinning more relevant to new generations.

7. Sustainability

As a city with an increasing position in the European and global market economies it is important for the City of Inverness to foster cultural, educational and economic links with partner countries as gateways to further cross-fertilisation and marketing opportunities.

The City of Inverness Town Twinning Committee fosters such links with its three twin towns. Developing links with young people in local schools and promoting eTwinning between Inverness and our twin towns will ensure the continued success of town twinning for Inverness.

RECOMMENDATION

The City of Inverness Town Twinning Committee values the support of the Inverness City Committee and Highland Council in carrying out their duties and furthering their aims.

The Committee is invited to continue supporting the activities of the Twinning Committee through the participation of Councillors and the Ward Management Team in maintaining the historic Town Twinning links with Augsburg, La Baule and St. Valery-en-Caux as well as with developments to sustain Town Twinning and to strengthen those links through youth participation.

Signature:

Designation: Inverness City Manager

Date: 20 November 2008

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