

**To:** City Executive Board  
**Date:** 7 March 2019  
**Report of:** Head of Community Services  
**Title of Report:** Approval of new twin cities, the budget allocation for twinning projects and criteria for selecting future twin cities

## Summary and recommendations

**Purpose of report:** To approve the signing of full Twin City agreements with Wroclaw, Ramallah and Padova and agree the criteria for the formation of additional international links.

**Key decision:** No

**Executive Board Member:** Councillor Mary Clarkson, Culture and City Centre Portfolio

**Corporate Priority:** Strong and Active Communities

**Policy Framework:** Culture Strategy

### Recommendation(s): That the City Executive Board resolves to:

1. **Approve** the Oxford-Wroclaw Twin City agreement signed in Wroclaw in October 2018;
2. **Endorse** the Oxford Polish Association as the formal volunteer community Link for the Wroclaw twinning relationship;
3. **Approve** the signing of full Twin City agreements with Ramallah and Padova;
4. **Delegate** authority to approve the final wording of the full Twin city agreements to the Head of Community services in consultation with the portfolio holder for Culture and City Centre and the Head of Law and Governance;
5. **Approve** how we use the £23,000 budget allocation for twinning projects; and
6. **Approve** the criteria and process for selecting future international links as set out in paragraph 26 of this report.

## Appendices

1. Risk Register
2. Equalities Impact Assessment

## Introduction and background

1. European twinning programmes 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 the hope that they could help prevent similar catastrophes in future. Building relationships between individuals and communities – citizens and civic leaders – was at the heart of this aspiration.
2. In contemporary life, 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. Oxford has been twinned with Bonn since 1947 and was one of the first cities to establish a formal Anglo-German link after the war. The Oxford/Bonn link draws on strong musical, school and university contacts; art, sport, youth theatre and business contacts have also been made.
4. The Oxford-Leiden Link was established immediately after the Second World War and has adapted and evolved over the years to reflect changing lifestyles. Our link with Leiden has a strong civic basis, and has also been one of the most active sporting links.
5. The Oxford-Grenoble Association was founded in 1989, and has since had many exchanges based on links between musical, artistic, scientific and school groups.
6. The Oxford-Perm link began to grow in the late 1980s, as the city was developing and barriers to communication were gradually eased. Oxford provided support to Perm to set up democratic structures after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the link was formalised in 1995. This link was based on strong university ties and maintains an academic focus, although many other activities take place including sports, arts and schools exchanges.
7. Oxford's link with Leon in Nicaragua was formalised in 1986, and focuses on fundraising for improvement projects in Leon. With the new possibilities afforded by developing technology, it is hoped that this link will be able to expand into more community exchange activities.
8. Each twin city link has a volunteer run Link Association/Committee in Oxford which organises activities and cultural exchanges between people from Oxford and their corresponding international link. Oxford City Council International Links part-time Coordinator provides co-ordination support to assist each of the volunteer links in Oxford filling skills and capacity gaps, where required, to ensure the success of twinning projects.
9. Oxford International Links (OIL) is a volunteer run committee which works closely with Oxford City Council and the individual Oxford Link Associations to support the development of activities that celebrate the historic friendship the city has with our twin cities. The Oxford City Council International Links Coordinator provides co-ordination assistance to OIL and also monitors the Oxford City Council grant

funding allocated to OIL on a Service Level Agreement basis. OIL administers grants to individual Links/Associations and also runs some twinning activities directly.

10. In addition to supporting the volunteer links and OIL, Oxford City Council also coordinates international partnerships and collaboration projects which include but are not exclusively with Oxford's twin cities. The main focus for these projects is collaboration between young people e.g. Ethno music project and twin city involvement in Cowley Road Carnival, Oxford Christmas Lights Festival and Pegasus Theatre project, which are designed specifically to deliver on Council core objectives. The International Links Coordinator also responds to initiatives and requests from the Council's international twin city offices and introduces people from our twin Cities to Oxford's diverse community groups.

11. At the Oxford City Council Meeting on 23 July 2018, the following motion was passed by Members:

*“Extending twinning links - Oxford City Council reaffirms its commitment to do all it can to ensure that Oxford remains an international and European city open to all. Whatever the results of Britain's negotiations with the rest of the European Union, we are determined to strengthen and deepen Oxford's links with other cities inside and outside Europe. To this end we call on the City Executive Board to: a) continue support for Oxford's existing twinning links with Leiden (Netherlands), Bonn (Germany), Grenoble (France), Perm (Russia) and Leon (Nicaragua); b) continue to support the Oxford European Association and promote the interests of non-British European citizens living in Oxford; c) initiate new twinning links with both Wroclaw (Poland) and Padua (Italy); d) initiate a twinning link based on the long-standing friendship between Oxford and Ramallah (Palestine).”*

### **Ratification of Oxford-Wroclaw twinning agreement**

12. Following visits to Oxford on 14 and 15 June 2018 by Wroclaw's Mayor to discuss the nature of the twinning relationship between the two cities, a full Twin City agreement between Oxford and Wroclaw was signed in Wroclaw on 3 October 2018 by Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Sajjad-Hussain Malik. The signing of the agreement was fast-tracked owing to the political situation in Poland and their forthcoming Mayoral elections and therefore was not approved by the City Executive Board in advance. The City Executive Board is requested to ratify the signed agreement to ensure due process.

### **Endorse Oxford Polish Association as the formal Link for the Oxford/Wroclaw twinning relationship**

13. Each twin city has a corresponding volunteer Link which drives twinning activity in the Community and endorses funding applications made to Oxford International Links (OIL) for twinning activity with the twin city. The Oxford Polish Association has proposed that they become the formal voluntary group for the Wroclaw twinning arrangement. Officers recommend this group as being the most appropriate one in Oxford to undertake this role.

### **Approving full Twin City status of Oxford and Ramallah**

14. Whilst everyday life is very different, Ramallah and Oxford have similarities in terms of population diversity, universities, schools and hospitals, and many civil society

groups as well as commerce, trade unions and cultural ventures. Additionally, a group of Oxford medics teach at Bir Zeit University, Ramallah, for a few weeks every year.

15. The project of forming friendship links between Oxford and Ramallah originated in 2002. Volunteer observers from Oxford, who were in Ramallah at that time, formed the Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association (ORFA) – a charity building grassroots links between civil society groups and individuals in Oxford in the UK and Ramallah in Palestine.
16. The Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association approached Oxford City Council in 2003 and requested that Oxford become officially twinned with Ramallah. Members agreed that there should be initial visits over a number of years within which the actual activities between the two cities could be monitored and an assessment made of how successful a formal twinning relationship was likely to be.
17. Over the last 16 years, the Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association has sent a number of delegations from Oxford to Ramallah to meet people with whom they have something in common, such as working in the same industry.
18. In 2018, more than 600 people signed a petition on Change.org for Oxford to officially twin with Ramallah. Following a motion agreed by Council a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with Ramallah on 17 December 2018.

#### **Approving full twin city status of Oxford and Padova**

19. In 2017, a delegation of Oxford academics from across the University of Oxford academic divisions visited Padova to discuss ways in which Oxford and Padova could collaborate on research projects. Discussions were held between University officials and Oxford City Council Members as to the benefits of a parallel twinning arrangement between the cities of Oxford and Padova as well as University of Oxford and the University of Padova.
20. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the Lord Mayor with Padova on 9 May 2018 and the Motion passed by Members as noted at paragraph 11.
21. The University of Oxford's Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) Directorate, headed by Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor Anne Trefethen is hosting a delegation of academics from the University of Padova, on 14 and 15 March 2019 in Oxford. The event will celebrate the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between GLAM and their equivalent University of Padova division, CAM.
22. Whilst there are benefits of a parallel twinning arrangement, it is expected that the wording of the full twinning agreement with Padova will reflect the University-led nature of this proposition and limit the resources expended by Oxford City Council accordingly.
23. As a commitment has been given Officers are now proposing that an agreement is negotiated and signed on this basis.

## **Budget allocation**

24. An additional £23,000 has been included in the baseline budget for 2019-20, reducing to £17,000 in the budget for future years. Officers propose to spend the additional ongoing funding on a contribution towards a full time twinning officer post to effectively resource the additional international links. It is proposed that the remainder of the additional budget would be managed by the twinning officer and spent on larger twinning events or those of strategic significance for Oxford City Council including launch events, anniversaries and inter-twin city activities. The additional amount for 2019-20 is needed to pay for extending the signage to incorporate the new twin city names.

## **The process and criteria for selecting future Twin Cities**

25. London has ten twin cities and Cambridge has two. Given that Oxford is likely to have eight imminently, it is recognised that the portfolio is significant and it is not advisable to add any further twin cities in the near future, at least until the new arrangements have bedded in.

26. Nevertheless, Officers recommend that any additional international requests are considered on the following basis:

- The proposed twin city has a University of international renown that already has links with Oxford
- The proposed twin city is committed to immutable principles of individual liberty, democracy, respect for Human Rights and equality under the law
- A suitable voluntary link group is available to drive ongoing activity with the twin city
- There should be an agreed period during which a Friendship Agreement would be entered into to monitor the link's ability to deliver sustainable activity in the longer term prior to signing a full twinning agreement
- The decision will need to be reviewed alongside the resource implication and only signed once a budget is in place and the City Executive Board has taken the decision.

## **Legal issues**

27. As there are no express statutory provisions or regulations underpinning and governing the process of international town or city twinning, it is usual for the many such twinning agreements in existence to be primarily aspirational in tone, rather than creating firm obligations on either party. Under the proposed draft, either party would be able to terminate the arrangement by giving 12 months' notice.

28. In entering into its twinning agreements 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.

## **Financial Implications**

29. In signing up to international links there is an expectation that events and reciprocal events will take place. Continental European cities tend to have larger budget commitments to such links than the City Council. The City Council reduces costs to

modest levels by expecting individuals not on official business to fund their own travel and subsistence. Nevertheless, there are costs associated with international links that have to be met and it important that these are fully reflected in decisions to form new links.

### **Level of risk**

30. There is a risk when twinning with another city that the political values of that city may change over time and not fit with the values of Oxford City Council. Legal agreements for new twin cities will include wording to mitigate this risk.
31. Unequal resourcing of the twin city link between the two twin cities carries a reputational risk which will be mitigated by managing expectations early and clearly.
32. Adding three new twin cities during a short space of time runs a risk of creating competition for attention and funds between these links which will all have the same anniversary dates; this will be mitigated by providing sufficient staffing capacity, allocating funding according to set criteria and involving all the links in plans for launch and anniversary activity.

### **Equalities impact**

33. See the attached Equalities Impact Assessment Screening form.

<b>Report author</b>	Paula Redway
Job title	Cultural Development Manager
Service area or department	Community Services
Telephone	01865 252780
e-mail	<a href="mailto:predway@oxford.gov.uk">predway@oxford.gov.uk</a>