

Sheffield City Council – Partner City Policy

Introduction

Sheffield has actively developed formal international relationships for over 70 years, through a range of mechanisms including Twinning / Sister City arrangements or Friendship Agreements and has established relationships with at least fourteen international cities including six designated Twin Cities and two Sister Cities. Some of these have been in place for many decades.

Given changes in Council policy, combined with resource constraints, some of these relationships are less active than they were previously.

Most of these relationships have been the result of ad hoc arrangements. The Council has not previously had a formal policy relating to international activities.

The Need for a Partner City Policy

Given Sheffield's broad range of existing international links, with a variety of terminology in place, this policy has been named a **Partner City Policy**, to ensure consideration of each of these arrangements.

This Policy sets out key principles to guide the Council's international relations work, ensuring that relationships are managed with a focus and aim to bring a rationale to international linkages, one that focuses on mutual benefits between Sheffield and the partner 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;
- Trade and investment opportunities;
- Increasing cultural awareness, including knowledge and understanding of the places of origin;
- Increased tolerance and understanding;
- Enhanced opportunities for youth activities, and
- The development of close friendships and ties built up over many years.

This Policy uses a hierarchy of relationships:

- **Twinning / Sister City relationships** are formal longer-term agreements (albeit with the inclusion of agreed review points);
- **Other Partner relationships including Partnership Agreements, Declarations of Friendship, Memoranda of Understanding (MoU), Letters of Support or Trade & Collaboration Agreements** are more likely to be time-limited arrangements, where each party receives short-term benefits. These partnerships may be renewed or converted into Twinning / Sister City relationships at a later date if appropriate.

The terms 'Sister City' and 'Twinning' are often used interchangeably and in reality, there is little distinction between the two. 'Sister City' is typically used in the Americas and Asia, whereas 'Twinning' is the more accepted term in Europe.

Twinning / Sister City relationships 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 and short-term difficulties of one or other partner and provide support to each other in times of need.

Friendship / Co-operation Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding have become more popular in recent years where partners identify areas of interest in which the partner cities or regions are committing themselves to explore and a timeframe for any proposed collaboration.

These may be opportunities to explore or facilitate less formal future partnership arrangements or shorter term commitments in circumstances where there is a mutual interest and benefit that fits with the city's objectives, however, there needs to be a clear interest or commitment from the partners involved to develop and sustain the links.

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 tiered system, whereby initial requests do not automatically lead to a Twinning / Sister City Agreement being agreed and signed at the outset. For example, a 'Declaration of Friendship' may be more appropriate in the first instance, until such time as the potential relationship has been scoped out and the resource implications considered.

Community Links

From a Sheffield perspective, the majority of international relationships have tended to be Council initiated and led but in some cases the initiative has come from communities or local organisations. In such cases an alternative to any formal arrangement is for the Council to adopt a role of initial enabler and facilitator and thereafter have a limited role that would fit within the looser Partnership model. The Council may not even be required to commit to or sign anything, rather involvement might be limited to hosting an introductory meeting or effecting introductions between appropriate organisations.

Both types of arrangement have their respective benefits.

Assessment Criteria for Decision Making

Sheffield City Council regularly receives approaches to forge new relationships, whether this is to enter into specific agreements or simply to host a visiting delegation. With limited time and resources, deciding on what opportunities to pursue requires decision-making criteria and robust assessment. Whilst we may choose to maintain existing relationships, new opportunities for city partnership working will undoubtedly arise.

Opportunities may be generated either by our work or via partners through their own activities and will require measured assessment to determine value for the City Council and other stakeholders. Using objective criteria, each new opportunity and each current relationship will be evaluated against a range of economic, tourism, cultural, historical connections, educational, and operational factors before providing recommendations on the merit of any new opportunity. Shared values such as the ability to demonstrate the promotion of human rights, gender equality and advocate 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.

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

A partner city arrangement may lead to a proposal to enter into a commercial contract. Such a proposal is outside the scope of this policy.

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 a formal Twinning / Sister City agreement is appropriate, and if so the recommended terms and nature of the arrangement;
- If not, then whether another form of arrangement might suffice and if so the recommended terms and nature of the arrangement;
- If not, then whether an informal, community-based arrangement could be facilitated.

Location Overview

- Is the location a “*good fit*” for Sheffield in terms of:
 - (a) Population size;
 - (b) Population profiles (e.g. age, gender, race);
 - (c) Economic 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 tangible benefits to Sheffield.
- Is the partner, city or network making progress against similar challenges to Sheffield and are they doing so in a progressive manner?
- Does Sheffield have any existing partnerships or Twin / Sister Cities 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.

Strategic Fit

- Does the proposal fit in with the Council’s stated aims as set out in any Corporate Plan?
- Does the proposal fit with strategic plans of the Council’s key partners (e.g. situated in a target market identified in the SYMCA Internationalisation Plan or target market for international students) and is there synergy with the Sheffield City Goals?
- Will there be tangible benefits for Sheffield’s residents, businesses or partners?
- Does Sheffield have any membership or affiliations to organisations in common with the partner city or network?

Profile

- Will the proposal give Sheffield significant and positive PR?
- Will Sheffield City Council’s involvement help boost the profile of city partners, helping them to achieve mutually shared objectives?

Purpose

- What is the rationale behind the approach – what are the perceived benefits of the arrangement either TO Sheffield or FROM Sheffield e.g. Trade & Investment opportunities, 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);
 - (e) Supporting trade and investment opportunities.
- What is the partner city or network seeking to achieve from collaboration?

Due Diligence Considerations

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

Connections

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

Resources

- Does the Council or other Sheffield stakeholder have sufficient resources (both staffing and financial) to enter into the project or partnership?
- Does the project have the potential to generate additional revenue or capital resources (e.g. Horizon Europe Funding) for Sheffield?
- Is the arrangement sufficiently sustainable?
- Are the proposed outcomes for the relationship measurable?

Outcome of the Assessment

The table below sets out the hierarchy for international partnerships for the purposes of this policy:

Relationship	Focus	Documentation	Duration	Review
Twin / Sister City	Agreement to exchange information, knowledge & expertise, and develop joint projects in defined areas e.g. Education; Culture; Sport; Trade & Investment	Agreement to enter into a Twin / Sister City Relationship (<i>Note: a separate agreement or MoU for specific projects, defining objectives and tasks may be desirable</i>)	Longer term (potentially in excess of 10 years)	Every 2 years with ability for either party to exit agreement
Trade & Collaboration	Sector-specific or related to an individual opportunity e.g. a trade mission or contract	Memorandum of Understanding (<i>commercial contracts are outside the scope of this policy</i>)	Aligned to the nature of the particular transaction	Envisaged to be every 6-12 months, dependent on the transaction and when it concludes
Partnership	Joint working arrangement where the partners agree to co-operate to achieve a common goal and share relevant information	Partnership Agreement	Aligned to the nature of the particular collaboration	Envisaged to be every 6-12 months, dependent on the collaboration and when it concludes
Friendship	More ceremonial in nature, with language focussing on a commitment to fostering understanding; co-operation and mutual benefit (<i>as opposed to specific projects</i>)	Declaration of Friendship	Short-term	Every 12 months
Support	Formal response to a particular incident e.g. natural disaster or conflict	Formal Letter	Short-term	N/A

Review Criteria

Unless the agreement is time-limited, all arrangements will be reviewed from time to time. If there is no longer any benefit to the Council or city, the review will consider whether to seek to revive or terminate the arrangement. There will not be an automatic cut-off point after a defined number of years of inactivity; review will be on a case-by-case basis, assessing historical benefits derived from the association and considering potential opportunities if the relationship were to be reinvigorated.

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

APPENDIX

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND GOVERNANCE

Decision-making

A reasonable request to enter into a Partner City Arrangement will be referred to Strategy & Resources Committee for initial consideration.

The Committee will determine whether the opportunity should be explored further and if so, request Officers to undertake an assessment in accordance with the Partner City Policy.

Officers will carry out research, including making informal contact with the city, and conduct an assessment exercise using the criteria set out in the Policy. The timescale will depend on information on the other location being readily available and the availability of officer time but should usually be completed within three months of the Committee request.

The outcome of the assessment will be reported back to the Committee. 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), make any other less formal arrangements, support community or other local organisation activity, or take no further action.

If a decision to proceed is made, more formal communications will commence with the relevant city and an agreement between the two cities is developed and finalised. The agreement will include provisions for periodic review or an end date, as appropriate.

The decision and any resultant agreement and activity will be included in the Annual Report of International Relationships presented to the Committee each municipal year.

Review

An agreement will be reviewed from time to time using the criteria set out in the Policy. If the outcome of the review is a proposal to terminate the agreement or relinquish Partner City Arrangements then this must be reported to Strategy & Resources Policy Committee in the same level of detail as for a proposal to enter into such arrangements so that the Committee may make an informed decision taking into account all relevant considerations.

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 Sheffield, 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;
- Provide information in respect of the relationship in a timely manner to ensure that this can be featured in the Annual Report on International Relations.

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