

PART A - Initial Impact Assessment

Proposal Name: International Update 2023-24

EIA ID: 2589

EIA Author: Nik Hamilton

Proposal Outline:

In November 2023, Strategy & Resources Committee approved proposals for a new Partner City Policy, including assessment criteria for the purposes of assessing new approaches and reviewing the effectiveness of existing international relationships. This report provides a summary of the assessments recently undertaken in respect of both existing relationships and approaches received and makes recommendations in respect of decisions required of the Committee. The report also provides a summary of activities and events, linked to our international relations that have taken place over the last 12 months. Sheffield has established relationships with numerous international cities, through Twinning, Sister City, Trade & Collaboration or Friendship links. Following on from the approval by Strategy and Resources Policy Committee of a Partner City Policy, an exercise has been undertaken to review these relationships, using the assessment framework in the policy to determine whether the Council wishes to retain, relinquish or reinvigorate these relationships. In addition to the review of existing international relationships; the paper considers the calls to detwin with China, and recommends a response to the approach from Nablus to Twin with Sheffield. The Paper presents the following recommendations that the City Council: a) Relinquishes the relationship with Anshan; b) Does not reinitiate the Trade and Collaboration Agreements with the cities of Daqing and Nanchang; c) Retains the relationship with Chengdu; d) Retains links with Bapaume; e) Acknowledges the links with Estelí whilst acknowledging that this relationship is community-driven, rather than Council-led; f) Retains links with Bochum; Kawasaki; Khmelnytskyi and Pittsburgh; g) Takes no further action at this time in respect of the relationship with Donetsk; h) Acknowledges the historical and community links in the case of Kotli and the historical links with Kitwe, noting that the civic relationships in respect of each city is effectively dormant; i) Enters into a Friendship Agreement with

Nablus; and j) Carries out further work in respect of identifying the potential opportunities with South Korea. That the Committee acknowledges the important role of the Lord Mayor in respect of fostering new international relationships and helping to maintain existing links with Partner Cities.

Proposal Type: Non-Budget

Year Of Proposal: 23/24

Lead Director for proposal: Kate Martin

Service Area: City Futures

EIA Start Date: 07/02/2024

Lead Equality Objective: Leading the city in celebrating and promoting inclusion

Equality Lead Officer: Bashir Khan

Decision Type

Committees: Policy Committees
• Strategy & Resources

Portfolio

Primary Portfolio: City Futures

EIA is cross portfolio:

Overview of Impact

Overview Summary:

The 'Global Detwin with China' movement has developed on the basis of alleged human rights violations in China. In maintaining links to Chinese cities, there is a need to separate out national political concerns from economic, cultural and education concerns, and from direct city (and often community or individual) links. Pre-Pandemic we had c. 10,000 Chinese students studying at our 2 universities. In respect of the wider Chinese community, the (non-student) Chinese population living in Sheffield is in excess of 15,000 – we have a significant diaspora. Given potential population numbers of c. 25,000, the value of both aspects of the Chinese community to the Sheffield cultural mix, can therefore not be underestimated. Considering the 'detwin' petition received, we also need to be aware of the potential unintended consequences of taking such a stance and the impact on the local Chinese population. We would not want members of the Chinese population to be singled out (for verbal or other abuse) as a consequence of a detwinning decision, nor would we wish to see, for example, Chinese businesses being boycotted or targeted. Nor would we want to cause issues for Sheffield-based Chinese residents that have family remaining in China. We have already witnessed the Chinese Government placing restrictions on accessing Sheffield Hallam University's website by prospective students living in mainland China, following on from the publication of a report by the Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice, which examined forced labour practices in the Uyghur Region. Whilst there is no suggestion that the City Council condones any of the alleged behaviour of the Chinese Government, it is felt pertinent to maintain links with Chengdu and relinquish links with Anshan; Daqing and Nanchang, for the reasons outlined in the Committee Report, rather than being a direct response to the 'detwin' petitions received. In doing so, it will be important to engage and support members of the Chinese community living in Sheffield, including those who have campaigned against the twinning arrangements we have with Chinese cities. In respect of the recommendation to establish a 'Friendship' with the city of Nablus, located on the West Bank in Palestine, since their initial approach to Sheffield City

Council in April 2019, Nablus have effectively been led to believe that their approach to Twin with Sheffield would be met favourably. The Global COVID Pandemic, coupled with changes in the ruling administration and key personnel at the City Council have significantly delayed the decision-making process. Regular requests, through the use of Public Questions at Council, for Sheffield to Twin with Nablus have been received. The conflict following the attacks of 7 October 2023, has further exacerbated the issue. There have been frequent public demonstrations outside the Town Hall in support of Palestine; the forced removal of the Israeli flag from the Town Hall roof and recently a camp and hunger strike outside the Town Hall. The current conflict in Gaza should have no bearing on the decision-making process, however, the Council should have responded appropriately to the initial approaches back in April 2019 in a timely manner. We failed to do this, and consequently there is mounting pressure for us to act. A decision needs to be made either way, and the polarising nature of the current conflict means that a section of the community will not be happy with whichever ultimate decision is made. Under the circumstances, a limited Friendship Agreement with Nablus, instead of a Twinning relationship, would therefore appear to be more appropriate and the wording of the document would also need to be carefully considered. Members of the Jewish community, but particularly the Orthodox Jewish community living in Sheffield have expressed their concerns with how the Council has conducted itself since 7 October 2023. If we are to accept a proposal to extend the hand of friendship to Nablus, we also need to ensure that we are prepared for criticism and that a full communications plan and other mitigations are developed, prior to any decision. For balance, we could consider looking to identify an Israeli city to also enter into a 'Friendship' with, however, there have been no direct approaches to Sheffield to date in this regard. Identification of a suitable city could present complications and also has the potential for what is a polarising issue to continue.

Impacted characteristics:

- Cohesion
Partners
Race
Religion/Belief

Cumulative Impact

Does the proposal have a cumulative impact: No

Impact areas:

Initial Sign-Off

Full impact assessment required: Yes

Review Date: 07/02/2025

PART B - Full Impact Assessment

Cohesion

Staff Impacted: No

Customers Impacted: Yes

Description of Impact: Twinning and other similar relationships are often founded on the basis of developing a mutual understanding and shared purpose, which can often serve to support or enhance community cohesion and provide an insight into the cultures and traditions of the other country. A current example being links with our Chinese Twin City of Chengdu and the Acrobatic Troupe that are travelling to Sheffield to perform in the Lunar New Year Celebrations. The proposed Friendship with Nablus is overshadowed with the potential negative impact on community cohesion and

we recognise that this particular action may lead to concerns particularly in the Orthodox Jewish community and balancing mitigation actions need to be carefully considered, for example exploring Friendship arrangements with an Israeli city.

Partners

Staff Impacted:	No
Customers Impacted:	Yes
Description of Impact:	Establishing Twinning and friendships can potentially have a positive effect on the Sheffield economy and our educational institutions. They may lead to an increase in trade and investment opportunities and could support the universities in their target markets for international student attraction.

Race

Staff Impacted:	No
Customers Impacted:	No
Description of Impact:	

Religion / Belief

Staff Impacted:	No
Customers Impacted:	Yes
Description of Impact:	The current Israel/Gaza conflict polarises opinions, many of which are linked to religion and belief. In seeking to establish a 'friendship' with the City of Nablus, the Council is trying to be balanced and consider competing interests and views. However, we recognise that this particular action may lead to concerns particularly in the Orthodox Jewish

community and balancing mitigation actions need to be carefully considered, for example exploring Friendship arrangements with an Israeli city.

Action Plan & Supporting Evidence

Outline of action plan:

Communications Plan to support whatever decisions are taken at Strategy & Resources Committee to address any concerns raised by a). the China 'detwin' protestors and b). Pro-Palestinian supporters and the Orthodox Jewish community living in Sheffield, given that whatever decision is taken on Nablus, one community will likely not be happy with the decision and little scope for mitigations exists, other than a balancing Friendship with an Israeli city.

Action plan evidence:

Changes made as a result of action plan:

Mitigation

Significant risk after mitigation measures:

Outline of impact and risks:

Review Date

Review Date:

07/02/2025

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