

C P 01 Twinning

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Policy Prepared By	Corporate Services
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Policy Revision History

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Rev 00	October 2022	Original

1. Background and Context

- Longford County Council recognises the value of twinning arrangement as a means for developing relations between individuals and groups in different countries and the people of Longford and in promoting social interaction and cultural exchange.
- Twinning can be defined as a coming together of two towns or regions seeking to strengthen common interests and links in culture, education, economic development, arts, heritage, tourism, sports, social and community development.
- Twinning arrangement foster friendship and understanding between different cultures, encourages trade and tourism.
- In addition to cultural and tourism exchanges, partnerships with international communities have led to lifelong friendships and business exchanges and opportunities.
- Through its partnerships and international friendships, the Council has developed a fantastic network of Longford ambassadors around the globe.

2. Purpose of this Policy

Longford County Council recognises the need for a policy to manage twinning arrangements to ensure the legislative requirements are met. The purpose of this document and policy is to

- Outline the legislative requirements for twinning arrangements.
- Develop criteria on which twinning applications can be assessed.
- Put in place a process to review existing arrangements.
- Provide general information and guidance for all Members, Management Team, Community Groups and employees.

3. Definitions

Town Twinning or Sister City Twinning is a long-term, cooperative relationship between two cities or municipalities in different countries through which cultural, educational, business, and technical exchanges take place.

Partnership opportunities explore / facilitate less formal partnership arrangements in circumstances where there is mutual interest and benefit and fit with the objectives. There still needs to be a clear interest or commitment from the community or partners involved to develop and sustain the links. Examples include URBACT - working together to develop solutions, learn, network and build capacity.

4. Local Government Legislative & Other Requirements

- Twinning is a reserved function of the Council.
- Legislative provision is set out in the Local Government Act 2001 Pt 9, S 75 which outlines the following:
 1. A local authority may enter into arrangements for the twinning of its administrative area or a part of it or establish other similar links with any other area, whether within or outside the State.
 2. The decision to enter into an arrangement under subsection (1) is a reserved function.
 3. A local authority shall not enter into an arrangement under subsection (1) unless, having had regard to the following matters, it is satisfied that the arrangement is justified:
 - a) the benefits likely to accrue to its administrative area and the local community,
 - b) the social, cultural and general interests of its administrative area and the local community.
 - c) The total cost involved.
 4. The Minister may issue directions to local authorities or specified classes of local authorities for the purposes of this section.
 5. There shall be recorded in the annual report of a local authority for every year expenditure and other particulars in relation to the performance of its functions under this section.

5. Key Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Local Authority

- The role of the Local Authority is to support communities develop the existing formal relationships and facilitate and enable local organisations develop direct international links and relationships which will contribute to the development of the identified priority objectives.
- Make the Council's policy available to existing twinning committees and groups and to those communities exploring opportunities for twinning arrangements.
- Provide guidance and direction to community groups and committees on developing and preparing proposals for twinning arrangements.
- Provide guidance and direction to community groups and committees arranging twinning events.
- Facilitate an annual gathering of twinning committees to share experiences, explore possible coordination of visits, develop itineraries, etc.

5.2 Council

- Put in place an appropriate structure for the effective implementation, monitoring, review and approval of the Twinning Policy.
- Comply with the requirements of the Twinning Policy.
- Carry out their Reserved function where appropriate to consider and approve twinning arrangements.
- Ensure all twinning approvals are in line with legislative provisions.
- Similarly, any proposed dissolution of a twinning partnership must be approved by the Council.
- Review the Twinning Policy as required.
- Ensure twinning arrangements support key corporate objectives and meet the criteria approved by the Council.
- Support twinning arrangements with the County of Longford to develop, foster, strengthen, and maintain relationships and ensure that the Council’s twinning objectives are achieved.
- Consider and approve a central budget for twinning arrangements with the County of Longford as part of the Annual Budget preparation.

5.3 Municipal Districts

- Support twinning arrangements within or with the Municipal District to develop, foster, strengthen, and maintain relationships and ensure that the Council’s twinning objectives are achieved.
- Ring fence funding for town or Municipal District twinning arrangements as part of the General Municipal Allocation.
- As part of the annual Community Support Scheme, applications from organisations, groups or individuals proposing to promote community led twinning links will be considered at Municipal District Level. Applications from organisations, groups or individuals proposing to promote community led twinning links must be accompanied by an outline of proposed activities indicating how these support twinning objectives.

5.4 Corporate Policy Group (CPG)

- Consider recommendations from the Placemaking Strategic Policy Committee and any comments from the Governance Strategic Policy Committee in relation to the policy in advance of submission to full Council for consideration and adoption.
- Consider recommendations from the Placemaking Strategic Policy Committee and Municipal District in respect of any new request for twinning.
- Make recommendation to the full Council on of any new request for twinning.
- Consider recommendations from the Placemaking Strategic Policy Committee in respect of their review of existing twinning arrangements.

- Consider as part of the annual Community Support Scheme, applications from organisations, groups or individuals proposing to promote twinning links with the County of Longford. Applications from organisations, groups or individuals proposing to promote twinning links with the County of Longford must be accompanied by an outline of proposed activities indicating how these support twinning objectives.
- Have an oversight role in monitoring expenditure.
- Review the Twinning Policy periodically.
- Consider and approve requests for representatives from the Elected Members and Executive to travel to twinning events overseas.

5.5 Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs)

- The Policy will be considered by the Governance and Placemaking Strategic Policy Committees in advance of making a recommendation to the CPG for consideration.
- The Governance SPC will review the Draft Policy solely from a governance perspective. Any observation made by the Governance SPC will be submitted to the Placemaking SPC. Such observations shall be included in the Placemaking SPC's recommendation to the CPG.
- The Placemaking SPC members will make a recommendation on the policy's adoption to the CPG.
- Proposals for new twinning arrangements will be assessed by the Placemaking SPC to ascertain if they demonstrate achievement specified criteria and supports the delivery of clear objectives. The Placemaking SPC will forward their recommendations to the Corporate Policy Group or relevant Municipal District for consideration.
- The Placemaking SPC members will review existing twinning arrangements at least every 5 years to establish if they continue to achieve adopted criteria and support the delivery of clear objectives and to assess their effectiveness and to consider how they could be improved and progressed.
- Review the Twinning Policy periodically

5.6 Corporate Services

- Arrangements for official welcomes are coordinated through the Corporate Services section and Chief Executive's office in consultation with the relevant twinning committee.
- Corporate Services monitor all formal twinning arrangements with an update on twinning activity included in the Annual Report.

6. General Principles

- Any proposed new twinning activity should clearly link with achieving local policy objectives and benefits for the local communities involved. In this regard, there is need for a governance mechanism for reviewing and recommending proposals to Council, as a reserved function.

- Prior to making a decision to support the twinning proposal, consideration must be given to the Council’s key twinning objectives and any other issues considered appropriate. A submission on the proposed twinning arrangement must consider:
 - Assessment against the twinning criteria
 - Likely benefits
 - What interests of the local communities will be met?
 - Costs
- Requests for new twinning arrangements must be accompanied with a detailed proposal, outline of how the arrangement will achieve the Council’s twinning objectives, 5 year plan to deliver on these objectives and key measurements to assess the success of the arrangement.
- The Placemaking Strategic Policy Group (SPC) will be responsible for considering and assessing new and reviewing existing twinning arrangements. Their assessment will consider if the arrangements are achieving the stated objectives and assess them against the criteria below.
- As part of its objective of focusing on outcomes, the Council will ensure that regular reviews of its twinning arrangements are carried out to assess their effectiveness and to consider how they could be improved and progressed. Equally, the Council may decide not to renew a twinning arrangement.
- The effectiveness of existing twinning arrangements will be reviewed by the Placemaking SPC, at least, every 5 years.
- All future formal twinning agreements entered into from date of policy adoption will include a review clause of at least every five years.
- As well as the criteria set out in this policy, it is considered that, in order to maintain a twinning arrangement, annual activities should be undertaken, such as eTwinning, and visits hosted at least once every 2 – 5 years.
- Twinning arrangements which have been inactive for over two years will be automatically ceased by the Council.
- The number of twinings in which the Council shall become involved shall be dependent upon the overall resource position of the Council.
- To ensure the sustainability and viability of twinning arrangements, multiple twinning arrangements will not be considered or approved for the county, a municipal district, town, village or area.

7. Criteria

Any relationship (from formal twinning / friendship agreements) will be expected to demonstrate that they achieve the following criteria and support in delivering on clear objectives. The Council

shall apply the following criteria to assess its involvement in, and support of, twinning and other international linkages:

- Compliance with the legislative requirement that the arrangement is justified:
 - The benefits likely to accrue to its administrative area and the local community.
 - The social, cultural and general interests of its administrative area and the local community.
 - The total cost involved.
- Potential twinning partners shall be required to respect and reflect the views and policies of Longford County Council
- Potential twinning partnerships should demonstrate actual or possible economic, educational, cultural, heritage or sports benefit for County Longford, its residents, communities, or businesses.
- Mutual shared interest and support from community and business groups for partnership with a lead identified for each area.
- Shared similarities and characteristics with the proposed candidate area.
- Clear aim and focus that achieves wider community and economic benefit for partnership with the proposed candidate area.
- Fit with Longford County Council's Corporate Plan and Local Economic and Community Plan goals and objectives and support in achieving key objectives.
- Sustainability and viability are demonstrated – mutual interest, commitment and resources are demonstrated to support in achieving the aims and maintaining into the future.
- Governance – strong governance structures in place with business and community representatives involved with annual reporting to the relevant Municipal District on activities and projects.
- Reporting is required in the annual report – the Council is required to recorded in the annual report expenditure and other particulars in relation to the performance of its functions under Local Government Act 2001 Pt 9, S 75.

8. Requests to Twin with the County

- Requests from organisations representing alternative locations to twin with the County of Longford will be forwarded to the Cathaoirleach and the Chief Executive. Such requests must be accompanied with a detailed proposal, outline of how the arrangement will achieve the Council's twinning objectives, 5 year plan to deliver on these objectives and key measurements to assess the success of the arrangement.
- The request will be referred by the Chief Executive to the Placemaking Strategic Policy Group.
- The proposal will be assessed by the Placemaking SPC to ascertain if it demonstrates that it achieves specified criteria and supports the delivery of clear objectives.

- The Placemaking SPC will forward their recommendation to the Corporate Policy Group for consideration.
- The Corporate Policy Group will consider the proposal and make a recommendation to the full Council which will decide if it will approve/not approve the arrangement.
- Corporate Services will notify the relevant organisation of the Council's decision.

9. Requests to Twin with a Town or Municipal District

- Requests from organisations representing alternative locations to twin with a particular location, town or Municipal District in County Longford will be forwarded to the Cathaoirleach for the Municipal District and the relevant Director of Services. Such requests must be accompanied with a detailed proposal, outline of how the arrangement will achieve the Council's twinning objectives, 5 year plan to deliver on these objectives and key measurements to assess the success of the arrangement.
- The request will be referred by the relevant Director to the Placemaking Strategic Policy Group.
- The proposal will be assessed by the Placemaking SPC to ascertain if it demonstrates that it achieves specified criteria and supports the delivery of clear objectives.
- The Placemaking SPC will forward their recommendation to the relevant Municipal District for consideration.
- If the Municipal District members agree to support the proposal, it is referred to the Corporate Policy Group for consideration. If the proposal is not supported, the relevant organisation will be notified by Corporate Services.
- The Corporate Policy Group will consider proposals referred from the Municipal District and make a recommendation to the full Council which will decide if it will approve/not approve the arrangement.
- Corporate Services will notify the relevant organisation of the Council's decision.

10. Twinning Events

- It is recommended that groups and committees agree focused themes for events and visits. Guidance and direction will be provided by Longford County Council to community groups and committees arranging twinning events. For example:
 - Twinning events can be promoted through the Council's social media.
 - The Tourism office can advise on possible itineraries and places of interest to visit.
 - The Library Service and Arts Office can advise on events being organised in the County.
 - LEO can arrange for business introductions.

- All official twinning activities, hosted by Longford County Council, including official welcomes, civic receptions, receiving delegations, etc, must comply with the Council’s Civic Protocols.
- All official twinning activities, hosted at Municipal District level, including official welcomes and receiving delegations, etc, must comply with the Council’s Civic Protocols.
- Official events must be agreed with Corporate Services in advance, to facilitate diaries, allow time for preparation and manage resources efficiently.
- Invitations to twinning events abroad, and funding for same, will be considered and must be approved by the Corporate Policy Group. Longford County Council will be represented by the Cathaoirleach of Longford County Council or Cathaoirleach of the relevant Municipal District, accompanied by the Chief Executive or relevant Director of Service. Such overseas travel must comply with the Attendance by Elected Members as Guests at Official Overseas Events Protocol.

11. Funding

- A central budget, Twinning of Local Authority, is considered and approved for the County of Longford twinning arrangements as part of annual budgetary process. The central budget covers the following:
 - Costs associated with twinning arrangements with the County of Longford.
 - Funding for official twinning activities for the County of Longford, hosted by Longford County Council, including official welcomes, civic receptions and receiving delegations.
 - Support grants to twinning committees supporting twinning arrangements with the County of Longford. Applications for funding are considered and approved at Corporate Policy Group.
 - Costs of Elected Members and officials, approved by the Corporate Policy Group, to travel to County of Longford twinning events overseas.
- Funding for town or Municipal District twinning arrangements are considered and approved by each individual Municipal District as part of their General Municipal Allocation. Municipal District allocations cover the following:
 - Costs relating to Municipal District twinning arrangements.
 - Support grants to twinning committees. Applications for funding are considered and approved by the relevant Municipal District.
 - Funding for official twinning activities, hosted at Longford County Council or Municipal District level, including official welcomes and receiving delegations.
 - Costs of Municipal District Elected Members and officials, approved by the Corporate Policy Group, to travel to twinning events overseas.
 - Costs associated with twinning events and activities, will be charged to the relevant General Municipal Allocation job codes.

- Applications from organisations, groups or individuals proposing to promote community led twinning links must be accompanied by an outline of proposed activities indicating how these support twinning objectives.
- An update on twinning activity will be included in the Council's Annual Report.

12. Review

The Council, having regard to changing circumstances, shall from time to time review this policy statement and shall conduct such review in accordance with the provisions in the Twinning Policy.

Appendix 1 – Background and Context

The town twinning movement started very soon after the Second World War, with the passionate support of mayors and citizens who vowed that Europe should never again be torn apart by war. Most of the twinings were between towns from countries that had, till recently, been divided by war. The promotion of this new twinning movement was one of the main priorities of the Council of European Municipalities (as it then was) in 1951, and the 1950s saw a huge increase in the number and range of twinings.

Twinning is not limited to the countries of the European Union – countries like Switzerland and Norway have always been actively engaged. But it is true that twinning has played a positive role at each main stage of enlargement of the European Union from its original 6 member states.

In southern Europe, the restoration of democracy in Greece, Portugal and Spain in the 1970s, and their accession to the EU in the 1980s, led to a range of new twinning partnerships with the municipalities of those countries, as they prepared for and joined the EU.

And again, the changes in central Europe following the fall of the former communist governments from 1989 led to a proliferation of twinning links, leading up to the biggest-ever enlargement of the EU in 2004, and helping to bring the peoples of our long-divided continent together again.

Since 1989 – and following a successful initiative of the European Parliament – the EU has provided an important financial support to twinning, especially where a European added-value can be shown.

Town Twinning developed to promote mutual understanding and friendship. Whilst not legally binding, the signing of a formal twinning agreement facilitates the setting up of a long term, trusting relationship. Its form and content are not fixed and may be amended depending on the specific nature of the partnership which is being set up according to partners' wishes.

Appendix 2 –Twinning Arrangements

A number of formal twinning arrangements exist which support some of the Council’s strategic objectives.

Active

- Ballinamuck and Essert de Belfort, France (1997) *
- Longford town and Noyal-Châtillon sur Seiche (1998) **
- Ballymahon and two adjacent towns of Landévant and Landaul, France (2001) *
- Granard town and East Rouen in Normandy, France (2021) *

* Community Led

** Legacy from Longford Town Council

Inactive

- Longford town and Sparks, Nevada, United States of America (1976)
- Lanesborough and Lanesborough, Massachusetts, USA (2006)

Lapsed

- County Longford and Municipality of Huixquilucan De Degollado, Mexico (2015) ***

*** Agreement was for one year and required renewal in writing from both parties

Appendix 3 – Twinning Objectives

Twinning and friendship agreements can offer benefits especially when there is a clear, shared objective, with 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. However, it is important to clarify the key objectives, the links to sustain, and what community benefits are expected to accrue.

Developing links or partnerships can support in achieving policy objectives such as culture, sports, heritage, age friendly, economic development, community development, links with diaspora and tourism. There may also be opportunities to work on problems or develop innovative solutions with partners around key challenges such as town design, smart cities, climate change and energy.

It is important to consider the key objectives and what the most appropriate partnership arrangements might be to achieve the objectives. There may be opportunities through specific European Programmes rather than entering into a formal twinning, depending on the objectives, mutual interest and level of community engagement to drive and sustain the partnership into the longer-term future.

The work of Longford County Council is set out in a number of strategic plans, including the Corporate Plan, the County Development Plan and the Local Economic and Community Plan. Twinning arrangements have the potential to support a number of Council policy objectives.

The Council considers that clearly defined objectives and a focus on outcomes will result in the most appropriate twinning arrangement, best use of resources and more sustainable and proactive twinning linkages. In particular, the following objectives must be considered and supported:

- Promote economic development and enterprise and improve the prosperity of the county by attracting new investment and enterprise development and facilitating economic partnerships and initiatives to attract business investment.
- Encourage community development, community spirit, cultural exchange, youth development, and further understanding and public participation for all within the county.
- Development of tourism, sport, recreation, heritage and culture sectors, enhance links with Diaspora and promote Longford as a quality destination for visitors.

Appendix 4 – Assessment of Twinning Arrangement

Longford County Council will have regard to the following questions in assessing future twinning arrangements. These will also be used when evaluating the benefits of existing arrangements.

- Does Longford have shared interests with the proposed twinning area? (Shared similarities, characteristics and/or real interests)
- Is there a broad base of groups/individuals identified from both the proposed area and within Longford to sustain a twinning? (Clear interest and support from community, business and/or sporting/cultural groups is clearly demonstrated)
- What key aims and outcomes will be achieved by a twinning? (Clear objectives identified for cultural, educational, sporting and/or economic exchanges and interaction between Longford and the proposed area)
- How do the twinning objectives fit with Longford County Council strategic priorities? (Related to local community, cultural, sporting, environmental or local economic interests)
- Will the proposed twinning arrangement support European Union objectives and priorities? (Does the proposal reflect on a new narrative for Europe, citizen-oriented, equality promoting, forward-looking and constructive that would be more engaging for the younger generation in particular)
- Is there potential for a long-term commitment? (Sustainability – potential for a sustainable relationship and not just a focus on singular events/areas)
- Does the proposed twinning demonstrate viability? (Are likely costs identified and adequate financial support for exchanges and maintenance of the relationship committed)
- Will the proposed twinning have a negative impact on other commitments? (Will it significantly impact on other twinning arrangements and the existing resources allocated for twinning)
- Does the twinning offer opportunity to participate in other programmes/beneficial activities? (Could it lead to partnership arrangements in other areas, such as EU funded projects/programmes, joint marketing campaigns to support tourism or attract future Foreign Direct Investment, help address common challenges such as climate change, etc?)

Appendix 5 – Advice when considering Twinning Opportunities

Adapted from *Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) European section of United Cities and Local Governments*

A twinning arrangement is not something to be improvised, it must be carefully prepared. The following guidance will ensure that all the bases are covered, and the twinning arrangement is a success.

Find the right partner

- Finding the perfect partner is obviously the first step.
- Each twinning is unique, however in most cases the right twinning partner should be similar to you on a number of counts. These can be the number of inhabitants, the geographic location, the economic activities, historic links with other communities, the main social or environmental issues.
- You should spend time with the representatives of your proposed partner town, to make sure that you each have the same understanding and aspirations for the new link.

Involve the citizens and the whole community

- There can be no twinning without the active participation of the inhabitants.
- Elected representatives and the Local Authority can often be the driving force behind projects, but they must not be the only people involved.
- Businesses, schools, sport clubs, leisure groups, senior citizens organisations, and other local community associations should all be involved.
- At the same time, the twinning needs to be visible for every citizen to feel involved. For instance, signs can be posted at the entry to your town, and your local newsletter and website can feature news about the twinning.
- It is important to communicate the impact and benefits of twinning to the wider public, and in particular to the media, to create an accurate image of your twinning.
- Home hosting has been a traditional feature of twinning arrangements in Longford. However, COVID-19 and child safeguarding requirements have changed the twinning landscape. Such hosting arrangements may become more challenging in the future and may become a barrier to involving new people, particularly young people, in exchanges and projects.

Include a European dimension

- In the European Union, a good twinning link should help to strengthen active European citizenship, by creating links between citizens, by aiding the promotion of European unity, and helping to forge a European identity.
- By allowing people to experience the daily life of others, to debate and discuss important issues of the day, and to discover new cultures and the languages of their partners, twinning helps citizens to understand that they belong to one community of values.

Define common objectives

- What do we want from this twinning? This should be the first question when establishing a twinning link.
- You and your partner should define together clear objectives and types of activities, and where possible agree from the outset on dates by which an assessment of the project can be established. If this is not done, the twinning may well fail, due to misunderstandings or misperceptions.
- It is useful to reassess the objectives and actions from time to time, to make sure you are all committed to the same priorities for the twinning.

Create a support structure

- Over time, the energy behind the partnership can weaken.
- A small but active team, in each of the twinned towns, can help to maintain connections, develop the partnership through new projects, seek financing, etc.
- This twinning “motor” can be a sort of steering committee for the twinning, or an association accredited by the Municipal District which works in cooperation with the town and its other associations, as well as with the partner town.

Work with schools and young people

- There are many ways of involving your schools in twinning. Pupil and student exchanges are often one of the high points of a partnership and can help to stimulate interest in learning the language of the partner country.
- These actions tend to involve a major part of inhabitants since, by their nature, they also involve parents, teachers and school staff, student associations, etc.
- Another way is to link twinings and eTwinning, the eLearning programme of the European Union which promotes school collaboration in Europe through the Internet. It provides support, tools and services to make it easy for schools to form short or long term partnerships in any subject area.

Address the major issues of our day

- Activities developed through twinning links can help citizens to be aware of European current issues; this is particularly true for young people.
- These issues can be about the environment, climate change, the future of Europe, human rights, peace, or social inclusion or even football or other sports.

Plan a sustainable relationship

- A good twinning link must be able to withstand the test of time, and not merely reflect the prevailing mood of the day.
- Strong friendships and true links of solidarity between the citizens of different towns need time to grow. Only by persisting over the years can one town come to count on another, in the event of disasters for instance.

Look to the future and build the basis for new exchanges

- A twinning link can create an ideal environment in which to develop new cooperation techniques.
- Exchange of experience as well as joint reflection on specific issues can help find solutions or bring improvements.

Develop a budget and look after the finances

- Last but not least, look after the finances.
- Any trans-national partnership is bound to cost some money, however carefully the partnership events are planned and organized.
- It is helpful if the Municipal District can allocate an annual budget, even if it is not a very large sum, to keep the momentum going. And local twinning associations are often very active in local fund-raising – which in itself can bring benefits among the home community.
- You can find more information on how to fund your twinning in the financial support section, in particular in relation to funding from the European Union.