

International Report number 10

Local
Government
International
Bureau



Take your partners

The local authority handbook on international partnerships



By Susan Handley

New, revised edition

LGIB International Reports

This publication forms part of a series of International Reports published by the Local Government International Bureau on international issues of particular interest to UK local authorities.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and cannot be taken as expressions of the policy of the Local Government International Bureau.

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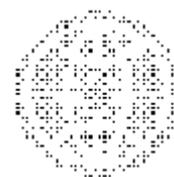
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As well as organising a number of conferences related to bilateral relationships and international linking, Susan has also managed a number of work exchange projects with Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. She is the UK's representative on the Council of European Municipalities and Regions' European Twinning Officers Network and has written a number of publications for the LGIB on European and international matters of relevance to local government.

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Judith Barton is the LGIB's Assistant Director - Communications and edits its European Information Service magazine. She has been writing and providing information on European and international affairs for over 20 years.



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Foreword



Cllr Ruth Coleman
Chair,
Local Government
International Bureau

For decades, local councils have been working with their counterparts to compare experiences and tackle the same issues, but only in recent years have so many started to look beyond the UK for possible solutions. By joining up with partners outside the UK, local government has succeeded in helping to improve living standards and create peace and stability for communities, both here and in other parts of the world.

This is why the Local Government International Bureau and the Local Government Association are making a real effort to encourage UK local authorities to become more involved with other countries. All political parties have united to enforce this strategy, in the hope that our authorities will start to think outside their traditional boundaries.

The aim of this new, revised version of 'Take your partners' is to describe how local authorities can get the best from their international partnerships, whether the links are traditional twinning arrangements, technical projects or partnerships with the developing world, and whether they are newly formed or need new impetus and direction.

Based on the experiences of those local authorities with a strong tradition of international work, this booklet will explain what is needed to make local authority links effective and successful. It will also try to show how international partnerships can contribute to improving a council's overall performance.

We hope that this guide will help all local authorities increase and strengthen their role in international partnerships and look forward to receiving feedback about successful and innovative activities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ruth Coleman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Councillor Ruth Coleman
Chair, Local Government International Bureau

February 2006

Introduction

Increasing globalisation and European integration mean that we live in a world that is more connected and interdependent than ever before. It's a world in which the role of local government is becoming more important and in which local authorities both compete and cooperate with each other. In this fast changing environment, councils have much to learn from each other. They also need, in the interests of peace and stability, to meet and understand one another. In recent years, many local authorities across the world have set up partnerships and links that represent a new form of international cooperation.

This guide starts from the premise that local government cannot afford to be insular, turning its back on Europe and the wider world. On the contrary, it needs to be involved with its partners in the rest of Europe and engage the international community.

'Take your partners' aims to give local authorities the self-confidence to include the international dimension in their everyday work and to make practical use of links with other communities to bring about tangible improvements in their locality. These principles may be applied just as much to a new partnership as to an existing one that is in need of new impetus.

There is no single correct model for an international partnership, but there are general principles that should be followed. The purpose of this guide is to encourage more international activity, whether with traditional EU partners, the wider Europe or the developing world. Case studies illustrate the many different types of international partnership, in the hope that other UK authorities can draw on the experience of others.

By careful preparation at the outset and regular review, international partnerships can become an invaluable and long term resource for both the local authority and the community. Through effective communication, such partnerships will also attract broad support and enhance the authority and community's reputation.

If local government is to remain a major player in the democratic life of our country, we cannot afford to be narrow or defensive, nor can we simply continue to do things in traditional ways without reflecting on what is relevant for the world of today and tomorrow. Learning from our counterparts in other countries, giving and receiving ideas and good practice, working together to build a better environment for everyone: these are essential components for any serious attempt to develop and modernise local government.

What are international partnerships?

The first form of local government international partnership was town twinning. After the Second World War, many European governments encouraged towns to make formal links as part of efforts to bring about peace and reconciliation among countries that had been locked in combat. This saw the first wave of UK twinning links. The twinning of this period centred mainly on family exchanges with a substantial cultural content and the first recorded twinning link was established in 1920 between Keighley, West Yorkshire, and Poix du Nord in France.

The UK's entry into the then European Economic Community, in 1973, led to a fresh boom in twinning links, and the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of Communism gave twinning another boost in the early 1990s.

New neighbours

Essex County Council has been particularly successful in its efforts to help countries prepare to join the European Union. With funding from the EU's INTERREG IIIC programme, Essex led on the creation of the Praxis network six years ago. New, old and potential EU members were brought together to share expertise in areas such as education, health and social welfare and to examine the most effective and low cost way of delivering these services.

As a result, experts from several countries came up with plans to maximise the benefits of the EU Structural Funds for rural entrepreneurs and to help start up and develop rural businesses.

For more information, visit:
<http://www.praxisnetwork.net/Default.htm>

Crimewatch

To reflect the ethnic make up of its community, Bradford has developed a friendship link with Mirpur in Pakistan. Participants from the local authority, West Yorkshire Police, the NHS, the education service and local businesses have taken part in exchanges so as to learn from their counterparts and understand each other's culture. Exchange visits between the police forces have helped officers to tackle crime in the Yorkshire city.

A link has also been developed between the Bradford Teaching Hospital's NHS Trust and Mirpur District Hospital to develop health care systems.

Contact Martin Baines at West Yorkshire Police:
E-mail mb363@westyorkshire.pnn.police.uk

Currently, the trend for local authorities considering forming new international links is to move away from formal, long term partnerships such as town twinning, and enter into less binding arrangements. Town twinning links are accompanied by formal charters that have no end date, whereas the new types of partnership tend to be less prescribed and are often endorsed by a friendship agreement or memorandum of understanding. Sometimes the agreements are time limited, and contain a list of objectives to be achieved within a specific time frame.

In addition to the trend away from partnerships that are best described as marriages without divorce, local authorities have moved towards a practice of 'municipal promiscuity', working with a variety of countries on a diverse range of projects to match individual priorities and areas of excellence.

The last 20 years in particular have seen a move by UK local authorities to seek partnerships outside what is now the European Union, with countries

from all continents. Many, for instance, have discovered a number of benefits from cultivating links with the former Yugoslavia and helping to rebuild the region's physical infrastructure as well as confidence amongst the local people.

Other local authorities are motivated to develop links further a field by a desire to cultivate relationships with the country of origin of many of their residents. In multicultural communities with a high proportion of people from a specific region, increasing cultural understanding and general awareness of their country of origin can contribute enormously to social cohesion.

The nature of a partnership is not important. It is the quality of the activities and the outcomes and benefits that count. Local authorities should have the confidence to set their own boundaries in terms of the nature, duration and location of their partnerships, secure in the knowledge that there is a clear rationale for this type of activity and demonstrable benefits.

Local authorities now regard international work more broadly. They are beginning to see the international dimension as a 'continuum', within which all forms of cooperation can exist, such as large scale EU funded projects, traditional town twinning, community links, technical exchanges and development cooperation. More importantly, they are appreciating that all activities are valid and equal.

Currently, there are over 2,000 formal twinning links in the UK, 50% of which are with France and 25% with Germany. The remaining 25% are with a variety of communities, including those in China, the USA and countries of the Commonwealth. These links are complemented by more informal partnerships and project based activities, many led by community groups, in particular with Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent.

Bristol fashion

Bristol twinned with Hanover in 1947, when the German city was in ruins and its people starving. Initial contact involved sending food and clothing parcels, with the Hanoverians responding with concerts and folk recitals as expressions of thanks. The city is now a thriving centre for culture and trade fairs, but the relationship continues with a variety of exchange activities, including school visits and an annual sporting exchange for junior tennis, gymnastics, badminton, squash and rowing.

As well as with Germany, Bristol now has thriving partnerships with China, France, Italy, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Portugal. Each link is managed by a community led forum and offers a wide range of activities from sport to cultural and education exchanges. As far as possible, the links are taken into schools so that students can discover the different partners' experiences and get more out of learning.

A special coordinator provides a focal point for all the links, funded in part by Bristol City Council and the University of the West of England.

For more information, visit:
<http://www.bristol-city.gov.uk/twin/intro.html>



Bristol has formal partnerships with China, France, Georgia, Germany, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Portugal

What's in it for local communities?

There are many reasons why UK local government has taken such a leading role in international activities over the years, not least because of their direct relevance and contribution to domestic policies, service delivery and corporate core values. However, local communities can gain a lot from overseas links, particularly if different parties are involved, such as schools and community groups.

As a provider of many key public services, local government is well placed to help improve the situation of people living elsewhere in the world. Listed below are some of the benefits provided by international cooperation.

Local authority benefits

Improving service delivery and problem solving
Comprehensive Performance Assessments look at councils' ability to adapt and improve. Having overseas links demonstrates an ability to learn from the best practice of others.

Sharing information and experience with overseas partners can help local authorities improve the quality and cost effectiveness of their own services. Exchanges between council officers are often a cheap and effective way of delivering technical assistance and can be more sustainable than one off projects. They can allow local authorities to

Business before pleasure

The London Borough of Lewisham has worked with its South African partner, Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, to boost their local economies.

As one of the major provinces, responsible for a third of the South African economy, Ekurhuleni has been using its experience of working with small businesses to help the London borough develop its community enterprise. In turn, Lewisham has shared its experience of skills development with Ekurhuleni.

Contact Ivor Wells at Lewisham for details:
E-mail ivor.wells@lewisham.gov.uk

compare approaches to solving particular problems, and let members of staff learn from each other over a period of time.

Increasing global and European awareness

Globalisation means that local authorities are increasingly required to work to European and international standards and operate in world markets.

Accessing EU funding

European Union funding programmes usually require local authorities to work with partners from other countries. Established links, including twinning arrangements, provide an excellent source of potential partners, enabling them to unlock funding for technical projects.

Staff development and training

Through the challenges associated with resolving technical issues in a new environment, overseas partnerships and twinning links can provide innovative training opportunities for all levels of staff and in a number of subject areas, ranging from management development to practical skills. A better understanding of another culture can also help local authority officers and other professionals to work more effectively within their own community.

Member development and training

Elected members can also benefit from the personal development opportunities available as a result of overseas partnerships. Councillors can use an international partnership to enhance their own skills by exchanging experience with their counterparts.

People to people benefits

Promoting tolerance and increasing understanding
Local authority partnerships put people from different countries and cultures together. This increases their understanding of the world and can broaden their horizons and help combat insularity. Importantly, it can promote tolerance and respect

for others, thereby combating racism and xenophobia.

Promoting stronger community partnerships

As activities often involve a wide cross section of the community, international partnerships can also help increase understanding between different sectors at home, as well as between the international partners.

Councils can use partnership activity to motivate key sections of the community, such as ethnic minorities, young people and disadvantaged groups, who may not always be involved in local authority activities or have contact abroad. Local authorities can stimulate local interest and make links with overseas counterparts possible.

Looking at other communities often encourages people to look more closely at their own environment and social structures. This, in turn, can boost civic pride, self esteem and confidence.

Young democrats

As part of the Local Government Association's Local Democracy Campaign, UK youth organisations took part in an LGIB conference on the role of international partnerships in promoting local democracy. Working with developing countries on projects to alleviate poverty, and with other European countries on drug prevention had enabled them to become more active in their local communities, participants heard. Young people from Rotterdam also explained how they had set up a support network for teenage mothers, whilst Swiss Youth Parliament representatives described how they had lobbied their national government to secure better regulations to reduce environmental damage caused by the large volume of freight passing through the country's major transport link.

For more information, visit:
<http://www.lgib.gov.uk/globalmark>

Ignorance isn't bliss

Kirklees set out to use its 50 year old link with the French town of Besançon to enhance the education of its young people and as a way of fighting the kind of intolerance caused by ignorance. The council has involved schools, choirs, football teams, stamp collectors, post office workers, the junior Chamber of Commerce and many others in activities to raise awareness of the two towns' different cultures.

By hosting exchanges, Besançon also helps Huddersfield students consolidate their language skills and experience contemporary French life. As part of students' career development, work placements have been set up with French lawyers, journalists and photographers, on a reciprocal basis. The French and UK partners also joined forces with German and Polish counterparts in a project for young people to address xenophobia and racism.

Contact Chris Rowe at Kirklees for details:
E-mail Chris.Rowe@kirklees.gov.uk

Enhancing youth activities

Overseas partnerships can give young people their first experience of life abroad. Youth exchanges or work experience can not only prove enjoyable but can also increase practical skills and enable young people to compete more successfully in the global workplace. Contact with foreign counterparts can provide an environment in which young people can explore social and political issues, deepening their awareness and increasing their self confidence.

General benefits

Promoting community well being

Bringing together counterpart organisations, experts and interest groups in health and social welfare can lead to improvements in social policy and community services and facilities. Sharing expertise and experience on issues such as unemployment and drug and alcohol dependency, and comparing facilities for the young and elderly

Transport of delight

Sunderland Council has managed to secure major funding from the European Union for projects which relate directly to its corporate aims and objectives. Working with counterpart authorities and transport providers in Norway, Scotland and Sweden, the council has been looking at ways of improving local planning and transport links so as to make Sunderland more accessible, attractive, inclusive and prosperous.

For further information, contact Catherine Auld at Sunderland:
E-mail catherine.auld@sunderland.gov.uk

can bring about changes at a local level that can make a real difference to people's lives.

Public awareness and learning

Taking part in international partnerships can raise public consciousness and encourage debate on major global issues, such as the environment, racism or poverty. Partnerships can also be used as a learning tool for all age groups in understanding the social, political, environmental and economic issues that face other parts of the world.

Education

International partnerships can enhance formal and informal education and lifelong learning for all members of the community. By providing a realistic context for learning, local authority links bring text books to life and serve as a resource for many subjects. Activities can be developed to relate directly to the national curriculum or an exam syllabus to improve educational achievement. Simply taking part in an overseas link can also boost key skills such as communication and organisation.

Economic and business development

International partnerships allow small and large organisations, in both the public and private

sectors, to explore potential economic benefits, through trade or the exchange of technical knowledge to improve business efficiency and service delivery. Tourism is recognised as a key component of the economy of many areas, and overseas partnerships can help promote an area.

Making a global difference

UK local government has a great deal of expertise that can help meet international agreed targets, such as the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, which set out to improve the lives of people in the developing world. Local authority services, such as public health and education, for instance, can be instrumental in alleviating poverty, gender inequality and environmental problems, although councils in developing countries may not always have the capacity to deal with them.

Girl talk

Stockport already works with its international partners on projects around vocational training, health care and services for disabled and older people.

To mark the 2005 European Year of Citizenship through Education, the council organised a visit to Brussels for the Stockport Young Women's Forum. Meetings with MEPs and sitting in on a debate on identity cards at the Parliament provided the group with a first hand look at European democracy in action. This was followed up with a visit to the North West by the Forum's counterparts from their German twin town Heilbronn, with the two groups comparing notes on their experiences of domestic abuse, teenage pregnancy and giving women a voice in decision making.

For further information, contact Sue Shore at Stockport:
E-mail sue.shore@stockport.gov.uk

Beginning a link

Finding a partner

There are many elements to consider before getting involved in an international partnership.

Top of the list is choosing the right partner. Finding a suitable partner and developing a successful link requires time and patience to get it right.

Authorities should give careful consideration to the following questions:

- what do they want to achieve from the partnership, both generally and specifically?
- do they want to work with a local authority or community similar to their own, or can they gain from working with somewhere of a different size or with different characteristics?
- how will they accommodate the expectations and aims of the potential partner?
- how will they work with their partner on a practical level? Are they able to communicate, can they respect each other's differences and can they reach compromises and achieve all their aims?

Where to look for a partner

The Local Government International Bureau can help by providing a partner search service for both long term and short term partners, working closely with counterpart organisations in the rest of Europe and around the world. Applications may be made by local authorities or by community groups that have the approval of their local authority.

A simple questionnaire must be completed providing factual information about the applicant community and details of the type of partnership sought. This information is then compared with the list of applications from overseas communities seeking UK partners and, once a match has been made, communities are put in contact with each other.

Further information about this service is available by contacting the LGIB at:

E-mail enquiries@lgib.gov.uk

Internet <http://www.lgib.gov.uk/partners>

Exploratory visits

Potential partners should make contact with each other to check areas of common interest.

Exploratory visits are a useful way to discuss individual aims and objectives for the partnership, and to ensure there is consensus on the way forward. Before a visit, both sides should draw up a list of key questions and queries and undertake some basic research on each other's culture. It is also important to decide whether partners can work with the individuals concerned on a detailed project. By tactfully asking searching questions and taking photos and video footage of the area, the two sides should be able to decide whether they can work together.

Deciding on a rationale

Before entering into a partnership, both sides should have a clear idea about why they are doing so. This rationale, or vision, should also apply to existing and long standing partnerships, where there needs to be an understanding of why the link is maintained. Linking the partnership's activities to the authority's corporate plan and to the community's priorities should enable the rest of the authority to understand the relevance of the international activities.

International partnerships can relate to specific subjects and consideration should be given to each partner's priorities and strengths. A partnership will work well if areas of excellence or experience are identified at the outset.

In addition to thinking about the specific needs of the community, there are many other general strategic viewpoints that could have an impact on the partnership's rationale. For instance, the Government's Department for Education and Skills has produced an international strategy emphasising the need to instil a strong global dimension into the learning experience of all children and young people. It also flags up to schools and colleges the need to equip employers and employees with the skills needed for a global economy.

What is a strategic plan?

A strategic plan should consist of three sections:

- the aims and objectives of the partnership, encompassing all aspects of the local organisation and community;
- a methodology, explaining how the aims and objectives will be achieved; and
- a list of desired outcomes and benefits, providing a starting point for the project's review and evaluation. This will enable partners to include a wide range of services and people.

At a wider level, the European Union's so called 'Lisbon strategy', which pledges to boost economic growth and create jobs also has a bearing on local government. The strategy relates to areas that are central to local government's powers of community well being and its role as a major local employer, including lifelong learning, active ageing, social inclusion and sustainable development.

Strategic plan

A strategic plan should be produced for all partnerships. Whilst a charter or written agreement is generally used to celebrate or announce a partnership and refers to more general aims of fostering friendship and understanding, a strategy document should provide clear parameters and inform everyone of what the partners want to achieve and how they plan to achieve it.

Both partners should draw up the strategic plan together. This is particularly important when the partnership concerns development activities, as the plan should reflect what the development partners really need, rather than any western perception. Good partnerships should always work on the basis of discussion and agreement, as well as respect for differing points of view.

The plan should be accompanied by a timetable with deadlines for activities to take place and for aims to be accomplished, as well as a list of the

available and required resources. The strategy should be regarded as an operational plan to guide daily work programmes and should remain flexible, as it will inevitably have to respond to any unforeseen and individual circumstances.

In addition to making a project more efficient and effective, a strategic plan can contribute towards fundraising efforts for the activities the partners aim to pursue. Almost all institutional donors require clear evidence of strategic planning and many now require it in the form of a tabular logical framework. This framework should bring together everything about the project in one place in a clear, concise and accessible way. The key thing about this approach is that its emphasis is not so much on the activities per se, but on their impact.

Finally, a strategic plan helps to inform others about the partnership, ensuring its activities are transparent and also providing a publicity vehicle to bring in new participants.

Welcome in the hillsides

The Welsh Assembly recognised the opportunities presented by the EU's 2004 enlargement to promote Wales commercially, culturally and as a top tourist destination. It therefore decided to forge links with the one of the smaller new members and with a region in one of the larger countries. The result is a thriving link with the Baltic state of Latvia, and with Upper Silesia in Poland.

The Assembly provides a clear steer to the links but ensures that the partnerships are cascaded down to local authorities and other key organisations in Wales. Activities with Upper Silesia have included trade missions, seminars on economic reform and job creation, and a visit by the Polish Environment Minister to water treatment plants in Cardiff. The Latvia link has focused on sustainable tourism and the use of Structural Funds, as well as school partnerships.

Contact Philip Bird at the Welsh Assembly:
E-mail philip.bird@wales.gsi.gov.uk

An example, giving some brief suggestions for the format of a strategic plan

Project summary	Measurable indicators	Means of verification	Important assumptions
GOAL: Improvement in the lives and living conditions of poor households and communities in Malawi	- Communities have increased access to sustainable basic services	- Programme evaluation - Observation analysis - Comparisons against national country plans	- Social and economic stability - Community residents see value in the project - Central government is receptive to the project goals
PURPOSE: Households and community groups see a reduction in unmet needs through improved delivery of appropriate basic services	- Improvement in the quantity and quality of basic services, falling under the responsibility of local government including: primary education, social welfare, public health, broader environmental health and housing compared to pre-programme levels	- Programme evaluation - Meeting minutes and reports - Discussion with other civil society groups - Local level assessment reports - Discussion with other local and central government representatives - Visit reports - Group discussions with community groups	- Stability of staffing in the council
OUTPUTS: (1) The local council is functioning effectively as a sustainable and relevant instrument of local government (2) The local council has developed a clear system for community engagement and is demonstrating this	(1) - The council has established plans in place - The council is working towards the delivery of strategic plans and is able to monitor performance against these plans - A reduction in unmet needs at the community level (2) - Community groups have full access to council officials who have mechanisms for consulting and responding to their input	(1) - Written plans - Records of progress against plans with improving trends (2) - Interviews with community groups. - Minutes of meetings and activity records	

Preparation, implementation and review

In short, there are three main phases to creating a perfect partnership and each one requires equal attention and time: preparation, implementation and review.

While implementation may be seen to be the key part to a partnership, careful and thorough preparation is vital before attempting any form of activity. Just as vital is the need to review activities, to evaluate and agree what worked well and learn from what didn't.

Celebration of success is also a key element and disseminating this success to a wider audience will ensure the project's sustainability and longer term commitment.

Polishing up links

Nottinghamshire's long standing link with the Polish city of Poznan has been developed on a 'slowly but surely' basis and involves almost every facet of the community. Activities have ranged from school exchanges and projects involving the special needs sector, to technical exchanges in the areas of information technology and transport.

Recently, the link has focused on social cohesion and welfare. With the help of EU funding, Nottingham's police service has been training its Polish counterparts in a community project that takes them into schools to talk about drug addiction. Social services practitioners have also been developing joint child protection procedures. As a result, Nottinghamshire staff have been able to appreciate different ways of tackling local problems, their confidence has increased and the county's reputation has improved.

Contact Roger Howes at Nottinghamshire:
E-mail roger.howes@nottsc.gov.uk

Steps to setting up a partnership

Understand the rationale

Have a clear rationale or vision for your partnership; understand what you wish to achieve from the link in the short, medium and long term and an idea of how this can happen.

Ensure you have support

Secure strong and broad support for the link from local politicians, senior officers, practitioners and community members by communicating the rationale clearly, ensuring it reaches every part of the community.

Find a partner

Ensure compatibility by an exploratory visit. Check that you have enough in common to sustain a relationship. Decide on the type of relationship you seek: formal/informal/time limited/focused on one issue. Scope the initial possibilities for joint activities.

Formalise the relationship

Make the relationship official through an appropriate charter or agreement. Agree a strategy or work plan for your activities and projects with your partner, together with funding possibilities and a flexible timetable.

Communicate your aims and objectives to secure support and participation by politicians, officers and the wider community and invite input.

Augment partnership

Set schedule for activities. Assign responsibilities for each function. Plan, consult and inform.

Follow up

Monitor activities, review procedures and improve as necessary. Continue to communicate aims, objectives and achievements to the wider community.

Securing support

Once there is a clear vision for the international work, it will be important for this to be communicated so as to gain broad backing for the plans. It is vital that partnership activities are supported as widely as possible.

Political support

Councillors have been elected to serve the community and decide on the way in which a local authority operates. They therefore have a vital role in guiding and supporting international work. Many have their own experience of international work and can add a great deal of expertise to overseas activities.

Cross party political support is needed for all international activities. Although the balance of political power may change with elections, international partnerships should remain above party politics.

In addition to adding political legitimacy to international work, the support of elected members is also important on a practical level in implementing partnerships. The leaders of overseas communities will almost certainly expect to meet their counterparts in a UK local authority.

Senior officer support

It is also important to enlist the support of chief officers, ensure that the vision is communicated to all areas of the local authority and that it is spread to members of staff at different levels. One of the unique features of international partnership work is that it is relevant to much of the work of an authority, so it is vital that everyone is aware of the potential benefits. This also applies to the community at large.

The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) has its own international strategy and actively encourages partnerships for staff development and for the benefit of the local authority as a whole.

Local Government Association position

Elected members of the Local Government Association have given political support to two national policies on international work, which were circulated to every local authority for them to consider and adopt.

In 2002, an LGA international development policy called on all local authorities to increase their involvement in development activities and to consider appointing an elected member and officer responsible for international development. The policy was updated in 2005.

In 2003, the LGA explained the significance of EU expansion to local authorities and asked them to play a role in responding to the challenges and opportunities this created.

The two papers can be accessed on the LGIB website at:

http://www.lgib.gov.uk/publications/pdf/International_development_strategy.pdf
and http://www.lgib.gov.uk/media/EU_enlargement_position.pdf

Further information is available on the SOLACE website at:

<http://www.solace.org.uk>

If the aims of a partnership are explained in a clear and concise way, free of jargon and acronyms, more people should understand the authority's involvement and give it their support. Other players can then be invited to contribute to the broader strategic plan.

External support

There are a number of political organisations with experience and expertise in the field of international cooperation.

Council of European Municipalities and Regions

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the pan-European local government association. It has long been a staunch advocate of international cooperation. The LGIB represents UK local authorities on the CEMR's Europe-wide Twinning Network and North South Network, made up of representatives of the national local authority associations. The networks meet to discuss aspects of international cooperation in Europe and the developing world, and their main purpose is to develop a united voice on behalf of European local government.

Further information is available online at:
<http://www.ccre.org>

Committee of the Regions

The UK is also represented at European level in the Committee of the Regions, the EU body where local and regional government representatives meet to discuss European legislative proposals. Its members are often willing to be involved in European and international activities.

Golden star

Basingstoke and Deane Council won the European Commission's Golden Twinning Star award for an exchange between British and French students in their final year of school. The project was developed to show the town's young people that they can move freely within the EU to find work.

The students attended lessons and a recruitment workshop on preparing for interviews, undertook a real job interview with the council's recruitment office, visited local companies and recruitment agencies and interviewed the Mayor and other council employees.

Contact Daniel Garnier at Basingstoke:
E-mail d.garnier@basingstoke.gov.uk

Information about members in your region can be found on the LGIB website at:
<http://www.lgib.gov.uk/representation>

European Parliament

Most Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) appreciate the important role of twinning in European integration and place significance on people to people contact in strengthening the EU. In recent years, MEPs have demonstrated their support by reversing European Commission plans to reduce the twinning budget.

MEPs can be invited to take part in events, providing an expert view on a particular subject, or can help generate interest in overseas activities.

More information is available online at:
<http://www.europarl.org.uk>

European Commission

In addition to the financial backing provided by the European Commission, which is covered in the next chapter, the Commission also awards Golden Stars for outstanding twinning projects.

MPs and the Government

Local MPs and members of the devolved administrations are often willing to lend their support for international partnerships or links and may be happy to speak at an event or even to organise a visit to Parliament or to an Assembly.

The Government and British Embassies abroad are sometimes able to help with events. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has recently unveiled a Global Opportunities Fund, which can be used to support activities with other European countries, particularly those currently applying for EU membership.

More information is available online at:
<http://www.fco.gov.uk>

Resourcing partnerships

Staffing

Funding is an important element to international partnerships. However, it's not just the budget for visits and activities that requires proper consideration, but also the human resources needed to manage the links efficiently and effectively.

Ensuring adequate staffing for international activities can pay dividends for local authorities. Staff should not be seen as a cost, but as an important asset in ensuring that the most is gained from partnerships. A well resourced team should be able to seek external funding opportunities, and make sure that partnerships are effectively promoted and communicated within the local authority and throughout the community. If partnerships are to be managed well, it is important to make a commitment to the staffing levels.

When considering funding for projects, local authorities should be creative and innovative. International work should not be seen as something additional or over and above the work of local authorities, but as an integral part of providing the best possible public services and creating the best environment.

Existing forms of funding can often be used for partnership activities. Training and development budgets for staff and elected members, for instance, can be used to support international work. Sending staff to work in locations overseas can sometimes work out to be as cheap as going on training courses in the UK. The added bonus of training within an international partnership and working alongside officers in different countries is that staff will feel recognised and valued. They will have the opportunity to learn new ways of performing their own tasks and the experience can endorse their own abilities and skills and therefore increase their confidence.

The involvement of councillors can have similar results. Taking part in international activities can increase their awareness, knowledge and abilities, giving local politicians new ideas about how to approach services and represent constituents. International projects can also help promote UK local government and democracy.

Using existing budgets

If the focus of an international partnership relates directly to a specific theme, the dedicated budget for that service area could be used. For instance, the budget for child care services could be used for overseas activities related to child care. Often, external consultants are brought in to deal with particular issues, although it may be possible to find similar solutions and ideas by working with partners overseas and exchanging technical expertise.

Powers and funding

If public money is involved, all expenditure has to stand up to the scrutiny of local government financial regulations, and all activities have to demonstrate a clear benefit to the community. It is therefore important to be aware of the legal guidelines relating to expenditure. Normal international or twinning activities pose no legal problems and should be subject to the usual local government rules. Therefore, as no specific rules exist, common sense should be used and political agreement sought where appropriate.

Under the Local Government Act 1972, local authorities may pay for the travel and related costs of councillors making official and courtesy visits overseas and for the costs of officially receiving and entertaining guests. Authorities may also pay the costs of members and officers attending conferences or meetings, at home or abroad.

The legal position was greatly strengthened, and applied to a wider range of international development cooperation, by the Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993.

Under this Act, local authorities are empowered to provide advice and assistance on any matter on which they have skill and experience to any overseas body carrying out local government related activities.

The Act sets out the maximum an authority can spend. There is no specific limit for assistance given under a scheme wholly or partly funded by the European Commission, UK government or other multinational organisation in which the UK government participates, such as the United Nations. In all other cases, the financial limits exclude staffing costs and charges for services, and are based on local authority population figures. For cultural, educational or similar town twinning activities, the limit is set at twice the amount spent, or budgeted for, in the previous financial year.

In case of doubt, councils should seek legal advice. In practice, few authorities come close to the legal financial limit, and in recent years there has been no serious problem with funding twinning and international activities.

For more information on the Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993, visit:
http://www.hms.gov.uk/acts/acts1993/Ukpga_19930025_en_1.htm

Further advice is available on the LGIB website at:
<http://www.lgib.gov.uk/international/funding/legalities.html>

Self funding, contributions in kind, sponsorship and fundraising

Although a blank cheque is helpful, funding for international partnerships can also take a number of forms.

Self funded projects can be made more cost effective by using the local knowledge of partners for outgoing visits. Partners can advise of cheaper forms of transport and accommodation, and make other cost saving recommendations. Home stays can also be an option.

Contributions in kind should not be underestimated and may be easier to obtain than hard cash. Discounted rates of admission and free venues and speakers can help keep down the overall costs of hosting visits.

However, for many businesses, small and large, contributing to the local community is important and some businesses already have their own community strategy. To attract sponsorship for an overseas partnership, it is necessary to provide information about planned activities in a clear, concise format. Promotional material should not be too long and it should be eye catching and interesting. The aims and objectives of the project should be explained and the benefits and beneficiaries detailed.

Organisers need not be shy about saying what kind of contribution they are looking for. Sometimes people are more willing to offer help if they know their contribution will be limited to one specific activity, such as help with the printing costs of programmes, travel costs for people on low incomes or hosting a reception or visit.

Businesses need to understand what they may gain by providing sponsorship. This may include increased publicity through the use of the corporate logo on printed materials, sports shirts, banners etc or the opportunity to publicise this support in promotional materials, in-house magazines and the local media.

If a partnership involves external community groups, fundraising through a variety of activities can yield impressive results. Although fundraising requires imagination and effort, the rewards can more than outweigh the input. In addition to providing financial resources, activities can promote the partnership, helping to attract more participants. Events can also increase knowledge about overseas partners and bring different groups of people within a community closer together. Involving young people in fundraising is also a

good way of ensuring that they value the project. If they have taken part in events to raise funds, they are more likely to feel a greater sense of involvement in the partnership.

Local resources and means

It can be very useful to undertake an audit of local resources that could be used for international partnership activities. These could include museums and other cultural attractions, public buildings, centres of excellence and local experts.

External funding

External forms of funding can complement partnerships, even if they do not directly fit into project activities. For contact details, go to page 25.

British Council

The British Council's Education and Training Section provides funding for European and international activities, such as curriculum related projects, school links and teacher exchanges.

Connect Youth International

This division of the British Council administers the European Youth programme in the UK. It provides funding for international youth activities and the European Voluntary Service. A network of regional coordinators provides advice on programmes.

Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council

This is a national voluntary youth organisation that promotes contact between groups of young people in the UK and Commonwealth countries through exchange visits. It works closely with the statutory and voluntary youth service and schools throughout the UK.

Development Education Centres

These independent local centres across the UK support teachers, youth workers, community educators, higher education institutions and students in learning about global and sustainable development issues. They are run by the Development Education Association.

Great wall of Chester

Chester's international activities bring in a variety of inward investment. A project to reinvigorate the river and canal has recouped more than £600,000, for instance, and the city's ability to access European funding has been acknowledged by the Audit Commission through its Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

An EU funded conservation project with Lalitpur, in Nepal, has looked at how to preserve and display archeological and heritage treasures, with the aim of attracting more tourism and income for the future.

The city's work as part of the International Walled Towns Friendship Circle, which also includes members from France, Germany and Italy, has been recognised by the Council of Europe through its prestigious European Flag of Honour award. The network enables staff to develop their understanding of the historical and cultural aspects of living in a historic walled town, and to work together on tourism marketing strategies. Chester is also involved in a joint project aimed at producing best practice guides on issues affecting the successful management of historic walled towns, such as transport, conservation and spatial planning.

Contact Chris Lines at Chester:

E-mail c.lines@chester.gov.uk

UK Trade and Investment

This is a collaboration between the Government's Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for Trade and Industry. It provides country-specific information on markets in different regions and can help fund trade missions.

European Commission

Since 1989, the European Commission has supported town twinning by giving grants for various initiatives. The next generation of funding programmes is due to start in 2007 and its details

are currently under review. There are plans to incorporate the twinning programme within funding designated to encourage people to take a greater interest in EU affairs.

EuropeAid

EuropeAid is the European Commission department that provides information on funding programmes for international cooperation.

Other bodies

There are a number of other organisations that may be able to help authorities develop their overseas partnerships, although none provide funding. They include the pan-European local government association, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions; the Eurocities network of European cities; and the world local government body, United Cities and Local Governments.

Schools and young people

International partnerships can be an excellent way of broadening the minds of young people, whether they are organised formally through organisations such as schools and college, or through voluntary social groups such as youth clubs and scout groups.

Giving young people the opportunity to see for themselves how people live in another country can bring tremendous benefits, beyond the obvious occasion to learn another language. For instance, if the partnership activities are open to everyone within a community, they could provide valuable experiences for those who might not otherwise have the opportunity to travel or learn another language. Similarly, exchange visits can give young people first hand experience of how other societies function and overcome stereotypes. On a practical level, international activities can contribute directly to many subjects within the national curriculum, build self confidence and develop new skills.

Taking part in a partnership can also be an excellent way of showing how many local issues have global dimension, for instance by looking at the food and clothes we buy. Local youth councils now exist in

many communities across Europe and are developing links themselves, enabling young people to see from each other how to play an effective part in their own community and influence local decision making.

Although some schools and colleges take part in successful exchanges independently of the local authority, there can be additional benefits from using an existing local authority link. For instance, the range of contacts may be more diverse and provide scope for different types of projects. However, the level and nature of a local authority's relationship with the education sector will depend on whether it has direct responsibility for education and can influence the way in which the European and international dimension is covered in local schools. The situation is also different in Northern Ireland, where education is the responsibility of Education and Library Boards.

For more information on young people and local democracy, visit:

<http://www.lgib.gov.uk/globalmark>

Virtual links

Overseas partnerships need not always involve travel. Information technology, such as e-mails and fax messages, can be cost effective and provide simple ways of maintaining contact, and some organisations use video links to stay in touch.

Obviously, the success of these 'virtual' links is dependent upon the availability and quality of information technology facilities in both communities.

The British Council's Central Bureau provides advice and ideas on using information technology in international educational partnerships. For primary schools, for instance, an 'envoy' or 'mascot' in the form of a soft toy is sometimes used to exchange information. Children can then to pose their questions about the overseas community to the envoy, and the answers are relayed back in the same way.

The practicalities of partnership

Managing partnerships

It is vital that all officers, members and others funded from the public purse who take part in international partnership activities abide by high standards of conduct at all times.

Council members are subject to individual local authority codes of conduct, based on a new model code of conduct. Similarly, there is also a code of conduct for local authority employees, which forms part of the standard terms of conduct for employment. Both the codes apply whenever the individual is undertaking official duties. The key message for overseas partnerships is therefore, that codes of conduct will apply when local authority representatives are overseas and must be carefully observed.

The guidance provided here is not comprehensive or definitive, but takes account of the approach taken by these codes.

Financial accountability

Local authorities should ensure that there is a procedure in place to demonstrate that careful consideration has been given to every financial transaction, particularly in the case of expenditure relating to travel and accommodation. For officer and member participation, there should be a process to explain the reasons for the visit/meeting and the benefits to be gained.

Travel costs

Local authorities need to decide their policy for expenditure relating to overseas partnerships and twinning links. For example, whether all travel should be economy class, or whether business class travel is acceptable and, if so, subject to what rules. Government departments, for example, have rules that permit civil servants to travel business class if the journey is longer than a specified number of hours. Local authorities need to set and follow similar rules, and be willing to justify expenditure.

Far and wide

Glasgow's involvement in international policy began in the 1980s as part of an attempt to be more proactive in internationalising the city. Keen to attract new settlers and investment and to develop local businesses, partnerships were formed with commercially strategic cities such as Nuremberg in Germany, Turin in Italy and Rostov on Don in Russia. Since then, the city has forged links with counterparts in countries such as China and Pakistan whose economies are growing.

By raising the city's profile through its partnerships, Glasgow has been able to capitalise on the significant contribution of business tourism. However, culture and social welfare are other facets of cooperation, with Glasgow's social services leading on an EU funded project with its Russian partners to tackle drug addiction.

Glasgow is now working with Lilonge, in Malawi, on water sanitation and health education, and is currently supporting a maternity wing for the care of premature babies and new mothers and infants.

Contact Marjukka Fryer at Glasgow:
E-mail Marjukka.Fryer@drs.glasgow.gov.uk

Hotel costs

Where it is necessary to use hotels, local authorities need to have a policy on the type and price range, though the position differs from country to country and continent to continent. Within Europe, there is usually a reasonable choice of mid-range hotels, but in some developing countries the only realistic option may be a relatively expensive 'western style' hotel. The golden rule is to be reasonable.

Occasionally, the issue arises about a member on official duty wishing to be accompanied by spouse or partner who has no formal role. It is, of course, for the councillor to understand that he or she is responsible for all the additional costs that arise, however minor, and that he or she must be willing to justify the position, if comment or criticism is

made later. The authority also needs to be clear about what, if any, incidental expenditure on hotel bills will be met. Normally, all extras should be paid for personally, and not charged to the authority, apart from reasonable subsistence costs. A degree of judgement and discretion is required for such cases.

Meals and subsistence

Local authorities may pay an agreed sum for subsistence where this is not covered by the host authority, or reimburse expenditure for meals and refreshments. It may be useful to give general guidance on the financial limits, though costs do

Young at heart

Wolverhampton has made sure its international activities involve the whole community, from local schools, council departments, the chamber of commerce and businesses and community organisations. Recognising the importance of securing political support, it has appointed a councillor to 'champion' European and international work, promote activities and ensure there is a clear link with the council's objectives.

Wolverhampton's newly qualified English language assistants are now able to study for an internationally recognised qualification and find a placement in Hungarian schools, thanks to the city's link with the Budapest suburb of Kobanya. Following the scheme's success, it has been extended to schools in Walbrzych in Poland and Subotica in Serbia, Wolverhampton's other partner cities. Other activities between the partners have included school summer camps for youngsters.

The council's international links were also the focus of a competition organised for local schools. Young people were asked to come up with a rationale for Wolverhampton's overseas partnerships, which resulted in some comprehensive and impassioned endorsement.

Contact Julia Speht at Wolverhampton:
E-mail Julia.Speht@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Safe twinning for young people

Leicester City Council has collaborated with the NSPCC to produce a publication entitled Safe twinning - child protection policy and guidance.

For information about the book, contact Sandra Rieger at Leicester City Council:
Tel 0116 252 6756
E-mail riegs001@leicester.gov.uk

vary greatly between towns and countries. In certain situations, for example, if a meal costs more than a specified limit of, say, £30, local authorities may ask individuals to meet the difference themselves.

Hospitality

In any formal visit to another country, there is usually some hospitality, in the form of receptions, meals etc. If this is provided by a public sector body, no difficulties arise. However, if given by a private company, this may need to be declared in the authority's register of hospitality, even though the member or officer is formally representing the authority. If in doubt, authorities should seek guidance from their Chief Executive or Solicitor. Though it is unlikely to occur in the context of twinning, those taking part should take care that hospitality is not used or accepted in a way that could cause criticism later.

Gifts

In many cultures, giving or exchanging gifts is not only normal but also required. It is often considered rude not to accept, or to show reluctance to accept, even relatively generous gifts. Whilst gifts of purely nominal value may be kept by the recipient, any more substantial or valuable ones should, on return, be given to the authority. All gifts should be recorded in the authority's register of gifts and hospitality.

Before any visit, consideration should be given as to whether to take gifts to the key people, especially at any main formal reception. These can be good quality and yet inexpensive gifts, which have been customised to reflect the visiting authority. Local businesses can often be encouraged to produce special editions of local produce or products, such as lace or pottery.

Once the authority's code of conduct has been agreed, the levels above which gifts should be registered or, in the case of more valuable gifts, given to the authority, will be specified.

Risk assessment

Partnerships will only be perfect if everyone's minds are at rest regarding the potential risks. It is therefore imperative to take the necessary measures to protect the interests and safety of all involved. The first step should be to discuss the implications of the partnership with the local authority's Legal/Insurance section and provide information about all partnership activities both at home and overseas. Any partnership should have insurance cover for travelling, and public liability cover for all activities and events. This applies to all categories of personnel, including officers, elected members and school children. In most cases this can be incorporated relatively easily into existing policies, but information about all activities must be given.

Usual health and safety inspections also apply to any placements or activities relating to partnership activities.

Young people

Involving schools and young people in international partnerships is often quite daunting because of the safety implications. While safety is of paramount importance, if adequate measures are taken it should still be possible to have youth participation. Firstly, written consent from parents or guardians should be obtained for all children taking part in exchange visits from both the guest and host

Young people: safety tips

- Make sure that young people are fully prepared before the visit by discussing and providing information on practical issues, language and culture;
- Agree an acceptable code of behaviour with the young people, their parents/guardians and those leading the exchange. Make this the basis of a contract for all partners to sign;
- Make sure the counterpart organisers are clear about the young people's requirements;
- Ask the organisers to provide full details about the programme and accommodation for the duration of the visit;
- Ensure procedures are in place to check on the young people's well being at the beginning of the visit and at separate intervals throughout the stay; and
- Give the young people full contact details of the designated visit coordinators and information on what to do in the event of difficulties.

towns. It is important that parents and guardians give their permission, not only for particular activities such as work experience or sports, but also for when the young people are travelling, are unsupervised and for outside normal school hours.

Safety of young people is a complex issue and there are many sources of advice, ranging from Social Services Child Protection Units and the police, to local education authorities, school governing bodies and voluntary organisations such as the Guide Association.

When children and young people are involved in transnational and twinning activities, there should be an agreed policy, and advice should always be taken from the appropriate bodies.

Communication and the media

Town twinning and international links are easy prey for journalists looking for negative stories. At the same time good communication with the media, partners and with the local community are important to make an international partnership a success.

Many authorities produce a newsletter informing the local community about what is happening with a link or create a special area of their website dedicated to their partnerships. One option could be to target specific information at certain groups within the community, such as young people or sports enthusiasts. Also for consideration are the various ways of communicating information, from public notice boards to text messaging.

Any newsletter or bulletin should be easy to read and understand. This is particularly important with overseas partners where there may be cultural and language differences. Lastly, but most importantly, it is vital to be clear and frank in any approach.

Managing the media

Local authority press officers are experts in media relations and can offer useful contacts and advice. Most media work relating to international activities is likely to be proactive, rather than reactive and how much media coverage a link gets is up to the organisers. However, there are a number of ways a local authority or community association can improve its chances of gaining the most positive media coverage possible.

Media savvy

The London Borough of Croydon took an unusual approach to tackling media criticism of its link with Kungwini in South Africa: it invited the local newspaper's business editor on a trade mission. Seeing the project first hand enabled the paper to keep the electorate informed about the link and verify that visits were not mere 'jollies'.

Contact Helen Mason at Croydon:
E-mail Helen.Mason@croydon.gov.uk

Nominating someone who is a confident speaker and can answer enquiries about international links is very important. However, it is wise to get a councillor who is involved in the international link to agree to be its spokesperson, and to let the council's press office know this.

The most obvious way of promoting partnership activities is through press releases. Timing is important and, in general, press releases should be issued by 11am to daily news sources, by Thursday morning for the Sunday newspapers, and on a Friday or Monday for the local government weeklies. Most media prefer press releases to be e-mailed as text.

Sometimes it is necessary to consider what else is going on in the local authority before a press release is sent out. Though councils know that their European and international work is worthwhile, sending out a press release about, say, links in South Africa the same week as the authority announces council tax rises is asking for trouble.

An alternative is for a councillor to take a journalist with them to an event. If budgets do not allow this, it may be possible to persuade one to interview someone about the event.

Feature articles are a more certain means of obtaining media coverage. It is important that anyone hoping to have an article published sounds out their intended media about whether they would be interested in a feature on a particular issue. Also, checking beforehand means that a piece can be written to fit the publication. There is nothing more disheartening for an editor than to have to rewrite a piece, cutting it in half, or for the writer to see his or her finely crafted text reduced to 500 words when it's printed.

Finally, a picture can paint a thousand words, but only if it is of high quality and, preferably, showing the practical benefits of the project. Images can also be included on the authority's website for future reference.

Re-energising a partnership

Some longstanding partnerships can benefit from a fresh boost of energy. It is not necessary to dismiss a partnership simply because it has been inactive in recent years. For those established more than a decade ago, particularly those set up in the years immediately after World War II, the people responsible for setting up the link may no longer be able to drive the link and create new interest. Encouraging young people to become involved is also a challenge, but very important if the link is to survive.

The experiences of some local authorities suggest a number of ways of revitalising an old link.

Re-educating the masses

For some people, the concept of twinning is either unknown or completely misunderstood. To increase interest, it is necessary to explain exactly what the twinning link is about. Actively promoting its dynamic and wide ranging aspects will help. Organisers should use every available opportunity to stage exhibitions that may be seen by members of the community, community groups, schools, colleges, religious institutions and business groups. It is vital that it is clear that anyone can get involved.

Making it relevant

Activities need to be relevant. Most twinning links were formed on the basis of friendship and culture and, while these values should underpin all links, times have moved on and twinning, like all other aspects of society, must reflect current trends and priorities.

Giving people what they want

Consulting within the community and inviting suggestions for activities can only help make a link more appealing to local people. Involving a wide range of members of the local population directly in designing and running projects can make a difference to how people feel about a link.

Giving young people a voice

To get young people involved, a link should include activities that interest them. Computer projects such as cyber cafés and website creation are popular. Sporting and musical events tend to attract young people, as do certain work experience and training related activities. Young people should have a say in what activities will be part of a link's programme of events and should be involved at every step.

Targeting new members

If particular groups within a community are not represented in twinning activities, they can be targeted directly. Information about the link should be publicised as widely as possible, in leisure centres, libraries, community halls and local authority buildings.

Marketing and rebranding links

In an age when manufacturers are happy to jettison familiar product names for younger, slicker or more international names, twinning organisers need not be afraid to do the same with a link. Although twinning is an accepted moniker for international links, some people may be confused by it or think of it negatively. Renaming or rebranding a link to make its aims and objectives easier to understand can help overcome this.

New partnerships overseas

It is worth considering setting up a link with a developing country or one of the EU's new Member States from Central and Eastern Europe. Alternatively, a three way partnership with an existing partner and another country may prove attractive, especially if the two overseas countries have traditionally been at odds with each other and the partnership can help improve their understanding of each other.

New partnerships at home

As part of the re-energising process, organisers can use the opportunity to look for new partners or sponsors within the local community, such as large businesses or academic institutions. This is an ideal opportunity to make new alliances at home.

The Local Government International Bureau



'InterAction', the LGIB's bimonthly newsletter on international projects, is available free of charge to anyone interested in twinning and overseas partnerships

The Local Government International Bureau, or LGIB for short, functions as the European and international arm of the Local Government Association (LGA) for England and Wales and represents the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA). It also acts as the all UK member of international organisations, in particular the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, the pan-European association of national local authority associations, and the new world local government body, United Cities and Local Governments.

The LGIB has a board of Directors made up of elected councillors appointed by the Local Government Association and NILGA, and policy direction is provided by the LGA's European and International Panel of elected councillors.

How the LGIB can help

The Local Government International Bureau seeks to promote and facilitate all forms of international cooperation involving UK local government. In addition to publicising international activities, the LGIB provides support through the following services:

Through its website, which carries information on international partnerships and programmes. It has a partner search facility for formal twinning links and international projects and a database of UK twinning links. The database can be searched by country or by the name of the town, county or region to find out which communities are twinned.

The organisation publishes regular newsletters and publications on funding, policy and current activities. 'European Information Service', the LGIB's magazine on European affairs, carries details of EU policy and funding developments and offers an e-mail alert system for calls for applications for financing international work. A free trial subscription is available by contacting the LGIB: E-mail enquiries@lgib.gov.uk

The LGIB acts as an information resource on European and international local government networks and associations. It also encourages real and virtual networks, organising meetings on a particular topic or geographical area, such as international development or Central and Eastern Europe, and holds seminars and conferences on innovation and good practice. The LGIB provides a forum for local authority staff working in European and international affairs, through its European Officer and International Cooperation Officer networks.

It is also the secretariat for the UK Local Government Alliance for International Development and can provide more information about local authority work with developing countries on the Alliance's website at: <http://www.lgib.gov.uk/lg-alliance>

The organisation actively lobbies the European institutions and government departments. In terms of twinning, it does this, for example, by meeting European Commission officials as part of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions' European Twinning Officers Network to argue for maintaining and increasing the twinning grant, and to influence the application procedures and criteria. It also plays an active role in the CEMR North South Links Network.

If you would like advice or information on international partnerships and twinning, or to tell us about the projects in your community, contact:

International Partnerships and Programmes
Local Government International Bureau
Local Government House
Smith Square
London
SW1P 3HZ

E-mail enquiries@lgib.gov.uk
Internet <http://www.lgib.gov.uk>

Other useful organisations and networks

British Council offices in the UK

Tel 028 9024 8220 (Belfast)
Tel 02920 397346 (Cardiff)
Tel 0131 524 5700 (Edinburgh)
Tel 020 7389 4386-7 (London)
Internet <http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning>

Commonwealth Local Government Forum

Tel 020 7934 9690
E-mail info@clgf.org.uk
Internet <http://www.clgf.org.uk>

Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council

Tel 020 7498 6151
E-mail mail@cyec.demon.co.uk
Internet <http://www.cyec.org.uk>

Connect Youth International

Tel 020 7389 4030
E-mail connectyouth.enquiries@britishcouncil.org
Internet <http://www.connectyouthinternational.com>

Development Education Association

Tel 020 7490 8108
E-mail dea@dea.org.uk
Internet <http://www.dea.org.uk>

EuropeAid

E-mail europeaid-info@cec.eu.int
Internet http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/index_en.htm

Eurocities

Tel 00 32 2 552 0888
E-mail info@eurocities.be
Internet <http://www.eurocities.org>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Tel 020 7008 1500
Internet <http://www.fco.gov.uk>

Global Gateway

Tel 0161 957 7755
E-mail education.enquiries@britishcouncil.org
Internet <http://www.globalgateway.org>

Local Government International Bureau

Tel 020 7664 3100
Fax 020 7664 3128
E-mail enquiries@lgib.gov.uk
Internet <http://www.lgib.gov.uk>

Network of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas (METREX)

Tel 01292 317074
E-mail secretariat@eurometrex.org
Internet <http://www.eurometrex.org/EN/index.asp>

Sister Cities International

Tel 00 1 202 347 8630
E-mail info@sister-cities.org
Internet <http://www.sister-cities.org>

UK Local Government Alliance for International Development

Tel 020 7664 3102
Fax 020 7664 3128
E-mail info@lg-alliance.org
Internet <http://www.lg-alliance.org>

UK One World Linking Association (UKOWLA)

Tel 01672 861001
E-mail pepi@ukowla.org.uk
Internet <http://www.ukowla.org.uk>

Take your partners: The local authority handbook on international partnerships

Finding the perfect partner is never easy - sometimes you have nothing in common, sometimes communication is difficult and sometimes you have different expectations. But, when it works, the relationship can bring the partners new ideas, different experiences and shared assets. International cooperation involving local authorities is not that different and more and more authorities are forming links around the world.

Whether you're involved in a formal twinning or a project based around an international partnership, this handbook is for you.

This new, updated edition of 'Take your partners' recognises that local authorities are now entering into different and more complex types of cooperative arrangements. It explains the benefits of international activities for the local community and offers advice on finding the resources to make international partnerships possible.

As the world becomes more interconnected and interdependent, overseas partnerships can often help communities innovate and look outside their traditional boundaries. This booklet offers advice on how to set up and manage a partnership and how to reinvigorate one that has gone quiet, and case studies provide real examples of the variety of partnerships that have made a difference to authorities across the UK.

For more information about the Local Government International Bureau, visit our website at www.lgib.gov.uk

Contact the Local Government International Bureau at
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