

REPORT TO:		Council	
DATE:		26 September 2024	
PORTFOLIO:		Councillor Kimberley Whitehead – Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Arts	
REPORT AUTHOR:		Julian Joinson. Member Services Manager	
TITLE OF REPORT:		Town Twinning with Khust, Ukraine	
EXEMPT REPORT (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A)	No	Not applicable	
KEY DECISION:	No	If yes, date of publication:	

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To outline a proposal for Hyndburn to twin towns with Khust, West Ukraine.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That this Council supports the establishment of a Town Twinning relationship between Accrington, Hyndburn and Khust in Ukraine.

2.2 That the Council request that the Leader of the Council write to the Leader of Khust Council to establish a formal dialogue with a view to developing an ongoing relationship between the two councils.

2.3 That a working group is established to include both officers and elected members, to further explore projects and initiatives that could align with aims of the report. The primary goal of the working group would be to connect Khust officials with the relevant individuals or organisations, for example education or business leaders. The attached terms of reference document, at **Appendix 1**, sets out the full terms of the working group.

3. Reasons for Recommendations and Background

Background

- 3.1 Khust is a popular destination city situated in western Ukraine, boasting a population of a similar size to Accrington (with 90% of the population being Ukrainian, as well as a mix of Russian, Hungarian and Roma ethnicities). The city benefits from a thriving leisure and tourism industry, bolstered by a rich industrial heritage in artistic wares like basket weaving and food production/processing, specialising in goods like the trade of honey.
- 3.2 The proposal to twin with Khust was initially brought forward by one of the residents in Hyndburn on the Homes for Ukraine scheme, neurologist Dr Valeyrie Hrymchat. In August 2023, Hyndburn Council hosted an initial virtual meeting between Chief Executive, David Welsby, Leader of the Council Marlene Haworth, the Mayor and Mayoress of Hyndburn, Council officers and representatives from Khust, including the Mayor of Khust. The following week, Hyndburn Council hosted a civic event at Haworth Art Gallery to welcome Khust representatives Professor Mykhailo Oros and Assistant Professor Luidmyla Varha. Both events served to initiate a working relationship between Hyndburn Council and Khust Council. A presentation in support of twinning was also provided at Council on 2nd November 2023.
- 3.3 On 5th August 2024 a further meeting took place between Council representatives and Professor Mykhailo Oros and Assistant Professor Luidmyla Varha at the Town Hall, Accrington, to reaffirm the Council's commitment to town twinning and to discuss progress. The meeting was hosted by the Mayor and included the Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holders for Housing and Communities, Business and Growth and Culture, Heritage and Arts, key officers, along with a local sponsor under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, members of the Ukrainian community in Hyndburn and the Operations Manager from Maundy Relief. Attendees spoke of their common aims and growing sense of friendship and noted the opportunities that town twinning might bring to both communities.
- 3.4 Professor Oros presented the Mayor with a gift from Khust in the form a painting of a landscape in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine. The outcome of the meeting was very positive and resulted in a letter being sent by the Leader of the Council to Khust City Council to thank them for the gift and to confirm the Council's commitment to twinning.

Opportunities

- 3.5 This proposal presents a unique opportunity for our community to foster international relationships, promote economic development and enhance cultural exchange. The benefits of town twinning with Khust include:
- 3.6 **Economic development opportunities:** There may be trade and investment opportunities which arise from establishing strong connections between Ukrainian businesses and entrepreneurs and their Hyndburn counterparts.
- 3.7 **Tourism and hospitality:** Town Twinning can significantly boost tourism and hospitality industries in both locations. Encouraging tourists from each town to visit the other can lead to increased revenue for businesses, such as hotels, restaurants and attractions. Cultural exchange and tourism can contribute to job creation.

- 3.8 **Education and skills:** Partnership with Khust can facilitate educational skills exchange programmes. Collaborations between schools, colleges, universities and vocational institutions can enhance learning opportunities for our residents, equipping them with international perspectives and skills, crucial in today's economy.
- 3.9 **Community cohesion:** Twinning with Khust will provide a platform for our communities to engage in meaningful cultural exchanges. Residents from both towns can share traditions, arts and customs, fostering understanding and appreciation for diverse cultures. Such interactions can promote tolerance, reduce prejudice and contribute to a more inclusive and harmonious society.
- 3.10 **Solidarity and Friendship:** The twinning initiative will enable our town to stand in solidarity now, and in the future, both in times of challenge and times of celebration. Collaborative projects and events can strengthen the sense of friendship between communities, creating lasting bonds that transcend geographical boundaries.
- 3.11 **Social and civic engagement:** Engaging in joint initiatives and community projects can enhance civic participation among residents. Working together on issues of mutual interest can empower individuals to contribute positively to the development of both towns.

Conclusion

- 3.12 In conclusion, the proposed Town Twinning presents an exciting opportunity to forge connections that extend beyond borders, show solidarity, stimulate economic growth in the future and promote community cohesion. This initiative aligns with Hyndburn's ongoing commitment to creating a prosperous and inclusive future for residents that has a global reach.

4. Alternative Options considered and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 The Council could decide not to enter into a formal town twinning arrangement, but to continue to engage with Khust informally. However, the absence of a declared civic agreement may lead to lack of recognition for the relationship, an unstructured approach to any interactions and limited realisation of the potential benefits of closer international working.
- 4.2 The Council could simply withdraw from further activity or ties with Khust. However, this would fail to build upon work undertaken so far with residents in Hyndburn on the Homes for Ukraine scheme and initial discussions with representatives of Khust.

5. Consultations

- 5.1 Initial discussions about Town Twinning have taken place involving residents in Hyndburn on the Homes for Ukraine scheme, representatives of Khust and the Council's political leaders and senior officers.

6. Implications

Financial implications (including any future financial commitments for the Council)	There are no financial commitments proposed in connection with the twinning decision. It would be expected that the town twinning relationship be considered alongside future initiatives or projects. This could include when signage is replaced on entryways, future street naming, events activity and development of new cultural assets in the Borough. Any cost implications of specific proposals would be considered when the proposal in question is developed.
Legal and human rights implications	There are no specific legal requirements relating to the establishment of a “twin towns” relationship
Assessment of risk	There are no business risks associated with the approval of Town Twinning arrangements. If the arrangements are approved, risks will need to be considered in relation to future initiatives, as appropriate. There may currently be an underlying risk to participation in any events or exchanges in the Ukraine due to the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine.
Equality and diversity implications <i>A Customer First Analysis should be completed in relation to policy decisions and should be attached as an appendix to the report.</i>	The recommendations in the report do not have specific implications for the equality target groups. It is possible that the twinings will benefit community cohesion for the reasons set out above.

7. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985: List of Background Papers

7.1 Nil

8. Freedom of Information

8.1 The report does not contain exempt information under the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A and all information can be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.