



Leicester  
City Council

**WARDS AFFECTED**  
All Wards

**FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:**

**Overseas Links Working Party**  
**Cabinet**  
**Council**

**3<sup>rd</sup> October 2007**  
**12<sup>th</sup> November 2007**  
**22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007**

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**Twinning with Haskovo, Bulgaria**

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**Report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Culture**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report proposes a formal twinning between Leicester and Haskovo.

**2. SUMMARY**

2.1 The City Council has been in regular contact with Haskovo since 1998. There have been meetings at ambassadorial level, both at the British Embassy in Sofia and the Bulgarian Embassy in London regarding a formal twinning between Leicester and Haskovo.

2.2 After nearly 10 years of close working, members from Haskovo Municipality, Leicester City Council and at ambassadorial level feel the time is now right to formalise the relationship by twinning.

2.3 The twinning will preferably be a 21<sup>st</sup> century style twinning, time limited for 10 years with specific targeted issues to be addressed within the link.

**3. RECOMMENDATIONS (OR OPTIONS)**

3.1 Cabinet are asked to note the report and recommend to Council that twinning takes place between Leicester and Haskovo.

**4. REPORT**

4.1 The Haskovo region is located in the South-East region of Bulgaria, nestled between the Rodhopi and Stara Planina Mountains on a territory of 740.22 square kilometers. The region includes the town of Haskovo Municipality, the regional centre and thirty-five villages.

4.2 The population of the Haskovo region is 104,692 people, approximately 82% of whom live in the town of Haskovo. The main arterial route linking Europe and the Middle-East passes through Haskovo and the town is connected by four of the trans-European Transit corridors.

- 4.3 There have been strong continuous links between Leicester and Haskovo since 1998. The first contact was made when a delegation from Haskovo, led by the Mayor of Haskovo, came on a fact-finding visit to the UK to look at housing provision for the Gypsy/Travellers community. In Leicester, they visited the Gypsy caravan site at Meynells Gorse and met with representatives from the Housing Department. The delegation was interested in the CCTV work done at the time. After the visit, the delegation kept in regular contact.
- 4.4 At that time, the Environmental Services Committee had a Sub-Committee with a specific remit to receive reports on activities with Haskovo. The City Council's Gypsy Liaison Officer who was a member of that committee, volunteered to travel to Haskovo to meet with the Roma Community. Historically, the community was forcibly resettled into overcrowded, low-rise housing in a district of Haskovo. During the visit, she identified two issues for the Roma community: the lack of fire equipment and the lack of books for children. When she returned to Leicester, she raised the question of the fire risk with a member of the Fire Committee. As a result, the Fire Authority sent fire equipment to Haskovo where it was well received. She also raised the issue of the lack of books for children with the Sub-Committee and it was agreed that enquiries would be made to the Council's library service to see if books were available.
- 4.5 In 2001, Leicester City Council signed a memorandum offering technical assistance to Haskovo. The collaboration between Leicester and Haskovo has stimulated a lot of local interest and produced valuable opportunities for councillors and officers on both sides to explore opportunities. Projects undertaken so far have included:
- Visits by the Mayor of Haskovo Municipality, Dipl. Eng. Georgi Ivanov and the Regional Municipalities' association Maritza to Leicester;
  - Visit of the City Council's Gypsy Liaison Officer to various projects in Haskovo and Varna to share best practice on the integration of socially marginalised groups;
  - Donation of forty Pentium computers by the Leicester North West Computer Recycling project 'Get Connected @ Home' to schools and Council offices in Haskovo. One of the computers was equipped with special software to help young people at the Giordano Bruno Observatory with their astronomy studies;
  - Gift of surplus fire tenders and other firefighting equipment by Leicestershire Fire & Rescue Service to the Haskovo region Fire Department;
  - Exchange of learning and expertise in the fields of economic development, social inclusion, social housing, education, training and the environment;
  - Visit by the Deputy Chief Constable of Leicestershire to Haskovo to share good practice on neighbourhood policing, evidence gathering and the use of computer technology;
  - Visit by the Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce and Industry to explore bilateral trade opportunities;

- Donation of Pentium computers to a school in Republika, a deprived neighbourhood of Haskovo. The school has now set up a computer suite, providing pupil access to ICT facilities. This was achieved through a partnership between Leicester City Council and Konnect9, a charity based in Leicester.
- Proposals for a social housing development. One particular area, known as Republika, has a mixture of planned and unplanned properties including properties that have been illegally constructed. Most of the properties in this area do not have access to bathrooms, toilet facilities or even drinking water. The Cabinet lead for Housing and Officers from the City Council provided presentations on the following themes:
  - Dealing with Marginalized Groups and Housing Policy;
  - Business Planning and Strategies;
  - Funding of Social Housing and practices in Leicester;
  - Leicester and the History of Council Housing;
  - Public and Private partnerships.

Sharing good practice and public service co-operation is in keeping with the principles of twinning and provides opportunities for accessing external sources of funding.

- 4.6 In September 2005, the Mayor of Haskovo invited a delegation from Leicester. The delegation included the Lord Mayor of Leicester and representatives from the Overseas Links Working Party and the City of Leicester European Twinning Association. The delegation attended the 'Haskovo Week' celebrations, which included a 'Leicester Day'. The visit built on cultural links, public service co-operation and trading opportunities.
- 4.7 In November 2005, a delegation from Haskovo visited Leicester. The delegation included:
- The Mayor of Haskovo and the Chairman of the Regional Municipalities' Association (RMA) Maritza;
  - The Regional Governor of the Haskovo region;
  - The Chairman of Haskovo Municipal Council;
  - The International Partnerships and Projects Coordinator from the Regional Municipalities' Association (RMA) Maritza;
  - A Member of the Bulgarian Parliament;
  - The UK representative of RMA Maritza.
- 4.8 On 15<sup>th</sup> November, the Lord Mayor of Leicester and the Mayor of Haskovo signed a joint Memorandum of Understanding in the presence of the British Ambassador to Bulgaria and the Ambassador for the Republic of Bulgaria. Both cities believe that the establishment of such cooperation will serve their common interest and contribute to the enhancement of the economic and social development of the people of both communities. Both cities agreed on cooperation in the following areas:
- a. Building Communities**
- The improvement of services for elderly people and the building of modern supported housing;

- Social housing policies and how they can be managed;
- Exchanging experience and improving the services for socially marginalised groups and that a programme should be developed and implemented with the participation and informed consent of the communities themselves;
- Exchanging best practice on approaches for community cohesion.

**b. Planning and Regeneration**

- Exchanging ideas about planning and developing public services in an urban environment including regeneration.

**c. Economic Development**

- Exchanging information about cooperation opportunities and potential interests of the businesses from both cities;
- Exploring the potential for inward investment in both cities;
- Transferring know-how and implementing joint projects regarding methods and instruments for stimulating the development of small and medium sized enterprises.

**d. Culture and Sport**

- Promoting opportunities for the exchange of cultural and sporting links.

**e. Working with non-Council organisations**

- We will seek to encourage opportunities for the exchange of experience, expertise and equipment in relation to police, fire, health and business.

4.9 A conference to exchange best practice in housing development took place in March 2006. The conference, which was supported by the British Ambassador to Bulgaria, was hosted by the Regional Governor of the Haskovo region and involved representatives from the municipalities members of the Regional Association of Municipalities “Maritza”. The conference was attended by the Cabinet lead for Housing and officers from the City Council’s Housing Department. The cost of the visit was met by the Housing Department. The conference was delivered in the context of previous technical work undertaken by Housing and Social Care & Health. Previously, the City Council’s Sheltered Housing Manager, who was one of two local housing specialists, visited Haskovo as part of a UK drive to help develop housing and social care services in Bulgaria.

4.10 In September 2006, a delegation from Leicester attended a technical conference in Haskovo, which included a practical session on twinning. The conference was funded by the European Union’s active European Citizenship Programme, which aims to raise awareness of European issues, boost local authority links and promote town twinning by swapping information on successful practices.

4.11 In February 2007, the Bulgarian Embassy and Leicester City Council jointly hosted a celebration event in Leicester to mark Bulgaria’s accession to the European Union. The event showcased Bulgaria’s culture and history.

4.12 The Local Government International Bureau has praised our work with Haskovo as exemplary and has used examples of the work undertaken so far as case study material. Appendix A sets out our programme for future work with Haskovo.

## 5. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

### 5.1. Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The link falls naturally within the remit of the City of Leicester European Twinning Association. Additional support for the Twinning Association and the link will have to be identified within Departmental resources.

*Martin Judson, Head of Finance – ext. 29 7390.*

### 5.2 Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

*Satish Surani, Solicitor – ext. 29 7034.*

## 6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph references within the report
Equal Opportunities	YES	Both authorities are working to help the integration of minority communities and promote social cohesion
Policy	YES	There are linkages to the International Development Strategy
Sustainable and Environmental	YES	Both authorities are working to improve the quality of their local environment
Crime and Disorder	YES	Both authorities are working to reduce crime and disorder and improve community safety
Human Rights Act	YES	Both authorities are working to help the integration of minority communities
Elderly/People on Low Income	YES	Both authorities are keen to stimulate economic development and ensure that the benefits of economic growth are felt in all our communities so that no one should be disadvantaged by who they are or where they live

## 7. RISK ASSESSMENT MATRIX

Risk	Likelihood L/M/H	Severity Impact L/M/H	Control Actions (if necessary/appropriate)
1. Human rights and	L	L	Further efforts are needed, in

the protection of minorities			particular for the integration of the Roma minority. We are working with the authorities to overcome these issues. The twinning agreement will address targeted issues within the link. This will be achieved by technical exchanges with specific timeframes, goals and other accountabilities.
2. Corruption			While efforts to combat corruption have had a certain impact, more work needs to be done to help the authorities overcome the problem. The twinning agreement will address targeted issues within the link.

L – Low  
M – Medium  
H - High

L – Low  
M – Medium  
H - High

- 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**  
- International Development Strategy, Regeneration & Culture, 2003
- 9. CONSULTATIONS**  
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- Satish Surani, Solicitor - ext. 29 7034.
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## DECISION STATUS

<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Reason</b>	Budget and Policy Framework
<b>Appeared in Forward Plan</b>	Yes
<b>Executive or Council Decision</b>	Council

**APPENDIX A**

**KEY ACTIONS/ACTIVITIES DURING FIRST YEAR**

AREAS OF INTEREST	ACTIVITIES	POSSIBLE LEAD PARTNER/OFFICER
<p><b>BUILDING COMMUNITIES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Share good practice on social housing policies and how they can be managed</li> <li>▪ Exchange technical and Housing Management advice</li> <li>▪ Advice on improving services for socially marginalised groups including services for elderly people and the building of modern supported housing</li> <li>▪ Establish a link between the Meynells Gorse Community in Leicester and the Roma community in Haskovo</li> <li>▪ Exchange best practice on approaches for community cohesion</li> <li>▪ Establish links between schools in Leicester and Haskovo               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Set up pen pal links</li> <li>⇒ Donation of surplus books/resources</li> <li>⇒ Exchange visits to encourage young people to broaden their horizons</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Strengthen borders through better exchange of information and working together to tackle the reasons for migration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Landlord Services (Adults &amp; Housing Department)</li> <li>▪ Landlord Services (Adults &amp; Housing Department)</li> <li>▪ TBC</li> <li>▪ Gypsy &amp; Travellers Strategy Officer</li> <li>▪ TBC</li> <li>▪ TBC</li> <li>▪ TBC</li> </ul>
<p><b>PLANNING &amp; REGENERATION</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Exchange ideas about planning and developing public services in an urban environment including regeneration projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ TBC</li> </ul>

<p><b>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Exchange information about cooperation opportunities and potential interests of the businesses from both cities</li> <li>▪ Establish further contacts between companies in Leicester and Haskovo</li> <li>▪ Explore the potential for inward investment in both cities</li> <li>▪ Share experience of developing and operating manual workspaces / business centres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce &amp; Industry</li> <li>▪ Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce &amp; Industry</li> <li>▪ Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce &amp; Industry</li> <li>▪ LCB Depot</li> </ul>
<p><b>CULTURE &amp; SPORT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promote opportunities for the exchange of cultural and sporting links</li> <li>▪ Develop artist exchange links</li> <li>▪ Share information on major projects e.g. Digital Media Centre, Performing Arts Centre, Special Olympics 2009</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ TBC</li> <li>▪ LCB Depot</li> <li>▪ TBC</li> </ul>
<p><b>WORKING WITH NON-COUNCIL ORGANISATIONS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Exchange of experience/expertise and equipment i.e. redundant fire equipment including old appliances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leicestershire Fire &amp; Rescue Service</li> </ul>