

<b>MAYOR AND CABINET</b>			
<b>Report Title</b>	Formal friendship agreement between London Borough of Lewisham and the City of Pokhara, Federal Republic of Nepal.		
<b>Key Decision</b>	No	Item No.	
<b>Ward</b>	All		
<b>Contributors</b>	Executive Director for Corporate Services		
<b>Class</b>	Part 1	Date:	30 October 2019

## **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide information on the link between London Borough of Lewisham and City of Pokhara, in the Federal Republic of Nepal and the proposal for a formal friendship agreement between the two municipalities.

## **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Mayor and Cabinet agree the formal friendship agreement between London Borough of Lewisham and the city of Pokhara in the Federal Republic of Nepal.

## **3. Policy Context**

- 3.1 The proposal is in line with Lewisham's Seven Corporate Priorities, in particular Priority One "Open Lewisham" where people can be actively involved in their local area and contribute to supportive communities and championing diversity and the contribution everyone makes to the borough's quality of life.
- 3.2 The proposal shares the diversity and cultural heritage of the borough, extending our friendship links into the Asian continent but also into the Hindu community.
- 3.3 More broadly these proposals support the delivery of the Council's wider goals and aspirations for cohesion, mutual respect, participation and engagement. Our commitment to an open Lewisham shares many of the values which are embraced in the city of Pokhara and surrounding area, and in the country of Nepal. To be connected with a town in Nepal will allow the Borough to raise awareness of the global community within the borough and encourage the community in Lewisham to support events to bring our two communities together.

## **4. Background**

- 4.1 The London Borough of Lewisham has strong population and cultural links to South East Asia. The population as per the census of 2011 in the London Borough of Lewisham is 275,900, now recently recorded at 300,000, compared to approximately 265,000 in the City of Pokhara in Nepal suggesting that there are similar population sizes in the two municipalities.
- 4.2 Lewisham currently has three twin towns and has friendship links with two other towns. The borough is twinned with Antony in France, with Charlottenberg in Germany, and with Kingston in Jamaica. The friendship links are with Ekurhuleni in South Africa, and with Matagalpa in Nicaragua. The borough currently has no twinning nor friendship link arrangements with any towns in the Asian continent.
- 4.3 Arrangements and initial discussions together with collaborative working, are currently underway between the International Partnerships Officer and representatives from the local Nepalese community and charities and third party organisations with keen links with Nepal, specifically with Pokhara and the surrounding area. These groups have close ties with the city of Pokhara, and have been instrumental in developing and forging strong philanthropic links between both the country of Nepal (some with specific links between the city of Pokhara and surrounding area) as well as links with local organisations in the Lewisham and surrounding area. Nepalese members of the local community have built and developed strong links between their homeland of Nepal, the Lewisham community and various specific groups in the Pokhara area, including:
  - 4.3.1. Lewisham Scout Troops, which were made up of a group of thirty-five Scouts, Explorer Scouts and leaders from Lewisham North Scout District went to Nepal for a two week period in April 2006. During the second week the group made its way to the capital Kathmandu where the group donated over eighty illustrated children's books to a Non Government Funded school called EPHC (Education Protection and Help for Children).
  - 4.3.2 Following the success of the expedition in 2006 a new expedition was devised, with Lewisham North Scout District sent out two expeditions to Nepal. Both expeditions also revisited EPHC and donated children's clothes and more school books. This was repeated in 2010 with two further expeditions.
  - 4.3.3 Two teachers from Kender Primary School recently visited Nepal as part of a British Council-funded Connecting Classrooms Project. They are still in touch with their Nepalese counterparts and it is hoped that Nepalese teachers will visit the UK shortly as the project develops.
  - 4.3.4 The South East London Chamber of Commerce has recently funded an IT suite for a school in Pokhara and several local individuals have existing links with various charities particularly those concerned with women and children.

- 4.4 Friendship links between the borough and the city of Pokhara would appear to be the most appropriate and suitable match and link between the two cities - as opposed to the capital city of Kathmandu - for building new friendship links.
- 4.5 Overtures are currently being made towards the Nepalese to further meet and discuss with the Ambassador Dr Durga Bahadur Subedi how the London Borough of Lewisham might best forge strong friendship links with the city of Pokhara, its community, local Nepalese schools, businesses and the local authority there which is also governed by a mayor, Man Bahadur GC. The London Borough of Lewisham is currently engaging the Nepalese government on the appropriate manner in which to enter into discussions with the various municipal officers and officials in Pokhara.
- 4.6 In addition to the discussions with government officials and bodies, other conversations are in process with other non-governmental organisations, and with largely UK based charities and third sector organisations, who have formed friendship links with municipalities and towns in Nepal. Various institutions in Edinburgh (such as the Royal Botanic Gardens) have strong links with the city of Pokhara; local philanthropic causes and small charities in the Swindon area have recently formed a friendship link with the municipality of Madhyapur Thimi. In addition to the links, Swindon has also developed a “friendship group” between the two nations, outside of the council administrations.
- 4.7 No other towns or cities in the United Kingdom will have such strong firm links with Nepalese cities, towns or villages. Currently discussions are underway to ascertain the specific benefits which the London Borough of Lewisham and the city of Pokhara and surrounding area can provide and gain from such links being forged extending from local residents, schools and businesses. An initial meeting has been held between the London Borough of Lewisham and Child Action Nepal, and is to be followed up by further discussions with the charity to discuss how the relationship between the London Borough of Lewisham schools and various schools and orphanages in Pokhara (and surrounding region) could develop partnerships which would be mutually beneficial to both cities and municipalities.
- 4.8 The friendship agreement proposal is to strengthen the relationship between the two cities and to celebrate mutual understanding and development.
- 4.9 The proposed wording for the agreement is as follows:
- “On behalf of our citizens, we, as the respective Mayors of the London Borough of Lewisham in the United Kingdom, and Pokhara in the Federal Republic of Nepal hereby commit to a friendship link between our two cities: to work together in partnership to develop and create a

better understanding between our two communities and to participate in joint projects for the mutual benefit of all of our people.”

## **5. Financial implications**

- 5.1 There are no specific financial implications in respect of entering into the friendship agreement itself. Any costs associated with the friendship agreement, should they arise, will be contained within the existing budgets.

## **6. Legal implications**

- 6.1 The power to enter into this agreement can be derived from the Localism Act which includes a 'general power of competence'. This gives local authorities the legal capacity to do anything an individual can do that is not specifically prohibited.
- 6.2 Under Section 176 of the Local Government Act for the Payment of expenses of official and courtesy visits, etc which states:-
- (1) Subject to subsection (2) below, a local authority may
- (a) defray any travelling or other expenses reasonably incurred by or on behalf of any members in making official and courtesy visits, whether inside or outside the United Kingdom, on behalf of the authority;
- (b) defray any expenses incurred in the reception and entertainment by way of official courtesy of distinguished persons visiting the area of the authority and persons representative of or connected with local government or other public services whether inside or outside the United Kingdom and in the supply of information to any such persons.
- (2) In the case of a visit within the United Kingdom, the amount defrayed under this section by a local authority in respect of the expenses of any member of the authority in making a visit within the United Kingdom shall not exceed the payments which he would have been entitled to receive by way of travelling allowance or subsistence allowance under section 174 above if the making of the visit had been an approved duty of that member.

## **7. Crime and Disorder Implications**

- 7.1 Crime and disorder implications have been considered and there are none of note at this time.

## **8. Equalities Implications**

- 8.1 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 8.2 In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to: eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 8.3 It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct, or to promote equality of opportunity or foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 8.4 It is a duty to have due regard to the need to achieve the goals listed in the paragraph above.
- 8.5 The weight to be attached to the duty will be dependent on the nature of the decision and the circumstances in which it is made. This is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. The Mayor must understand the impact or likely impact of the decision on those with protected characteristics who are potentially affected by the decision. The extent of the duty will necessarily vary from case to case and due regard is such regard as is appropriate in all the circumstances.
- 8.6 The Equality and Human Rights Commission has issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled “Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice”. The Council must have regard to the Statutory Code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value.
- 8.7 The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at:  
  
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-codes-practice>

## **9. Environmental Implications**

9.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

## **10. Conclusion**

10.1 The proposed friendship agreement is to strengthen the relationship between the London Borough of Lewisham and the town of Pokhara and to celebrate mutual understanding and development between the two municipalities.

If there are any queries with this report please contact **Kris Gavin** on 020 8314 7227.