

## Friendship Oath with the City of Kharkiv

Date: 22 November 2023

Report of: Director of City Development

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

### Brief summary

In June 2022, Leeds received a formal letter from the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv inviting our council to consider establishing “a comprehensive cooperation between our cities in spheres of common interest” as “a symbolic demonstration of solidarity and support of the British towards Ukraine and Ukrainian people in this challenging period”. Kharkiv is already twinned with Lille in France and Brno in Czechia which are both twinned with Leeds.

On 20<sup>th</sup> July 2022, following a debate, Council resolved that “Leeds has a long tradition of building strong international partnerships in a show of friendship and has a number of long-standing twinning agreements and sister city relationships across the world. Council continues to condemn the invasion of Ukraine, and welcome Ukrainian refugees, as the humanitarian situation worsens. Council requests officers to explore a twinning between Leeds and Kharkiv to support closer ties of friendship confirming the City’s commitment to show support and solidarity with Ukraine”.

This report seeks approval from Executive Board for Leeds City Council to sign a Friendship Oath with the City of Kharkiv in Ukraine to officially mark the development of a more formal link and negotiation between the two cities to form a Friendship Agreement.

It is recommended that the decisions from this report are exempted from Call In, for the reasons of urgency as detailed in the report.

### Recommendations

Executive Board is recommended to:

- a) Agree to the signing of a Friendship Oath between the city of Leeds and Kharkiv in Ukraine
- b) Support the proposal for the Lord Mayor of Leeds to sign the Friendship Oath in the presence of the Mayor of Kharkiv City Council on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2023 in the city of Brno.
- c) Approve the start of negotiations with the city of Kharkiv on terms of a Friendship Agreement with a May 2024 deadline. The detail of any Friendship Agreement will be subject to securing external funds to support partnership activity.

- d) Approve that the decisions of the Board from this report are exempted from the Call In process pursuant to paragraph 5.1.3 of the Council's Executive & Decision Making Procedure Rules on the grounds of urgency, as set out in full at paragraph 10, 23 and 24 of the report

### **What is this report about?**

1. Since the start of the Russian invasion on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, Leeds has stood in solidarity with Ukraine. To continue to underline that support the signing of a Friendship Oath between the city of Leeds and the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv is proposed.
2. In June 2022, Leeds received a formal letter from the city of Kharkiv inviting our council to consider establishing "a comprehensive cooperation between our cities in spheres of common interest" as "a symbolic demonstration of solidarity and support of the British towards Ukraine and Ukrainian people in this challenging period". Kharkiv is already twinned with Lille in France and Brno in Czechia which are both twinned with Leeds.
3. Subsequently, a meeting was arranged on the 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2022 to explore Kharkiv's proposition. This meeting was attended by the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education, Chief Officer Culture and Economy, Head of Service Destination Marketing and International Relations, the International Relations (IR) Manager from Leeds City Council; and the First Deputy Mayor, the Deputy Director for International Cooperation, the Head of International Relations and European Integration from Kharkiv City Council.
4. On 20<sup>th</sup> July 2022, following a debate, Council resolved that "Leeds has a long tradition of building strong international partnerships in a show of friendship, and has a number of long-standing twinning agreements and sister city relationships across the world. Council continues to condemn the invasion of Ukraine, and welcome Ukrainian refugees, as the humanitarian situation worsens. Council requests officers to explore a twinning between Leeds and Kharkiv to support closer ties of friendship confirming the City's commitment to show support and solidarity with Ukraine".
5. 'Twinning' or 'sistering' arrangements are formal agreements of understanding between two cities, usually based on a written memorandum of understanding concluded through their mayors. These memoranda can be based on several things, ranging from broad declarations of friendship to more specific agreements on business cooperation or partnerships on issues such as education or the environment. All, however, are created to denote some form of special relationship between the two cities<sup>1</sup>.
6. Census 2021 data shows that an estimated 1,260 Ukrainian nationals were living in Yorkshire and the Humber before the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022 with the largest population concentrated in Leeds (300), Sheffield (160) and Bradford (140). Since the Home Office's Homes for Ukraine scheme was introduced Leeds' communities have welcomed over 900 refugees hosted by over 400 sponsors. New arrivals from Ukraine are also supported by a long-established Ukrainian-British community through Leeds Ukrainian Community Association based at the Ukrainian Community Centre.

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<sup>1</sup> Michele Acuto and all, 'City Diplomacy and Twinning: Lessons from the UK, China and Globally, City leadership Initiative, Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy, University of London, Government Office for Science, 2016.

7. Leeds City Council Migration Team has also played a key role in supporting new arrivals settle in local communities in partnership with the Ukrainian Community Association and other third sector partners. Furthermore, the Council successfully raised over £150,000 through the #Together Leeds For Ukraine Appeal, which allowed funding of local charities and community groups to provide a range of support aiming to facilitate the integration and signposting to advice and support.
8. The proposed signing of a Friendship Oath between Leeds and Kharkiv will further underline to the Ukrainian Community in Leeds that the city continues to stand in solidarity with Ukraine and to be a place of welcome and safe haven for Ukrainian refugees.
9. Council officers from International Relations have been liaising regularly with counterparts in Kharkiv to identify areas of cooperation. In March 2023, International Relations colleagues initiated a poetry collaboration between Leeds' twinned cities: Lille in France, Brno in Czechia, and Kharkiv with the objective to build a closer relationship between Leeds and Kharkiv and raise awareness of the conflict through art across the four cities. The 'Write Across Line' poetry project is led by Seacroft based Chapel FM community radio and is an addition to their annual Writing on Air Poetry Festival. This new poetry initiative will take place between the 26<sup>th</sup> November and 2nd December 2023 and will involve poets from Leeds, Kharkiv, Lille and Brno performing from a variety of venues in their home cities, including theatres and radio stations.
10. Given the Council's increasing financial pressures, the International Relations Team is increasingly working in partnership with the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the Department for Levelling UP, Housing and Communities (DLHUC) in order to build our international profile and attractivity through maximising opportunities for partnership work, as part of our [Destination Marketing and International Relations Plan](#) whilst minimising costs. On 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023, the International Relations Team was informed that they had successfully secured some funding from the British Embassy in Prague to cover the full costs of a Mayoral visit to Brno on 1<sup>st</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> December 2023 to celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of partnership. It is proposed that the official signing of the "Friendship Oath" takes place in Brno during this visit since Brno is already twinned with Kharkiv. This will reduce costs and carbon footprint associated with face-to-face meetings and underline the Council's alliance with its European twinned cities to stand up in solidarity with Kharkiv in the spirit of the 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2022 Full Council resolution.
11. The Friendship Oath indicates the initiation of consultations between the Leeds City Council and the City of Kharkiv to devise a Friendship Agreement that is compatible with the current resources and capacity and our inclusive approach. Both cities will endeavour to foster dialogue, exchange good practices and determine joint activities whenever feasible. The execution of cooperation projects will rely on our capacity to acquire external funding.

#### **What impact will this proposal have?**

12. Based on the results of an Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration (EDCI) impact assessment (Appendix 2), we assert that establishing a new international partnership with the city of Kharkiv in Ukraine will demonstrate the city of Leeds' support and solidarity with Kharkiv in the face of the War in Ukraine. It will also convey a positive message to the Ukrainian community in Leeds.

#### **How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?**

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

13. **Health and Wellbeing:** This proposal recognises the increasing size of our Ukrainian community in Leeds and the positive impact this Friendship Oath will have on their mental health and wellbeing by demonstrating further our city compassion and solidarity with Ukraine and by exploring possibilities to support the city of Kharkiv, where some refugees may still have family members and friends experiencing conflict.
14. **Inclusive Growth:** This new relationship will reinforce Leeds global status and reputation through its soft power and city diplomacy.

### What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?       Yes       No

15. The declaration applies to the whole city and is expected to have no significant adverse impact on any individual ward, but rather to enhance the city-wide well-being, intercultural dialogue and cohesion.
16. The International Relations Team has consulted with the Ukrainian Community Association and representatives of Chapel FM in November 2023..

### What are the resource implications?

17. The British Embassy in Prague will bear the entire cost of the Lord Mayor of Leeds visit, which will not entail any financial burden on the Council.
18. The International Relations Team will develop and finalise a friendship agreement. It is anticipated that this can be managed through existing resources with support from local communities and third sector organisations in line with our inclusive growth strategy.
19. The Friendship Agreement will be drafted to reflect Leeds's solidarity with Kharkiv and ability to support within current resources and capacity.

### What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

20. **Community tensions:** Leeds has a long established Russian and Ukrainian communities. In the wake of the Ukrainian conflict, some hate incidents against the Russian community were raised. Both Leeds City Council Safer Communities team and West Yorkshire Police advised that although some tensions were raised at the start of the conflict in Ukraine, there are currently no tensions that would impact on a friendship oath, however, we acknowledge that international events related to the war could affect this position.

Mitigation actions: the International Relations team will adopt a bottom-up approach and will work closely with communities to ensure our programme of work is inclusive.

The International Relations Team will also consult with the Safer Communities team regularly to monitor and assess impacts on social cohesion and equality.

21. **Effective cooperation in a conflict/post conflict context:** Due to the current context of conflict, we acknowledge that there might be some practical challenges that could impact on the effectiveness of our cooperation with the city of Kharkiv.

Mitigation actions: The International Relations team will endeavour to work on joint projects led by our twinned cities, Lille and Brno, European networks such as EUROCITIES and/or

reputable Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) whenever possible pending the identification of additional funding for an additional FTE and project.

## 22. Resources and budget:

Leeds City Council is facing major financial challenges which means that future cooperation projects with Kharkiv will require external financial support.

Mitigation actions: The International Relations Team will work closely with local communities and third sector organisation in order to mitigate risks around limited resources and capacity. The International Relations team will also play a key role in identifying available external funding such as the '[Innovate Ukraine- Supporting Ukraine's Energy Recovery](#)' funding or the British Embassy in Kyiv '[Call for proposals under Small Projects Fund 2023 to 2024 in Ukraine](#)'. The funding from the British Embassy in Prague will support a Mayoral visit to Brno from 1st to 7th December 2023. This visit will enable the official signing of the Oath of Friendship between Leeds and Brno in person, without incurring any costs to the Council. It will also facilitate the participation of the Mayor of Kharkiv, our partner city in Ukraine, due to the proximity of Czechia and Ukraine.

## What are the legal implications?

23. The recommendations in this report are prompted by the receipt of a funding decision on 27th September 2023, which did not allow the IR team to make a decision request at an earlier date that would have been eligible for Call-in.
24. . Given the timeframes as outlined, the Board is requested to exempt the decisions arising from this report from the Call In process, as the operation of the Call In mechanism would prevent the signing from taking place within the given deadlines.
25. A Friendship Oath is a non-legally binding document. The intention is to mark our solidarity with the city of Kharkiv and formally start developing a Friendship Agreement for the purposes of establishing friendship, recognising bilateral relations, and promoting co-operation between the two parties.
26. The Local Government Act 2000, section 2(5) gives local authorities wide powers to promote the well-being of their area and this covers this activity. The Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993 also gives local authorities the specific discretionary power to provide advice and assistance as respects any matter in which they have skill and experience to a body carrying on local government activities overseas.

## Options, timescales and measuring success

### What other options were considered?

27. On 20<sup>th</sup> July 2022, Full Council approved a Motion that requested officers to explore a twinning between Leeds and Kharkiv to support closer-ties of friendship confirming the City's commitment to show support and solidarity with Ukraine.
28. Due to the Council current capacity and resources, the desire to demonstrate a council wide commitment, and the council's previous experience, it is felt that pursuing a less formal arrangement than a twinning agreement through a friendship agreement best meets this request.

### **How will success be measured?**

29. By the signing of the friendship oath in Brno in December 2023 and of a Friendship Agreement by May 2024.

### **What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?**

#### **30. Timeline:**

**November 2023:** Executive Board Report

**December 2023:** signing of the Friendship Oath in Brno by Kharkiv Lord Mayor in presence of the Lord Mayor of Leeds

**January 2024:** negotiation of the terms of reference of the Friendship Agreement

**May 2024:** Signing of the Friendship Agreement

31. The International Relations Team will be responsible for facilitating the terms of the Friendship Agreement within the current protocols and available support from local communities and third sector organisations.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Friendship Oath

Appendix 2 - Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration (EDCI) impact assessment

### **Background papers**

None

# **Appendix 1**

## **Friendship OATH**

*We, ..... (name) and ..... (name),*

*Mayors of ..... (country) and of ..... (country)*

*Freely elected representatives of our fellow-citizens,*

*Certain that we act on behalf of the sincere wishes and real needs of our populations,*

*Aware that our civilisations and peoples found their origins in our ancient free local communities, that the spirit of liberty was first recorded in the freedom won by them, and later, in the local self-governments they were able to found,*

*Considering that history shall continue in a wider world, but that this world will be truly humane only in so far as men and women live freely in free cities,*

*Convinced of the necessity of respecting the principle of subsidiarity, Affirming our value of respecting human rights, which we hold as inviolable and inalienable,*

*Recognizing that the growing interdependence of different national societies necessitates an international, global democratic order, the foundation for a real peace,*

*Convinced that the ties that bind the towns of our continent constitute a fundamental element upon the path towards developing European citizenship and thus promote a Europe of human dimensions*

### ***DO TAKE, ON THIS DAY, A SOLEMN OATH***

*According to the relationships established between our two countries,*

*To develop permanent ties between the governments of our municipalities in order to promote our dialogue, to exchange our experiences and to identify joint activities, according to our capacity and resources, which may foster mutual improvement*

*To encourage and support exchanges between our fellow citizens in order to ensure, through greater mutual understanding and efficient cooperation, the true spirit of European brotherhood for our now common destiny,*

*To act according to the rules of hospitality, with respect for our diversities, in an atmosphere of trust and in a spirit of solidarity,*

*To guarantee for all people the possibility of participating in the exchanges between our two communities without discrimination of any form,*

*To promote the universal values of liberty, democracy, equality and the rule of Law, through our exchanges and cooperation,*

*Focus our efforts using all the means at our disposal to supporting the success of this essential undertaking for peace, progress and prosperity, which is:*

### ***EUROPEAN UNITY***

*Place ..... Date .....*

