

Report to the Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Review of Newcastle's of the World Alliance



Report Author: *Joanne Halliday*
Job Title: *Head of Housing and Regeneration*
Email: *joanne.halliday@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk*
Telephone: *01782 742451*

Introduction

The Council has been a member of the Newcastle's of the World Alliance since inception and in March 2013 agreed to contribute up to £2,500 per annum towards the costs of a secretariat to coordinate the work of the alliance at and between summits (met from the existing budget).

In light of the Council's broad financial position it is important to ensure that resources are directed to activities which deliver priority outcomes consistent with corporate objectives. It is therefore appropriate that the Scrutiny Committee reviews the membership of the Alliance.

Background

The Council has been a member of the 'Newcastles of the World' partnership since 1998 and has attended the biennial summit on most occasions since. Prior to the 2012 summit, very little practical action has taken place to establish tangible benefits from the participants' involvement, other than the biennial gathering which has tended to focus upon cultural, educational and tourism issues. The most notable activities have related to pockets of activity in relation to educational links.

However, Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council sought to re-energise and re-focus the Alliance in response to the "Joint Declaration" that was signed at the end of the 2012 summit. Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council has provided a secretariat role, setting up a website (www.newcastlesoftheworld.com), producing a quarterly newsletter and creating a Facebook page and Twitter account.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council also produced a development plan indicating the minimum recommended requirements to underpin success in delivering the aims of the Alliance as follows:

- A regularly updated website supported by other social media – (in place but needs to be promoted more and the functionality improved)
- A regular newsletter (which includes stories from the Borough)
- Regular contact between the political leadership
- A contact person responsible for regular communications and links, and whose work is endorsed and supported by the political leadership.
- A Newcastle's of the World central coordinator to link the leaders and contacts, and to oversee the work of the alliance.

- Champions, or lead members, for each major initiative or project.
- Regular funds that can be drawn upon to support activity.
- A forward programme for the hosting of future summits.

The Newcastle's of the World Alliance Declaration 2014 highlights nine key commitments:

1. To implement the paid secretariat to take forward the actions.
2. To share information and best practice on a range of common issues including employment, young people, affordable housing, older people, town centres, historic buildings and sustainability.
3. To improve communications between the Newcastles
4. Create a shared tourism strategy and city branding
5. Encourage opportunities between businesses
6. Pursue EU and international funding
7. Support youth involvement through the youth conference
8. Develop educational, cultural and business links
9. To welcome and accept the invitation by Newcastle, Ontario to host the tenth conference in 2016.

Questions to be Addressed

In line with the 2012 and 2014 Declarations there was a commitment to have a paid Secretariat commencing early 2015. The Secretariat role based on 15 hours per week enables clear accountability for delivering the bi-annual summit event and the range of activities listed in the declaration have greater likelihood of being delivered with a paid officer. Without the services of a formal secretariat, it is unlikely that the Alliance can progress any actions (a view that is corroborated by the limited evidence of tangible outcomes before 2012).

The Council has committed to the first years membership in 2015. If the Council were to consider a second year's payment in January 2016 this would need to be considered by Cabinet in February as part of the 2015/16 budget setting process. This would mean that Scrutiny would be reviewing whether the Council should continue supporting the paid Secretariat, prior to commencement on the post. Officers have therefore requested that the first years payment covers 2015/16 and thus enabling Scrutiny to have a more thorough review in December 2016.

The indicative amounts from each Newcastle so far (expressed in Euros) are:

Switzerland 8000€

SA 5000€

Germany 1500€

Japan 1500€

Newcastle on Tyne 3000€ (plus administrative support and on-costs such as office accommodation)

Latvia 1000€

Nove Hardy 1000€

Newcastle-under-Lyme 3000€

A response from Canada is expected shortly

The Alliance has asked the Council to consider the above development plan and 2014 Declaration in order that we can prioritise actions for the Secretariat. By highlighting which areas of work the Council considers to be important or of added value this will enable the Council to review progress in the December 2015 review.

Scrutiny may consider that the potential benefits are in sharing information and best practice, and maybe developing some collaborative work in the following areas:

- Maintaining the vitality of our town and district centres
- Challenges of an ageing population
- Strengthening civic identity
- Affordable Housing
- Reducing inequalities and improving cohesion between communities
- New uses for old and/or historic buildings
- Environmental sustainability including increasing recycling
- Connecting with citizens to improve communication, involvement and support (including young people)
- If the Alliance was able to develop suitable EU funding applications then the benefit could be greater and more direct.

Membership of the Alliance needs to take into account the potential outcomes and the resource implications, set in the context of the Council Plan, Service Strategies and Plans and associated revenue budgets. Clearly with all areas of work there is a decision as to what level of resources are invested and this usually takes into consideration the likely outcome and benefits. The review may also wish to consider the different approaches taken by other Newcastle's and if those investing greater resources receive proportionally more benefit or if those smaller Newcastle's investing less are treated equally.

To assess whether this should be a corporate priority and represents value for money then Members may consider the extent to which the main aspects benefit the Council. In terms of economic development it is very difficult to assess if any business has or would be set up between one or more of the Newcastle's as the reasons for trade are much greater than any good will created through such twinning arrangements. Clearly there are some educational benefits and the Alliance is capable of generating and sharing learning about culture and geography, however education is not a responsibility of a Borough Council. Outside of the summits there is potential to market the areas for tourism, through a well presented linked website there may be opportunities to encourage residents of other Newcastle's to visit our Borough; the number of visits generated through this mechanism may however be small. The Alliance does provide cultural links and raise awareness of our heritage; the Alliance may therefore be comparable with agencies supported through cultural grants. Cultural grants have been reduced to be a maximum of £1,200 and have to take place within the borough to ensure that there is a local benefit for the financial investment.

Subject to Members views there are 2 main questions:

- 1) Does the Council want to honour the commitment to the first year's membership and complete a proper review of the paid secretariat in December 2015 or do Members wish to cease membership now.**
- 2) If a review in December 2015 is preferred, what actions do Scrutiny wish the Secretariat to focus upon and is membership at £2,500 considered to be an appropriate contribution?**

Members are asked to consider if these options are appropriate so that the Alliance can be notified early in 2015.

Outcomes

It is anticipated that the views of the Scrutiny will be taken forward to a future Cabinet meeting for a formal decision to be made as to whether the Council should remain an active partner within the Alliance.

Constraints

The main constraint is resources.

At present there is budgetary provision of £3,000 in the council's base revenue budget. There would be a modest in-kind cost of providing ongoing officer support which would be achieved by re-prioritising the work programme of the Regeneration team. There has been some in-kind support provided by past Mayors and, on two occasions, by his partner but that cannot be assumed or relied upon for future years.

The part-time secretariat from Newcastle-upon-Tyne of 15 hours per week would cost this Council £2,500 p.a. This cost is calculated based on the size of the town, with larger donations from Switzerland, South Africa and continuing in-kind support from Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

The Council has previously committed to the first year's membership and officers have requested that although the money is from the 2014/15 budget that this is carried forward to the 2015/16 year to enable the Secretariat to commence in early 2015 and for the evaluation to include a period where the post has been operation. In these circumstances there would be no additional budgetary requirement for 2015/16.

As part of the 2014 Declaration it was agreed 'To implement the funding arrangement, as agreed between us, at the earliest possible date which will provide resources to establish a paid secretariat - responsible for taking forward this agreed plan of action'. In order to progress this, the alliance is looking for a 4 year commitment with right to review mid-term, however officers have discussed the need to complete a review prior to paying the second year's fees (i.e. before the 2016/17 budget setting).

In terms of involvement with the bi-annual Conference the main costs comprise the delegate fee of about £700 along with the cost of transport (in most cases likely to involve flights). In the past this Council has generally funded two or three official delegate places although some representatives have self-funded their attendance.

Conclusions

Does Scrutiny wish to review the progress of the Secretariat in December 2015 to enable an assessment after 6 months of operation?

Relevant Portfolio Holder(s)

Economic Development, Planning and Town Centres

Local Ward Member (if applicable)

N/A

Background documentation (available on request)

Newcastle's of the World Alliance Declaration 2014
Job description of the Secretariat