

From: Roger Gough – Leader of the Council
Jordan Meade – Deputy Cabinet Member

To: County Council – 18 July 2024

Subject: Ukraine Co-operation

Previous pathway: N/A

Status: Unrestricted

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This seeks to update Council on work being undertaken to establish and progress co-operation arrangements between Kent County Council and the Regional Government of Chernihiv in Ukraine.
- 1.2 Members will be aware of the ongoing challenges facing the people of Ukraine during the conflict. The tragic loss of life, injury and the destruction of infrastructure have been covered extensively in the media. Since the conflict began, KCC has played an important role, along with many other Local Authorities, by providing shelter and support for Ukrainian families displaced by the war through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.
- 1.3 Around the UK, a small number of Local Authorities including Leeds and Edinburgh Councils have entered into agreements with regions of Ukraine to establish connections, identify opportunities to offer support and to work with partners to facilitate relief and assistance. Some Authorities have explored formal Twinning arrangements, while KCC is presently looking to prioritise establishing and promoting community and business led mechanisms to provide short term relief and support to the Chernihiv region.
- 1.4 The current plan builds significantly on the local engagement and community led support that the Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities, Mr Jordan Meade, has already spearheaded in Gravesham. This extensive work has provided clear proof of concept for the positive contribution local volunteers, business and Members can make to the people of Ukraine when working together.
- 1.5 This report seeks to provide an overview of the steps KCC intends to take to play an important role in harnessing the skills, knowledge, determination and generosity of the people and organisations across the County to enable support to reach people in dire need in Chernihiv.

2. Background

- 1.6 Chernihiv is a region in northern Ukraine, bordering both the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus. This places the region on the frontline of the conflict and it continues to experience the terrible impact of war at close quarters, including the loss of many civilian lives. Chernihiv has faced damage and destruction of a huge number of homes, a significant portion of its transport infrastructure, many education settings as well as businesses. The damage inflicted by the war means many years of recovery lie ahead post-conflict. In the interim, relief and assistance will mitigate day to day challenges while longer term connections and relationships with partners such as KCC and the many business and community groups in Kent offer the chance of positive development of the region.
- 1.7 The Chernihiv Oblast is broadly equivalent to a County Council area, albeit with different governance and political organisation. It has a population of just under one million, includes six major cities, five Administrative Districts and fifty-seven Territorial Communities.
- 1.8 The Governor of Chernihiv Oblast, Mr Vyacheslav Chaus, has been in discussion with the Leader of Kent County Council and the Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities as part of the development of the planned arrangements. These discussions included the Chernihiv Regional Administration inviting the exploration of a formal agreement, so they now welcome the potential support and future connections with Kent set out within this report.

3. Planned approach

- 1.9 KCC intends to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Regional Government (Oblast) of Chernihiv. This MoU will set out the terms and expectations of the co-operation between the two authorities. The approach being progressed seeks to establish an effective partnership whereby KCC will act as a co-ordinating body to encourage, facilitate where appropriate and promote relevant support activity in Kent. It is recognised that there is already a significant amount of grassroots activity, with community groups, organisations and individuals working to identify and implement support packages to assist the Ukraine recovery and mitigate some of the terrible impacts the war has had on the Ukrainian population. There is an opportunity for the Council to help bring some of this work together, supporting effective communication and prioritisation of support that aligns with the requirements being clarified by the Regional Government in Chernihiv.
- 1.10 The plan may be summarised as KCC positioning itself as a strategic, community-focused enabler of businesses, organisations and residents in the county who wish to come together to support the Chernihiv Region of Ukraine in the following areas:
- Humanitarian support
 - Economic Development and business

- Heritage, Tourism, Sport, Health and the Natural Environment
- Education, skills and language.

- 1.11 It is important to clarify that the planned arrangement is not a case of a formal Twinning or 'Sister City' agreement. Similar to these types of agreements, KCC's approach will still seek to establish the beginnings of long-term connections for mutual benefit in terms of business links, development and cultural exchange. However, the core objective and focus of the KCC approach at this time is the first on the above list – Humanitarian support. To that end, KCC will work to identify immediate opportunities for our partners across the private and voluntary sectors as well as local communities and residents to work together to provide effective relief and recovery support that will have a meaningful positive impact on the people of Chernihiv.
- 1.12 KCC is not intending to act as the main delivery agent and will not be providing direct support using significant Council resources. While the need for assistance in Chernihiv is clear, the Council has core responsibilities in terms of managing its approved budget and delivering against the Strategic Statement and Securing Kent's Future. KCC as a local Authority has to prioritise the delivery of core services to its residents. However, it has a unique strategic position in the County that makes the Council well placed to ensure both existing and future initiatives being undertaken by partners and local groups that are designed to support Ukraine are progressed in the most efficient and focused way.
- 1.13 This means that KCC will not be providing direct financial assistance or committing to the provision of specific goods or services. Such arrangements are the responsibility of the national government and international aid organisations or institutions. Limited Officer resource will be provided to support the establishment of the arrangements and put the required processes in place to manage the activity.
- 1.14 The Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities will be leading on the work to identify, support and facilitate specific projects that align with the objectives set out in the MoU and the overarching goals noted in this report. The project activity supporting the delivery against the objectives in the MoU will be overseen through an internal Board led by the Deputy Cabinet Member, which will collate and consider information provided by external bodies, some Officer support and via Local Members. This Member-led activity will maximise the benefits of the community leadership role of Members in terms of promoting the project and encouraging key partners to contribute, assist and deliver as appropriate.

4. Member role

- 1.15 Members have an important role to play in this type of arrangement whereby KCC will be seeking to co-ordinate and support a range of 3rd party initiatives or programmes. Members, as key contacts within their local communities will have a range of direct connections to community groups, businesses and

charities who may be interested in working to provide assistance to and engagement with Chernihiv.

- 1.16 The communication plans for this project will make best use of Member local knowledge and connections, as well as help Members share information and updates to their constituents. Initially, subject to the arrangements being established, Members are encouraged to promote the scheme to their communities and direct them to register interest via the appropriate channels, details of which will be shared in due course.
- 1.17 The local engagement and community focus of the planned approach means that Member involvement and support for the activity will be crucial to its success. The direct connection Members have with their communities, local businesses, charities and local organisations means they will have the opportunity to promote opportunities to provide support to Chernihiv and assist in making the inter-regional connections between Kent and Chernihiv based businesses and organisations.
- 1.18 While the co-ordination and overview of the project will be led by the Deputy Cabinet Member, this initiative is intended to be a whole Council non-party political arrangement whereby Members across all Groups can work together to deliver the objective through effective community engagement.

5. Next steps

- 1.19 An Executive Decision will shortly be taken to approve KCC entering into relevant agreements to formalise the co-operation arrangements with Chernihiv. The MoU does not involve the commitment of significant KCC funds or resources, nor does it involve material service review or redesign. As set out above, the MoU will provide strategic and policy direction on the work undertaken with partners and on that basis, it is appropriate that this is approved at Executive Member level.
- 1.20 County Council endorsement of this positive initiative helps demonstrate County-wide support for the activity, highlights the role of Local Members in involving their communities and assists in the effective promotion of the planned work.
- 1.21 In the event of further, substantive developments or proposed commitment of resources in relation to this arrangement, relevant Executive Decisions would be required as per normal constitutional procedures.
- 1.22 Following the entry into the MoU, operational activity under the leadership of the Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities will proceed through engagement and communications with partners across Kent. This will initially focus on confirming existing local initiatives, seeking to co-ordinate and bring them together where appropriate, while also championing the principle of Kent based organisations seeking to form links with their

equivalents in Chernihiv, sharing knowledge, expertise and resources where this is viable.

- 1.23 Members will be engaged as part of this process, with guidance on options and mechanisms to support local initiatives provided as soon as possible.

6. Conclusion

- 1.24 The planned work intends to lay the foundations of positive future relations with the Chernihiv region while focusing initially on supporting Kent based relief, reconstruction and assistance initiatives that can be delivered by private or voluntary sector partners. KCC will take on a support and co-ordination role as it seeks to leverage its strategic position in the county, established relationships with a wide range of organisations and the local knowledge and connections of Members.

- 1.25 The Council is invited to consider, debate and endorse the proposed arrangements.

7. Recommendation

County Council is asked to:

- a) ENDORSE the planned co-operation activity with the Chernihiv Region of Ukraine.
- b) NOTE that relevant Executive decisions and operational activity will be progressed to deliver the objectives in due course.

8. Report author and relevant director

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