

Dartford Borough Council
International Strategy

INTRODUCTION.....	2
<i>Developing the strategy</i>	<i>2</i>
BENEFITS OF INTERNATIONAL LINKS.....	4
<i>People to People Benefits</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Local Authority Benefits</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Other Benefits</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
LINKS IN DETAIL	6
<i>Dunkerque, France</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Tallinn, Estonia.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Capelle, Holland.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Hanau, Germany.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Gravelines, France</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>OECD Links</i>	<i>9</i>
THE FUTURE FOR DARTFORD’S INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES	10
<i>Policies and Actions.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Strategy and Focus</i>	<i>12</i>
APPENDICES	
A <i>Consultation</i>	
B <i>Funding for International Projects</i>	
C <i>Action Plan</i>	

Introduction

Dartford Borough Council has over many years enjoyed strong and valuable links with a number of partner towns and cities overseas. We are committed to a positive international outlook and to maintaining a proactive approach to its international links. The Council currently has links with the following:

- Hanau, Germany – Town Twinning 1969
- Gravelines, France – Town Twinning 1992
- Capelle, Holland – Co-operation Agreement 1989
- Tallinn, Estonia – Co-operation Agreement 1992
- Urban Community of Dunkerque, France – Economic Accord 1985 (This original accord was with the town of Dunkerque)
- Namyangju, South Korea – Treaty of Friendship 1995

In addition, Kent County Council and various organisations within the borough, including schools, businesses, voluntary organisations and sports clubs, have developed international links.

The aim of the Council's International Strategy, and the consultation process carried out, is to consider the purpose and benefit of each of the Council's international links, and to set out how they should be maintained and developed in the future. The focus of the consultation was on why the Council has developed links with particular countries, regions and towns, and the benefit that they bring to the Council and to the wider community.

Developing the strategy

The process of developing an International Strategy was initiated by the Cabinet Portfolio Member for International Relations, and involved consultation with Members, officers and the wider community, and research into guidance and best practice on international links and information on funding opportunities. Details of the consultation process are attached at Appendix A.

- All Members were invited to take part in the consultation and interviews were conducted with the Leader of the Council and a number of other Councillors representing both main political groups.
- All schools in the Borough were sent letters asking them to detail the extent and nature of their contact with schools abroad.
- The Twinning Association was interviewed about its activities and experiences.
- The Managing Director of the Chamber of Commerce was interviewed in relation to business links with international partners.
- Kent County Council was contacted

- The authorities with which the Council has international links, other than those where the link is conducted through the twinning association, were contacted to gauge their perceptions of the main benefits of existing links and their potential to be taken forward.
- Local Government International Bureau, guidance and research on best practice has been considered, and used to develop the Council's International Strategy.
- Information on funding opportunities was researched and is included in the strategy at Appendix B.
- An action plan setting out the process by which this strategy is to be implemented is attached as appendix C

Benefits of international links

The consultation process identified many benefits of international co-operation. These benefits can relate to the Council, the wider community, business or education interests.

People to People Benefits

Tolerance

- International partnerships and twinning links provide contact between communities of different countries and cultures, increasing understanding of the world and promoting tolerance and respect for others.
- International co-operation can provide opportunities to bring together the whole community, irrespective of age, ethnic or religious background, gender, disability, social or economic status. It can contribute to breaking down barriers and increasing understanding within the home community, as well as between communities from different countries.

Community Partnerships

- International co-operation provides an opportunity for a local authority to forge partnerships outside local government, such as with central government departments or businesses. These partnerships can also help to establish links between commercial organisations, voluntary bodies and the non-governmental sector.
- Local authorities can use international partnerships to engage with key sections of the community, such as ethnic minorities, young people and disadvantaged groups, who may not always be involved in local authority activities or have contact with overseas communities.

Enhancing youth activities

- International partnerships can give young people their first international experience through youth exchange or work experience. This provides an environment in which young people can explore social and political issues with their counterparts from other countries, develop understanding of other cultures and improve practical skills such as languages.

Business Benefits

- Businesses will develop international links on the basis of their expertise, sector and market interests. However, where strong community or municipal links are in place, these can be extended to relevant businesses who may be able to derive benefits through developing new markets, supply lines or joint venture activities.

Education Benefits

- At all levels in the education system, international links will not only enhance curricular work but can provide an invaluable exchange of ideas, knowledge and values. Links developed through schools can act as a spur to broader community links.

Local Authority Benefits

Improving service delivery and problem solving

- Best value legislation requires local authorities to provide services that are cost effective, of a good quality and that meet the demands of the local community. International partnerships can link directly into this work by giving local authorities the opportunity to work collaboratively with counterparts overseas and to share information on good practice and exchange skills.

Increasing global and European awareness

- Globalisation means that local authorities are operating in an increasingly international environment and dealing with European and international businesses on a regular basis. The influence of the European Union is also increasing, as its laws impact directly on local government activities. International partnerships and twinning links increase awareness of European and international issues and can help local authorities to participate more effectively in a global environment.
- International links forge important partnerships that can be of substantial assistance in preparing for political changes such as European enlargement.

Accessing EU funding

- European Union funding programmes require local authorities to work collaboratively with partners from other countries. International links provide local authorities with an excellent source of potential partners to enable them to access funding.

Staff development and training

- Through the challenges of resolving technical issues in a new environment international links can provide innovative training opportunities for staff ranging from management development to more practical skills.
- International links provide an opportunity for staff to work with different colleagues within their own organisation, or with other UK local authorities and organisations, thus creating good links and networks within this country.

Member development and training

- The wide personal development opportunities from international partnerships are also available to elected Members, enhancing skills, experience and learning through the exchange of experience with counterparts.

Links in Detail

Dunkerque, France

History of Link

The Borough of Dartford established an Economic Accord with the Town of Dunkerque in 1985 in response to the new ferry service which existed at that time between the Dartford Port and Dunkerque. This link developed over time to include education, industry, sport and culture, and drew in very significant support from the wider communities of both Dartford and Dunkerque.

With the move of the Chief Executive, Jean Luc Delecluse from Dunkerque City to the Urban Community of Dunkerque in 1995 the relationship changed. The Urban Community of Dunkerque undertakes a wide range of local government functions on behalf of a voluntary grouping of communities based on Dunkerque itself but drawing in seven local authorities which together represent a population of approximately 200,000 people. The responsibilities of the Urban Community of Dunkerque in many ways closely reflect those of a Shire District in the U.K. In particular, it encompasses land use and urban planning issues, transport, environment etc. As a result of the involvement of this larger organisation the cooperation between Dartford and Dunkerque area has grown significantly over the last five years.

The Transmanche Festival in 2000 was a particularly successful venture between the two authorities. It was funded by the lottery commission and brought together a number of sports and cultural clubs in the two regions. The relationship with Dunkerque is progressed annually via the North Sea Conference. The Transmanche festival took place again this year, organised and held in Dunkerque.

Other elements of previous joint working included exchanges on issues such as housing, the environment and economic development. A feasibility study into the opportunities to develop a new maritime link was undertaken in partnership with Kent County Council and part funded under the Interreg II programme.

Specific Funding Opportunities

Interreg IIIA – As part of Transmanche Programme for Kent and the Nord Pas de Calais region.

Members' Comments

This was generally thought of as the strongest of the Council's international links. Many Members have been involved in the link, particularly in relation to the North Sea Conference. Members commented that information on the link, and events associated with it should be more widely publicised. Opportunities for developing the link include sharing best practice on involving and consulting with the public, youth exchanges and improving links between the colleges in Dartford and Dunkerque.

Tallinn, Estonia

History of Link

The first contact with Tallinn was made in 1990 when a group of Estonian representatives visited Dartford and were hosted by the Mayor. A return visit was made in 1991 with strong support from the Foreign Office who wished Local

Authorities to establish links with the emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe and particularly former Soviet Republics.

The links with Tallinn have been strongly supported by the Know How Fund allowing the Borough Council to provide significant advice on establishing democratic local government systems and modern management practices. For a period of approximately 5 years the Know How Fund money paid for training to be given to local government managers in Tallinn and particularly for Estonian staff to visit Dartford and to receive training both within the Local Authority and within the University of Greenwich Business School.

The current link has now matured, is supported by an Economic Accord and is relatively low key. From time to time Mayors and Senior Members are invited to visit Tallinn and this is reciprocated by visits to Dartford either directly from Tallinn itself or through the Estonian Embassy in London.

One significant factor in relation to the Economic relationship is that Tallinn now exports a large quantity of the timber used in building locally into the Northfleet Deep Water Port, which came about in part through the link between Dartford and Tallinn.

Members Comments

Members were generally very proud of this link relating to both the assistance given by Dartford at the time of independence and the fact that Tallinn is the capital city of Estonia. Members noted the rapid development of the city and the relative paucity of contacts with the city in recent times, and some questioned whether Tallinn's size and position as a capital city meant it had 'outgrown' the link with Dartford.

However, the rapid growth expected in Kent Thameside, could lead to projects in the future and Members recommended that the Council should seek the views of the Tallinn City Council, on the future of the link.

Specific Funding Opportunities

EU Phare

The Phare programme is currently the main channel for the EU's financial and technical cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The programme was introduced in 1989 to support economic and political transition and includes 13 partner countries from the region. Phare is a wide ranging programme and assistance takes the form of grants. Phare aims to help the 10 candidate countries prepare for EU membership.

Namyangju, South Korea

History of Link

An Economic Accord Link was established with Namyangju in 1995 at the request of the Korean Local Government Bureau within the South Korean Embassy in London. The link was established at a time when Dartford was seeking inward investment to support the development of Kent Thames-Side and at that time Korean businesses were seeking to expand within Europe. With the subsequent sharp downturn in the

South Korean economy this link has never developed significantly, although more recently requests have been received from Namyangju to participate in exchanges.

Specific Funding Opportunities

EU Asia-Urbs

Asia-Urbs is a European Commission funded programme which supports partnerships between local authorities in Europe and Asia. The programme funds two year development projects, or six month studies, which seek to improve the living and environmental conditions of those in urban areas.

Projects require at least two local authorities from the EU and one from Asia, and the active participation of community groups, non-governmental organisations, academic institutions and local business is encouraged. Eligible areas of activity include urban management, socio-economic development and the urban environment.

Members Comments

It was noted that Namyangju has continually shown interest in the link. The main issue raised by Members was the difficulty of resourcing the link, due to the very high travel costs associated with visits to Namyangju. Namyangju have invited representatives of Dartford Borough Council to visit on a couple of recent occasions. It was suggested by one Member that the link be pursued on a Kent Thameside basis.

Capelle, Holland

History of Link

An Economic Accord was set up with Capelle in the late 1980's similar to the one established with Dunkerque. The driving force being the link between the Crossways Business Park and the Rivium Business Park in Capelle. Some preliminary links were made between the Chambers of Commerce representing Capelle and Dartford and indeed a small amount of business development has taken place over the years between the two areas. There has also been some cultural and sports exchange between the two communities. The level of input by the local authorities has been very limited in recent years.

Members Comments

Members view this as a low key link. In considering opportunities to develop the link, Members noted the Dutch competence with the English language, and the similarities between Dartford and Capelle, both of which are situated on the fringes of major cities, London and Rotterdam respectively.

Hanau, Germany

History of Link

Hanau was Dartford's first Twin Town going back some 30 years and the link is maintained almost entirely by the Dartford Town Twinning Association. Consideration was given to linking the Chambers of Commerce and to look at common issues on economic development particularly bearing in mind Hanau's location relative to Frankfurt which closely mirrors Dartford's relationship with London. This has not led to any joint project proposals.

Members Comments

Members viewed the link as important, and recognised that the Twinning Association and other community organisations, such as sports clubs, have traditionally taken the lead in maintaining it. Members considered that it should continue as a 'community' and 'friendship link', with civic involvement where appropriate.

Gravelines, France

History of Link

Gravelines lies within the urban community of Dunkerque and is the Town with which Dartford was originally twinned.

Largely the Dartford Town Twinning Association operates the links with Graveline and Council involvement is confined to the Mayor and those Members of the Council who are members of the association.

Members Comments

Members viewed the link as important, and recognised that the Twinning Association has traditionally taking the lead in maintaining it. Members considered that it should continue as a 'community' link, with civic involvement where appropriate.

OECD Links

Dartford has developed some other international links through its involvement in the OECD Learning Regions project. Details of these were set out in a report to Cabinet on 6 July 2000. These links may provide a basis for joint project work in the future.

The Future for Dartford's International Activities

Policies and Actions

Information centralising

Due to the division between the civic aspect of the Council's international links and the more formal projects, information and correspondence often goes to both the Mayor's Secretary and the Cabinet Office. However civic correspondence often comes to the Cabinet office and project information sometimes goes to the Mayor's secretary. It is suggested that our international links are informed that all correspondence should be sent to the Cabinet Office, and is dealt with by a designated 'international' officer who can then disseminate the information as required. (Action 1)

Perception and image

The benefits and relevance of the Council's partnerships and links should be demonstrated through:

- Clear objectives for maintaining the link, with stated aims and outcomes for each activity, and ways of measuring the success;
- Information concerning activities reported to Members through the Members Information Bulletin, and reports to Cabinet where appropriate. (Action 2)
- An annual report to the Cabinet, detailing international activities over the year. (Action 3)
- Information for the public on the Council's links being made widely available, for example on the Council's web site (Action 4a) and in the Dartford Borough News (Action 4b).
- All sectors of the community, regardless of age, ethnicity, gender etc being offered the opportunity to participate.
- Support for other organisations in the Borough to further international co-operation, where clear benefits to the Council and the community can be demonstrated

Conduct

It is vital that all officers, Members and others funded from the public purse who take part in international partnerships and twinning link activities abide by high standards of conduct at all times

Members are required to have regard to the National Code of Local Government Conduct. Both the Member and officer codes will apply whenever the individual is undertaking official duties.

Financial accountability

In relation to overall local authority expenditure, most twinning is a fairly low cost activity. However, it is important to be aware of the legal guidelines relating to expenditure. Normal twinning activities pose no legal problems. Under the Local Government Act 1972, local authorities may pay for travel and related costs of members making official and courtesy visits overseas, and may pay for the costs of

officially receiving and entertaining guests. Authorities may also pay the costs of members attending conferences or meetings within or outside the UK. The costs of officer visits and attendance are also deemed to be legitimate incidental costs.

The legal position was greatly strengthened, and applied to a wider range of international development cooperation, by the Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993. Under this Act, local authorities are empowered to provide advice and assistance on any matter on which they have skill and experience to any overseas body carrying out local government related activities. The maximum an authority can spend under this Act is set out in a 'General Authorisation' from the Secretary of State, the latest dated October 1996.

The Council should ensure there is a procedure in place to demonstrate that careful consideration has been given to every financial transaction, but particularly in the case of expenditure relating to travel and accommodation. For officer and member participation, there should be a process to explain the reasons for the visit/meeting and the benefits to be gained. This should be included in the annual report to Cabinet. In addition, the Council should seek to ensure that expenditure on international links is closely monitored at all times.

Strategy and Focus

Four key factors were cited in the Cabinet report describing the process towards the international strategy, which would form a key part of the assessment of our international link. They are:

- Commonality of interest between Dartford and the partner in question
- Future opportunities for projects and funding
- Depth of linkages between communities
- Relative cost, in terms of finance and staff resources, of maintaining or developing the link

One of the key factors that have to be considered when re-evaluating the Council's links are the very limited resources available to support international projects. Many of the Council's partner organisations have dedicated teams who deal with international relations. With this in mind and with reference to the opinions of officers, members, stakeholders and corporate priorities, the following ways forward are suggested for each of the Council's links.

Dunkerque

The link with Dunkerque has strengthened over the years, with the momentum being maintained by the annual North Sea Conference. This is felt to be a satisfactory way of continuing this link with a focus on community, educational and cultural issues. The Transmanche Festival is to be held this year in Dunkerque. This is a key international link as there is a real benefit to the wider community in terms of their involvement and participation in the festival. There have also been past benefits in terms of sharing local authority best practice and opportunities for this to be taken forward again in the future.

Maintaining progress throughout the year with this link can be difficult due to the limited resources that can be devoted to the link, in comparison to a whole team in Dunkerque progressing international matters. This asymmetry of resources can lead to an imbalance between aspirations for the link and the ability to progress it. Therefore to maintain a focus it is suggested that the agenda for subsequent conferences be focused upon areas, which are both a priority for the Council and are likely to provide tangible projects (Action 5).

Tallinn

The link with Tallinn, the capital city of Estonia, is obviously a source of pride to many Members. However in the decade since Estonian independence, Tallinn has developed very quickly and it was felt that possibly the city had outgrown its link with Dartford. Certainly the support offered by this Council in the early days of the link is no longer appropriate

In recent years contact with Tallinn has become more intermittent and little is known of their intentions for the link. However, the Estonian Ambassador visited Dartford in April and spoke very positively of the support that Dartford had provided, particularly in the early years of independence. The Ambassador's view was that future cooperation might lie more in community-based or cultural links and that in view of the fact that Tallinn is a large capital city, it may be appropriate for the link with Dartford to be focused on one of the eight 'districts' of Tallinn, which provide local

services in their respective areas. The Ambassador also suggested that there were schools in Tallinn who would very much welcome links, primarily virtual links with joint project work being done through the internet. E-Government is a particularly important and high profile issue in Estonia and may provide another possible source for future cooperation. The Ambassador was keen to help facilitate an ongoing relationship. On the basis of this a letter was sent to the City Secretary in Tallinn, encouraging him to share his views as to how the link may be taken forward. Subsequent to this, a positive response was received from Tallinn with an invitation to visit Tallinn to discuss how the link may be taken forward. It is proposed that there should be more detailed analysis of potential areas of cooperation in advance of this to ensure that any meeting is sufficiently focused, and a positive concrete outcome can be achieved.

The enlargement of the EU is potentially of relevance in relation to this link because Estonia is one of the five countries identified as likely first entrants to the enlarged EU. Inevitably these new entrants having less well developed economies and are likely to become a focus for the Structural Funds and specifically Objective 1 status. As such, the maintenance of good quality links may open up new funding opportunities if appropriate projects, relevant to strategic priorities, can be identified.

Namyangju

It was very apparent during consultation that the key problem with this link is the distance to Korea and the associated costs of travel. Over the last year the Council has received invitations to events in Namyangju. Due to the short notice received, there was insufficient scope to investigate what arrangements should be made to cover financial costs. However it does seem that most of these events were run on an annual basis and one particular event of interest is the 'youth exchanges' that take around the time of their 'Citizens day' celebrations in October.

It is proposed that this be the main focus of the relationship with Namyangju, if it proves feasible to progress it. Opportunities for the exchange of school students to such a different culture are to be commended and open to the widest possible range of students. Therefore research is to be carried out to ascertain the feasibility of conducting student exchanges with Namyangju on an occasional basis. The level of interest in schools in Dartford and the opportunities for sponsorship from schools, local businesses and other organisations will be investigated (Action 7a).

With a possible strengthening of the 'Tiger' economies again, the link may also in the future be used to promote investment opportunities in Dartford or links between businesses. To this end, information relating to the developments in Kent Thameside will be forwarded to Namyangju (Action 7b).

Capelle

This link has been maintained at a very low level in recent years. It is proposed that lines of communication are maintained with a view to ensuring any concrete and useful opportunities to progress joint initiatives can be considered when they arise. With resource limitations in mind, it is not proposed to seek actively to develop this link at the current time.

Gravelines and Hanau

Given the community focus of these two links, it is suggested that the Twinning Association is left to maintain these links, with civic involvement where appropriate.

General

It is proposed that lines of communication are maintained with our OECD links with a view to ensuring any concrete and useful opportunities to progress joint initiatives can be considered when they arise. Interest has been expressed specifically in developing links with the USA, however any new links or the development of these existing OECD links should be pursued only with explicit reference to the Council's priorities.

From time to time the Council receives requests from international delegations to visit the Borough. This is likely to increase as the developments in Kent Thameside acquire international significance. The Council should maintain its current positive approach to accommodating requests from visiting delegations. (Action 8)

Appendix A

Consultation

Members

A wide variety of views were expressed about Dartford's international partners. The following are key points made by Members.

- There was wide agreement on the importance of the Dunkerque link, both in terms of projects undertaken in the past and opportunities for developing the link.

- Members felt strongly that the Council should focus on projects with concrete benefit to the community and/or the Council – demonstrating value for money.
- A number of Members highlighted the opportunities for facilitating exchange visits for younger children, as at present exchange visits mainly take place for secondary school pupils.
- Members view it as important that they and the wider community are kept informed of the nature and benefits of any projects involving the Council and international partners.

Schools

All local primary and secondary schools were contacted and asked to provide details of relationships with schools abroad. Replies were received from eight schools in the Borough, two of which were primary schools. The majority of schools had developed links with European schools to facilitate curriculum development. Student exchanges, along with visits to further curricular activities are the mainstay of school international links. However it seems that many more schools are getting involved with foreign schools through e-mail, particularly those that would not have previously had the opportunity to do so, such as primary schools. The most active schools in terms of their links offer a wide variety of opportunities to their students as detailed below:

- Axton Chase has particularly strong links with a variety of European schools and in particular, schools in Dunkerque. They have completed a number of projects funded by the EU Socrates programmes in addition to linguistic exchanges, theatre exchanges and various Europe-wide competitions.
- Dartford Technology College has links with schools in Sweden and France. The links with Sweden have generally taken the form of visits to compare differences in management and also 6th form exchanges. There are annual visits to Germany, France and Italy, electronic links with a school in France and 6th form work experience.
- As a specialist international language college, Dartford Grammar School for Boys has a wide range of international links and programmes. They conduct traditional language exchanges with Lycee Jean Bart in Dunkerque and the Karl Rehbeinschule in Hanau. Students have the opportunity to complete work shadowing with students in Holland, Switzerland and Spain. An exchange is also available with students in Bucovice, Czech Republic. The school also provides opportunities for students to learn a wide range of languages, including Japanese.

Businesses

Kent Thameside Chamber of Commerce prioritises its international work according to the needs of its members. The networks which the Chamber is part of enable it to access other Chambers and companies across the globe. The Chamber does not priorities links with particular Chambers overseas, although they have found the

relationship with Dunkerque useful, particularly in terms of the links they have developed with Dunkerque Port. The Chamber suggested that wider consultation by the Council with local businesses on these issues should form part of the joint work on economic development, rather than as part of this strategy.

Kent County Council

Kent County Council (KCC) was approached to discuss the international links it has developed, and currently leads on at a County level. Kent County Council has an International Strategy which proposes a further focus “on those links with clear benefits for the pursuit of KCC policies”. The County indicated that it is willing to consider the benefits of joint working on certain international links. This may be particularly pertinent in the case of Tallinn as KCC education department are currently developing links with their counterparts in Tallinn.

Town Twinning Association

An interview was held with the chair of the Twinning Association regarding the activities undertaken by the association and its relationship with the Council and its links. The association has links with Dartford’s two twin towns, Gravelines and Hanau. The majority of activities take place with citizens of Hanau and take the form of exchanges often at the time of the various civic festivals that are held in Hanau. Reciprocal visits are often held at the time of the Dartford Festival, however disappointment was expressed at the lack of other civic occasions that foreign visitors could be invited to.

There are approximately 70 members of the association although attendance at event is variable. There is a stated will to increase membership amongst both Councillors and the association itself, especially by involving more young people. With this in mind it was suggested that opportunities for promoting the group for example, through the Dartford Borough News, be explored. The association carries out a number of events to raise its own funds.

MEPs

All the MEPs who cover the South East region were contacted. Replies were received from all; however in general they still operate on the old boundaries with certain MEPs responsible for Kent. All those who cover Kent said that they would be willing to offer advice and assistance with any specific international projects and activities.

Appendix B

Funding For International Projects

The following is a brief summary of the funding streams currently on offer.

Central Bureau for International Education and Training

The Central Bureau is the educational arm of the British Council and provides funding for a number of European and international activities such as curriculum related projects, school linking and teacher exchanges. The Central Bureau also has a number of European Resource Centres located throughout the UK, specifically for the use of schools and colleges.

Connect Youth International

Connect Youth International is the division of the British Council that deals with youth exchanges. It provides funding for international youth activities and administers several programmes including the European Voluntary Service and the Millennium Awards. Connect Youth International has a network of regional coordinators to provide advice on programmes.

DfID funding programmes

DfID runs four funding programmes; they are the Civil Society Challenge Fund; the Small Environmental Projects Schemes (SEPS); the Democratic Institutions Small Projects Scheme (DISPS); and the Development Awareness Fund. However these are only applicable for authorities with links to the Russian Federation or any developing countries.

EU funding programmes

EU Phare

The Phare programme is currently the main channel for the EU's financial and technical cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The programme was introduced in 1989 to support economic and political transition and includes 13 partner countries from the region. Phare is a wide-ranging programme and assistance takes the form of grants. Phare aims to help the 10 candidate countries prepare for EU membership.

EU Tacis

Tacis (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States) is the main EU initiative to help the countries of the Former Soviet Union with the transition to a market economy. It supports democracy and the exchange of knowledge and expertise through partnerships, links and networks at all levels of society and is based on close cooperation and exchanging experience between partners. The Tacis Programme is managed and delivered in a similar way to the Phare programme.

European Commission Grant for Twinning

The European Commission Town Twinning Programme aims to support twinning activities, including exchanges and conferences, within the countries of the European Union and Accession countries. Applications from local authorities or twinning associations with a high quality European theme can receive up to 50% funding, with additional support towards travel expenses.

Interreg

Currently on phase IIIa, the funds main purpose is to assist the EU in the development of border regions by promoting International collaboration in fields such as economic development, transport and the environment. The three main priorities are:

- **Strengthening cross-border co-operation in the service of the citizen**
- **Promoting balanced spatial development**
- **Promoting an attractive and welcoming region**

All projects in Kent must have at least one partner from the Nord Pas-de-Calais region or other applicable border region.