

Statement: PS09.02

Cabinet – 18 January 2022

Re: Agenda item 9 - 2022/23 Budget Report and Treasury Management Strategy (Including Public Health)

Statement submitted by: Clive Weston (Bristol Link with Nicaragua (Blinc))

Bristol Link with Nicaragua (Blinc) is the long-established organisation that represents the twinning between Bristol and Puerto Morazan in North West Nicaragua.

This statement is in response to the proposal by Bristol City Council to cut the International Twinning Officer post by 50%, specifically the community engagement and development element, whilst retaining funding for the “municipality to municipality” element.

We note from the documentation on the council’s website (<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/>) that the Twinning Officer post in its entirety contributes an extensive array of benefits to the citizens of Bristol, especially young people and those from disadvantaged communities. We note also that it is hoped that the 50% shortfall in funding, if the cut is agreed, be made up from alternative “civic” sources (not specified).

Whilst we understand the severe budgetary pressures the city is facing we are disappointed with the proposal to cut part of this post. The Twinning Officer post was established 30 years ago to co-ordinate and develop the formally recognised twinning arrangements, initially as a Service Level Agreement with Bristol International Twinning Association (BITA) and latterly as a post fully funded by the city council. It is widely recognised that this post has been extremely successful at fostering these international links and delivering real benefits to the people of Bristol. We have always seen the roles of fostering international relationships and community development here in Bristol as two sides of the same coin, with one facilitating and enhancing the other. It appears very risky to cut one of these aspects in the hope of securing external funding to cover the shortfall. As is acknowledged in the above documentation without this input it is highly likely that the seven twinning associations will struggle to fulfil their objectives and to thrive, making it very difficult to continue to deliver benefits to the people of Bristol. We question whether the savings gained by cutting 50% of this post is really worth it in terms of lost benefits now and into the future?

With invaluable support from the Twinning Officer the twinning associations have managed to continue to operate throughout the Covid pandemic. To take one example, Blinc managed to host the annual Copa Sandino football tournament at Ashton Park school, which raised vital funds to help fund our under 5’s education programme in Puerto Morazan. As we begin to emerge from the pandemic we believe that the twinning associations have a vital role to play in helping to re-establish relationships between communities and believe it would be an error to cut

the Twinning Officer post at this time. We urge Bristol City Council to reject the proposal and to continue funding a full-time post.