

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	6
Report No	CIA/03/26

Committee: City of Inverness Area

Date: 2 February 2026

Report Title: Inverness Town Twinning Committee

Report By: Assistant Chief Officer - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Inverness Town Twinning Committee (ITTC) exists to give substance to the Council's long-established policy commitment to maintain town twinning partnerships and activity programmes with Augsburg, St Valery and La Baule. Funding is sourced from the Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF)
- 1.2 Twinning directly benefits economic vibrancy. Memorandums of understanding have been signed with UHI Inverness and the University of Augsburg. In addition, with the support of the Provost and the City Leader, the development of additional links encompassing the opportunities relating to renewable energy posed by green hydrogen and the advent of the green Freeport, have progressed.
- 1.3 This work shows that without any detriment to any of that twinning relationships, the three civic partners have very different community profiles, along with differing and fluctuating emphasis. Forward planning of activity is not straightforward, calling for budgetary planning that combines a blend of commitment and discretionary flexibility.
- 1.4 This report reviews activity prospects and presents and updates on the ongoing work including the views and responses to the support given by this committee through the ICGF over several decades.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are recommended to **endorse** the varied and dedicated work of the Town Twinning Committee supported by the civic leadership and thank the City of Inverness Town Twinning Committee (ITTC) for all their hard work over many years in support of the well-founded principles of the City and Area's Twinning arrangements.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - Town Twinning is funded by the ICGF. Every effort is made to make use of third-party funding opportunities. Aside from the Town Twinning Open Day, which is set to take place this Spring, the cost of which is born by the events budget for the Townhouse, there are no direct resource implications because of this report.

Funds are allocated to Town Twinning activities as part of the budget setting process for the ICGF each year.

- 3.2 **Legal** - There are no known implications

- 3.3 **Risk** - There are no known risk implications

- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - All activities are undertaken with recognition to all relevant Health & Safety Policies and procedures.

- 3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no Gaelic implications as a result of this report

4 Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

- 4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 Background

- 5.1 Inverness has long standing town-twinning partnerships with Augsburg (since 1956), La Baule (1981) and St Valery (1987) – committed international relationships that were entered into by previous Councils. For many years, the management and implementation of these relationships has been led by the Inverness Town Twinning Committee (ITTC). The Committee comprises up to 18 members, of whom up to 6 may be appointed by the Council and up to 12 may be elected at a public meeting. Its funding is provided exclusively by the ICGF through applications via the ICGF Sub Committee.

- 5.2 The general aims and objectives of the town twinning movement are to promote friendship, better mutual understanding and social, cultural and commercial exchange between the partners. This was initially intended to help post-war reconciliation and social reconstruction but has evolved over time into an informal network and process for forging better pan-European education, understanding and social and commercial relationships at the grass roots level.

5.3 There is strong anecdotal evidence in Inverness of success in fulfilling these aims: as successive generations of school children, students and apprentices, sportspeople, musicians, youth organisations and other civic groups have enriched their lives and broadened their horizons through their international experiences. Tangible evidence of commercial benefits is harder to identify and impossible to quantify, although mutual promotion of tourism is a constant theme.

5.4 The activities of ITTC fall into the following general categories:-

- Maintaining established contacts and ongoing activities of inter-community exchange (including liaison with equivalent civic organisations and officials in partner towns and fostering such regular activities as: inter-school exchanges and visits; inter-college work placements; reciprocal tourism publicity, etc.).
- Promoting and encouraging new activities (recent examples include inter-university co-operation; football tournament; art exhibition; inter-school quiz).
- Providing grant assistance to community groups - primarily for outbound travel, but occasionally for in-bound visitor hospitality.
- Arranging civic exchanges/group visits involving elected members, officials and citizen groups.

5.5 The level of twinning activity varies from year to year and is not always very predictable. ITTC 's policy is to maintain a small budget to cater for routine demands or minor new initiatives.

6 Augsburg

6.1 Augsburg is the largest twin partner (pop. 270,000) and the most significant in terms of commercial strength (MAN, Siemens, KUKA, etc), education and research (2 universities), cultural heritage and overall civic capability. They have maintained the longest and strongest commitment to the twinning process with Inverness, of which 2026 is the 70th Anniversary.

6.2 To mark that milestone, the City of Augsburg has invited the Provost, a civic deputation to include partners who can support the on-going discussions promoting economic links relating to Green Hydrogen and Renewable energy along with the development of existing links between UHI Inverness and the University of Augsburg. The Oberbürgermeisterin of the City of Augsburg has highlighted the achievements of the twinning links and the importance that they are held by one of Germany's leading industrial hub cities.

Commemorative activities in Augsburg alongside business discussions, will take place in the period 8-11 May. A reciprocal visit is being arranged in Inverness to take place in September for Inverness having hosted activities to celebrate the 70th anniversary in 2026.

A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed in support of mutually beneficial exchanges between the University of Augsburg and UHI Inverness. From this MOU further exchanges have developed, and this has led to the current development of opportunities relating to the provision of green hydrogen technology.

- 6.3 A liaison group has been set up by the Provost to promote the economic links. The objectives of this group are set out in **Appendix 1**. The Workgroup is supported by senior leaders with Professor Chris O'Neil, Vice Principal of UHI Inverness, Senior Professors from the University of Augsburg alongside officers from Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Senior Community Development Manager for the City of Inverness and South (in a facilitation role).
- 6.4 The ITTC continue to play a key role in ensuring that the cultural links between the City of Augsburg and the City of Inverness remain strong.
- 6.5 In the context of the 70th Anniversary, Oberbürgermeisterin Weber, has been reciprocally invited to visit Inverness with an equivalent official party later in the year. The visit will take place in September 2026 time to coincide with the Kirking of the Council.
- 6.6 A good example of the benefits of the twinning arrangements is the reciprocal plan involving City of Inverness sports clubs and The Augsburg Sporting Alliance Youth Exchange. Highlife Highland are working with the Council to arrange this and Highland Rugby Football Club are keen supporters of these exchanges and have held their own exchange programme with our twinning partners, apart from assisting with this exchange.

The exchange has been initiated by the Federation of Sports Clubs in Augsburg and will see reciprocal visits take place in May and June 2026 with up to 10 young people from Inverness travelling to Augsburg and a reciprocal group visiting from Augsburg. This type of exchange underpins the Alliance between the two cities and is especially important, noting the 70th Anniversary of the twinning alliance to be celebrated by the two cities in 2026.

The Goals for this exchange are:-

- Getting to know Inverness and Augsburg and learning how sports clubs are structured, noting that the BSJ (Bavarian Sport Youth) function as a sports union for clubs that offer sports programmes specifically for youth.
- To promote volunteers attending to deliver a presentation and potentially an interactive lesson in their chosen discipline. This will include an exchange in training methods, giving an insight into how sports training works in our respective countries and will act to connect volunteers from the two countries
- To promote sustainable exchange arrangements being set up across a network of sports clubs within Inverness and Augsburg.

Plan:-

- Age – to support young people within various sporting disciplines all who have shown an inclination to take up sport, however, there is no age limit, however it is preferred if applicants are under 30 years old at the time of application.
- Group from Augsburg to Inverness - to visit 30 May until 6 June 2026; and
- Group from Inverness to Augsburg - to visit 20 June to 25 June 2026
- The groups from both cities will be supported by a coordinator and Highlife Highland are working closely with the Council in this regard.

- 6.7 These reciprocal visits and the underpinning of the relationship with the development of economic links bodes well for the strengthening of the relationship between two important regional Cities.

7 St Valery-en-Caux

- 7.1 St Valery is the smallest of the twinning partners (pop. 5,000), but with strong links forged through the wartime experiences shared with the 51st Highland Division in 1940. Located near Dieppe on the Channel coast in a rich agricultural area, it is a busy seaside resort and fishing port with a large nuclear power plant nearby.
- 7.2 Communication between Inverness and St Valery En Caux has strengthened in the last two years with exchange visits taking place in September 2024 to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the liberation of St Valery En Caux from Nazi occupation and in May 2025 to celebrate twinning links with a special visit of the City of Inverness Pipe Band.

Over the two visits strong links have been established.

- 7.3 St Valery offers the strongest of cultural links which has stretched over many generations based on the sacrifices made in World War II. Whilst there is local economic activity with a major nuclear power plant and another manufacturing bases, the links forged in wartime will continue to stand the test of time. There is also continuing interest in products from both localities and opportunities will not be loss to promote these and to ensure that future generations remember the sacrifices of those who came before.

8 La Baule

- 8.1 La Baule is a seaside resort in south Brittany, whose prime feature is a splendid eight-mile beach. It has a normal population of 16,000 that swells to about twice that number in the tourist season.
- 8.2 It has had a long and active twinning partnership with Inverness (involving schools, sports clubs, musicians and mixed groups) of which 2026 will mark the 45th Anniversary. Exchange visits took place in 2024 with the Provost and a Depute attending La Baule. The Provost and Depute attended as guests of the principality and made important presentations regarding high profile events taking place at the time.

Significant contacts were made particularly with the hospitality sector. Further, as a direct result, a visit from the La Baule Whisky Brotherhood led by a leading member of the French sailing community, to the city and the Highlands, took place in May 2025 with 35 guests.

Additionally, the Provost instigated discussions with the joint chair of Visit Inverness Loch Ness and leading golf course promoters on the potential for a major inward investment event to take place potentially next year based on the contacts the Provost and Depute Provost made during the visit.

Opportunities continue to be investigated in this regard, especially with the development of a second golf course at Castle Stuart.

9 Budget Summary

- 9.1 As part of the commitment to funding town twinning arrangements, funds are set aside within the common good fund revenue budget each year to fund initiatives related to town twinning.

The ITTC apply independently for funding for each twinning project. There is also a civic contingency fund which is there to address unsolicited events which involve our twinning partners.

The following table gives background to the spend undertaken in 2024 and 2025 and the planned expenditure for 2026:-

Date	Visit To	Amount Approved £	Actual Cost £
2024			
4 June - 10 June	La Baule Civic Visit	£1,500.00	£858.32
29 August - 2 September	Visit to St Valery for 80th Anniversary Liberation of St Valery	£1,600 (Civic Party) £1,000 (Town Twinning Committee)	£1,329 (Civic Party) £868 (Town Twinning Committee)
November	Visit by a delegation from La Baule to Inverness	£5,000	£5,406
Total		£8,100	£6,264
2025			
6 May - 10 May	Visit to St Valery for 80th Anniversary of VE Day	£7,300	£8,592.33
May-25	La Baule Whisky Brotherhood	£3,300 approved for a Civic Reception	£6,162.00
May-25	Green Hydrogen Conference at the Kingsmills	£4,000	£1,502
Total		£14,600	£16,256
2026			
May '26	Inverness/Augsburg Celebration of 70th Anniversary Reciprocal Exchange Visits	£20,000 (£12,000 to be drawn from Reserves)	
June '26 Total	Inverness/Augsburg Sporting Alliance Exchange	£14,350 (to be drawn from Reserves) £34,350	

- 9.2 Historically, ITTC has received an annual budget from the Council of £5,000.
- 9.3 ITTC maintains a modest financial reserve of £2,000, which is required to cover administration, unexpected initiatives and contingencies.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 9 January 2026

Author: David Haas, Senior Community Development Manager
(City of Inverness & South)

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Hydrogen Workgroup Objectives

Hydrogen Workgroup Objectives

Purpose and Vision

- The goal is to build partnerships between academia and industry in Scotland and Bavaria to advance hydrogen technologies.
- Focus areas include hydrogen production, storage, transportation, and end-use applications.
- The collaboration is framed within the context of Inverness and Augsburg being twinned cities.

Proposed Activities

- Mutual visits – A delegation from Scotland to visit Bavaria (Augsburg, Nuremberg, possibly Hamburg) and vice versa.
- Conference participation – Potential attendance at a hydrogen trade fair in Hamburg and hydrogen meeting in Augsburg.
- University / industry collaboration – UHI Inverness is keen to understand Bavarian hydrogen infrastructure and training models.
- Strategic alignment – Emphasis on aligning with national hydrogen strategies and leveraging Freeport status in Inverness.

Key Themes

- Education and skills – UHI Inverness aim to develop hydrogen related training and research capacity.
- Industrial engagement – Interest in connecting with companies like MAN Energy Solutions and others involved in hydrogen tech.
- Energy security – Discussion on using surplus renewable energy in the Highlands to produce hydrogen for export.
- Funding and strategy – Need for funding to support collaboration and clarity on how hydrogen can be transported to Bavaria.