

## **Councillor Questions for Council 15<sup>th</sup> January 2015**

*(NOTE: The following question and response will be published on the Council's website as soon as possible after the meeting and linked to the published draft minutes of this meeting.)*

### **1. Question from Councillor Nathan Hartley**

For almost ten years, consecutive council leaders, cabinet members and senior officials have taken part in 'trade visits' to China. The most recent was over the summer months.

Can the Leader of the council tell us what benefit these trips have brought to Bath and North East Somerset? In particular, to the residents that live in our local authority?

Can the Leader also tell us how these trips have been funded (covering all costs, flight, accommodation, etc)?

### **Answer from the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development**

Bath and North East Somerset is home to circa 1900 Chinese with nearly 1000 students currently attending the local Universities creating significant income for the local economy and strong ties between China and B&NES. Great value is placed in China on a high quality education and in particular there is great attention on university education in England.

Following exploratory discussions during late 2008 Bath and North East Somerset Council hosted a delegation in July 2009 from officials of Jiangxi Province. Two outcomes resulted;

- i. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding dated 6<sup>th</sup> July 2009 that crystallised both parties' intentions to formalise a Friendship Agreement.
- ii. An invitation from Jiangxi Province to visit the City of Jingdezhen (in Jiangxi Province) for its International Ceramic Fair and also to visit Nanchang (the capital of Jiangxi Province).

A full report was put to Council and agreed on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2009. The report recognised the economic importance of China, that Chinese made up the biggest Minority and Ethnic Group within B&NES and that there was Chinese interest in pursuing a Friendship link with B&NES.

The report set out the purpose of any Friendship Link, namely;

- Economic Development
- Development, Regeneration and Sustainability
- Education

- History and Culture

Jiangxi province covered the expenses of delegates during all visits. Travel costs between the UK and China were borne by the Council.

A further conference in 2011 at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Jiangxi International Conference of Friendship Cities showcased investment opportunities and presented a forum to exchange ideas, follow business leads and allow Bath & North East Somerset to show it is 'open for business'.

The visit opened doors for a range of business opportunities in B&NES and provided direct links and information about available contracts and a forum to exchange ideas around future challenges related to climate change, development and regeneration. A Business delegation from The West of England also attended - including local companies - and all costs of the business delegation were borne by themselves.

In October 2014 a formal visit was made to the Pearl River Delta as part of a UKTI sponsored trade mission with companies from Somerset and a detailed report was provided to the Council's Economic and Community Development Policy and Scrutiny Panel.

Subsequently a group of businesses and education establishments in B&NES has met with the Council to explore further the opportunities to create more formal economic ties to that region. The feedback from businesses attending was that stronger links would be beneficial for export and knowledge exchange and a programme will be developed in 2015 to take this forward.