



8 Member Administrations



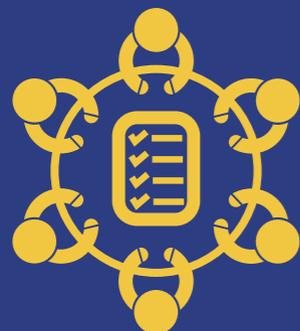
The British-Irish Council

The BIC is one of the three institutions established as part of the Multi-Party Agreement reached in Belfast in 1998 representing the east-west dimension of relations in these islands.

It is a unique forum for engagement on matters of mutual interest.

The permanent BIC Secretariat was established in Edinburgh in January 2012 staffed by officials from BIC member administrations.

52 Official Meetings
3 Ministerial Meetings
2017



11 Work Sectors

- Social Inclusion 01
- Environment 02
- Transport 03
- Energy 04
- Misuse of Substances 05
- Creative Industries 06
- Indigenous & Minority Languages 07
- Digital Inclusion 08
- Spatial Planning 09
- Housing 10
- Early Years Policy 11

Heads of Administration Summits



25 Over 25 Summits

The Council held its inaugural meeting in December 1999, since then there have been over 25 Summits

Welcome

On behalf of the British-Irish Council, the Secretariat is pleased to present our Annual Report for 2017.

It was an eventful year across our Member Administrations, with a November Summit meeting in Jersey which also incorporated a Ministerial meeting of the Creative Industries work sector. Three of the Council's workstreams also convened separate Ministerial meetings to consider developments and innovative policy in relation to indigenous and minority languages, the digital inclusion agenda and addressing the misuse of substances. All these sessions provided a space for productive engagement on the common issues faced by Member Administrations and identified measures to collectively address some of those challenges. Each of these meetings also resulted in the publication of policy papers on the Council's website for the benefit of the wider public. Additionally, there were 52 BIC meetings at official level in 2017 to coordinate policy in the 11 work sectors of the Council.

In line with the wider global political landscape, 2017 was a year of political developments on these islands which has presented social and policy challenges to all the members of the Council. As the governments and Administrations of these islands work to address those issues, the British-Irish Council continues to have a powerful role to play in facilitating inter-Administration engagement.

Since it was first established in 1999, the Council has provided a unique framework within which the governments and Administrations across these islands can meet and cooperate. In 2017, the Council's Member Administrations have again underlined their belief in its unique role in generating opportunities for discussion, information sharing and practical collaboration on matters of mutual interest. For our part, with the existing Secretariat Strategic Business Plan due to expire in 2018, the Secretariat will be working to create a Business Plan which ensures that the British-Irish Council continues to be fit for purpose in an ever changing operational environment.

Finally, our thanks to Secretariat staff and officials across Member Administrations who have supported the Council in delivering an exceptionally demanding programme of activity in 2017. We would like to note the departures of the previous Joint-Heads Deirdre Ní Fhallúin and Isabel Conway as well as Policy Officers Valerie Devlin and Pat Allan and thank them all for their dedicated service to the British-Irish Council. We look forward to a productive year ahead with three sectoral Ministerial meetings planned for the first half of the year alone in addition to the 30th BIC Summit which will be hosted by the Government of Guernsey.



BIC Secretariat Joint Heads - Jerry O'Donovan (l) and Tereasa Bell (r)



Family photo of Ministers at the 29th British-Irish Council Summit. Participant not pictured: Hon Laurence Skelly MHK, Minister for Economic Development, Isle of Man Government

Jersey, 10 November 2017

In November the 29th British-Irish Council Summit was hosted in Jersey by the Chief Minister of Jersey, Senator Ian Gorst. This was the fourth Summit hosted by the Government of Jersey since the Council was established.

Latest political developments

One year on from the Council's last meeting in November 2016, Ministers took the opportunity to consider key political developments across their jurisdictions.

The Council noted the ongoing engagement between the two governments and the parties in Northern Ireland following elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Council looked forward to the restoration of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland as soon as possible.

Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the Council and its role in promoting harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships across these islands as set out in the 1998 Agreement. The Council agreed that political developments across Member Administrations underlined the importance of this unique forum to share views and strengthen relationships.

Ministers also updated the Council on their activity in relation to the UK's exit from the European Union (EU), particularly with reference to relations and engagement between Member Administrations. The Council reviewed themes identified in previous discussions, including in relation to specific topics such as: agriculture, agri-food and fisheries industries, economy and trade, free movement of goods and people, the Common Travel Area, relations with the EU and transition/implementation. Ministers also received an update on implications for the Council work sectors and asked that this be kept under review for further reporting to the Council.

Members noted recent press coverage regarding the 'Paradise Papers', reaffirming their shared commitment to meeting international standards and to working with the international community to tackle tax evasion and abusive tax avoidance. Members noted that this is also a global issue and requires a commitment from the whole international community to be effective.

Creative Industries: Capturing and Sustaining Impacts

Ministers with particular responsibility for creative industries policy met in advance of the Summit meeting to consider a paper prepared by the Council's Creative Industries work sector. The results of a data sharing and measurement initiative agreed at the 2015 BIC Creative Industries Ministerial meeting indicate that this is an area which contributes approximately £98.6bn / €110bn per year to the economies of the eight BIC Administrations. This discussion was taken forward by Heads of Administration in the Summit who reflected on examples within the report of good practice in various sectors of the creative industries. Particular focus was put on initiatives to combat skills gaps that creative industry employers have had to address and also in considering the relationship within the various Administrations between grass roots culture and professional creative activity.

Responding to the paper prepared by the Creative Industries work sector, Ministers endorsed a proposal for future collaboration, particularly in relation to the following priorities: Ministers agreed on the need

to facilitate a pipeline of development of practical and applicable creative skills learned through the education curriculum, thus reducing the burden of skill development for creative industry employers. Ministers also asked the work sector to identify and implement measures to encourage diversity among employees within the creative sector. Finally, it was agreed that work would be undertaken to put in place initiatives to maximise inclusivity for audiences of the creative industries.



Minister for Creative Industries of Guernsey, Deputy Andrea Dudley-Owen and Minister for Economic Development Hon Laurence Skelly MHK

Review of Work Sectors

The Council noted the conclusions of a review of its activity and a number of tangible outcomes, including endorsement of a set of principles for work sectors at the London Summit in 2015 and the adoption of a task and finish approach to Council work sectors at the Glasgow Summit in 2016. They agreed that these measures have brought practical and positive change to the work sectors as evidenced in an increase in outputs by work sectors and the strengthened ability of the Council to shape its activity to respond to shifting priorities.

The Council noted that proposals for work sectors to be adjusted, concluded and opened remained under review and agreed that emerging topics would be brought to Ministers for future consideration.

The Council asked that official Coordinators and the Secretariat continue to consolidate feedback from the review and identify opportunities for developing the Council's work and processes, reporting to Ministers as appropriate.





From left to right: Deputy Gavin St Pier, Chief Minister, Government of Guernsey; Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP, First Minister, Scottish Government; Mr Leo Varadkar TD, An Taoiseach, Irish Government; Senator Ian Gorst, Chief Minister, Government of Jersey; Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, UK Government; Hon Howard Quayle MHK, Chief Minister, Isle of Man Government



Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-used Languages led by Welsh Government - Edinburgh, 10 March 2017

The British-Irish Council Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used (IML) Languages work sector held its fourth Ministerial meeting in March, hosted by the Scottish Government in Edinburgh. Ministers were welcomed by John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, on behalf of the Scottish Government. The meeting was chaired by Alun Davies AM, Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language in the Welsh Government.

Promoting our Languages Through Technology

Ministers discussed the report arising from the conference 'Promoting Our Languages Through Technology' which took place on 9-10 November 2015 in Dublin. The conference provided an opportunity for those working in both the areas of language promotion and in the field of language technology, to demonstrate how technology can be used to promote preservation, engagement and the use of each of the IML Languages across BIC Member Administrations. Delegates and speakers highlighted current uses of technology for their respective languages.

Ministers noted the report of the conference and recognised that technology can be used to promote the use of IML Languages. They also reflected on future requirements for further developing and fostering use of language technology.

The report of the conference can be viewed at: www.britishirishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/communiq%C3%A9s/BIC%20Report%20of%20IML%20Technology%20Conference.pdf

IML Languages and the Economy

Ministers discussed the paper prepared by the work sector which considers the close inter-relationship that exists between economic factors and the vitality of IML languages. They agreed that promoting the use of IML languages within the economy can play an important role in efforts to support those languages and noted the various ways in which IML languages are used by businesses across Member Administrations.

The paper discussed by Ministers can be viewed on the British-Irish Council website: www.britishirishcouncil.org.

Future work

Ministers agreed that the fifth Ministerial meeting will be hosted by the Isle of Man Government in the first quarter of 2019. In addition to the commitments outlined above, Ministers considered and approved proposals for the future work programme of the IML languages work sector. They agreed that this would focus on:

- Workforce Planning (both within the education sector and in other sectors);
- Adult learners of IML languages; and
- Social use of languages, including through the arts and digital technology.

The work sector will report back on progress to the next meeting of IML Languages Ministers.





Digital Inclusion

led by the Isle of Man Government - Douglas, 23 June 2017

The British-Irish Council Digital Inclusion work sector held its first Ministerial meeting hosted by the Isle of Man Government. The meeting was chaired by Hon Chris Thomas MHK, Minister for Policy and Reform in the Isle of Man Government.

In November 2014, Ministers agreed that the Council's Digital Inclusion work sector should continue to focus on the themes of 'People, Partnerships and Policies'. Ministers discussed and reviewed a paper, 'Digital Inclusion: Developing Digital Skills', prepared by the work sector. Ministers agreed the importance of everybody having the opportunity to share in the benefits of technology, and of its potential contribution towards wider government policies in areas such as community cohesion, economic participation and health and wellbeing.

They noted the many different, creative and community-based approaches to encouraging basic digital skills and that, in the future, skills would need

to further evolve to keep pace with developments in technology.

They also noted the ongoing development of those skills through the digital inclusion strategies and policies which are becoming more embedded in each Administration, and the partnerships which are a key part of delivering these activities.

Delegates were updated on examples of work under way in the different Council jurisdictions to promote digital inclusion. The Ministers discussed the benefits and increasing importance of digital participation in everyday life. Ministers recognised the scale of the challenge posed by the pace of technological change and that governments alone cannot meet this challenge. They acknowledged the vital role played by voluntary, community, public sector and private sector organisations in each of the Administrations in delivering projects and schemes in their communities.

Future Work Programme

Ministers agreed that officials in the Digital Inclusion work sector should continue to collaborate on the theme of digital skills, and progress the agreements made in the meeting to consider how best to make better use of cross jurisdictional partnerships with large organisations and to share best practice.

They tasked officials, working closely with the Secretariat, to begin consideration of how best we can support this work across the eight Administrations.

Ministers also agreed that they would next meet to discuss digital inclusion in 2019.



Misuse of Substances

led by the Irish Government - Cardiff, 21 September 2017

The Welsh Government hosted the 10th Ministerial meeting of the British-Irish Council on the Misuse of Substances in the Life Sciences Hub, Cardiff. The meeting was chaired by Catherine Byrne TD, Minister of State for Health Promotion and the National Drugs Strategy in the Irish Government.

Ministers received a report entitled "Drugs Strategies and Policy Developments", which focused on key developments in the drugs strategies of Member Administrations in the past three years. They welcomed the public health focus of the drug strategies, which acknowledges the importance of reducing demand as an effective response to tackling the misuse of drugs, while maintaining efforts to restrict the supply of drugs.

Delegates were updated on the emerging challenges faced by Member Administrations in responding to substance misuse, including rising rates of drug-related deaths, an ageing population of drug users, and the ever present threat of new psychoactive substances (NPS).

Ministers acknowledged the positive impact of recent legislative initiatives by Member Administrations to reduce access to NPS through head shop outlets, but agreed on the need for continued cooperation between law enforcement agencies to monitor online markets, such as the darknet which can facilitate the trafficking of these harmful substances into these jurisdictions. Ministers highlighted the benefits of the British-Irish Council as a mechanism for collaboration in this area and agreed on the importance of keeping NPS under continuous review by making this issue a standing item on the agenda of future meetings of the work sector.

Other harmful patterns of substance misuse discussed at the meeting included the increasing use of image and performance enhancing drugs (IPEDs), and the inappropriate use of prescription medicines, which is contributing to rising rates of drug-related deaths. Ministers highlighted the need for targeted harm-reduction education and prevention measures tailored towards groups engaged in harmful patterns of drug use.



Ministers also had the opportunity to discuss interventions used by Member Administrations to reduce the harmful consequences of drug misuse and support recovery. They recommended that the future work programme should include discussion among relevant members on the role medically supervised drug consumption centres could play in reducing harm among hard-to-reach drug users. They also agreed that there was potential for co-ordinated research activity across the Council's Administrations focusing on areas of mutual interest, including harm reduction, drug-related deaths, recovery and the development of health-led person-centred services.

Future Work Programme

Ministers concluded that the Work Programme for 2017-18 should focus on interventions to reduce harm and support recovery, changing policy directions,

legislative developments, and emerging trends and patterns of drug use. They also considered there would be a benefit in focusing on performance and outcome measurement in order to assess the impact of drugs policies and interventions on health and social outcomes for service users.

Acknowledging the value of the informal links that have built up between Member Administrations, the Ministers looked forward to continued collaboration in order to exchange information and monitor the effectiveness of interventions in the Misuse of Substances Work Sector.

It was agreed that Ministers would meet again in the latter part of 2019.



Collaborative Spatial Planning led by Northern Ireland Executive

During 2017, the Collaborative Spatial Planning (CSP) work sector met in Edinburgh and Dublin and continues to progress its forward work plan. The focus includes: the spatial planning aspects of housing delivery; the factors that may impede its provision and the initiatives jurisdictions are taking forward to increase housing supply. The Dublin meeting was held in November 2017 to coincide with an assembly of 'planning' representatives from the 5 Administrations (i.e. the 5 Admins meeting). This facilitated a joint plenary session involving representatives from both groups. The next CSP work sector meeting will take place in April 2018 (Dublin) ahead of a joint seminar with the Housing Work Sector on the same date. The joint seminar will explore issues of common interest to both work sectors.

Creative Industries led by Government of Jersey

The Creative Industries work sector continued its work on the areas directed by Ministers in October 2015 and reported back formally as part of the BIC Summit in Jersey in November 2017. The group published a report entitled 'Capturing and Sustaining Impacts', supported by a short video (see below).

Since the Cardiff Summit, the group has met on four occasions – in London, the Isle of Man, Edinburgh and Dublin. At the November 2017 Ministerial meeting a new work programme was agreed, focusing on the role of education in nurturing the creative industries; equality, diversity and inclusion in the industries; and programmes to engage new audiences in the creative (cultural) industries. These topics formed the basis of visits made by the group and presentations received during the first meeting of 2018 in Dublin.

Report:

www.britishirishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/CI%20report%202017%20final.pdf

Video:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=7U6lKg16Nik&feature=youtu.be

Digital Inclusion led by Isle of Man Government

The work sector held a Ministerial meeting in June 2017 in Douglas, Isle of Man where Ministers reviewed three digital skills films on intergenerational working, young people and future skills, and partnership working. Ministers discussed approaches by members, including the use of intergenerational working to increase digital skills and capability, supporting young people in developing digital skills for the future, and how the Council could facilitate collaboration and partnerships across these islands. Ministers requested that the work sector take forward the proposed work plan and adopted the model of facilitating discussions and presentations on each theme at forthcoming work sector meetings.

Early Years Policy led by Welsh Government

Early Years was the theme for the Ministerial Summit held in Cardiff in November 2016 when Ministers identified the priority areas for the group as: the workforce; supporting families; parenting and, quality assurance and assessment. The work sector has begun to progress these topics in its subsequent meetings. In March 2017 the work sector met in London where the Early Years workforce was the main topic, followed by a meeting in Edinburgh in September 2017 which focussed on supporting families including a presentation on the Scotland Baby Box. Its meeting in Dublin during December 2017 looked at quality and the Irish Government's Access and Inclusion Model. The work sector continues to provide valuable opportunities to share policy thinking through shared site visits and via numerous bilateral and multilateral discussions on shared projects amongst the members. The work sector is also beginning preparations for a potential Ministerial meeting in autumn 2018 to review progress with this work.

Energy led by Scottish and UK Governments

The work sector has met in Belfast, Guernsey and Cardiff in 2017. The group agreed a refreshed vision paper that draws on existing initiatives for electricity generation, provides a forum for discussion of policy approaches and the exchange of information on energy developments in member Administrations. The vision paper is supported by a work plan with key deliverables and milestones. The work sector is reviewing possible themes and logistics for its forthcoming Ministerial meeting which will be held during 2018.

Environment led by UK Government

The work sector has been working diligently on the topics agreed by Ministers when they met in Guernsey in 2016. These include food waste, recycling, invasive and non-native species and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The invasive and non-native species sub group held a conference in Edinburgh in October 2017, bringing together experts in this field from across the Council jurisdictions and culminating in the launch of the Non-Native Species Week initiative across all BIC Administrations. A paper on climate adaptation has been completed and will be presented to Ministers at the Ministerial meeting in Dublin in March 2018.

Housing led by Northern Ireland Executive

During 2017, the Housing work sector has continued its focus based on the workplan adopted by Housing Ministers in November 2015 and the group is now working towards a Ministerial meeting during 2018 (subject to the appointment of a Northern Ireland Minister). The group met in Cardiff in May and in Edinburgh in early November. Site visits continue to form an important part of the group's work, including in relation to urban regeneration. The next meeting will be a joint one with Collaborative Spatial Planning in April 2018 in Dublin which will explore issues of common interest to both workstreams.

IML Languages led by Welsh Government

IML Languages Ministers held a successful meeting in Edinburgh in March 2017, where a new forward work plan for the group was agreed. The current work plan has a focus on (a) work force planning (b) adult learning of IML languages and (c) social use of languages, including through the arts and digital technology. The group continues to collaborate well on IML language issues and share learning across the Administrations. The Work Sector has finalised plans for a conference to be hosted in Belfast in March 2018 on the theme of 'Adult learning of IML Languages and links with community, workplace and society'. The conference will welcome speakers and delegates from across BIC jurisdictions, and the event provides an opportunity for practitioners, academics and policy makers to learn, share good practice and network. A report of the conference will be prepared to inform the group's ongoing work in the future.

Misuse of Substances led by Irish Government

The work sector held a Ministerial Meeting in Cardiff in September 2017. The work sector is continuing to share information in relation to trends, evidence-based approaches and new challenges. The Ministerial meeting provided a forum for the consideration of drugs strategies and policy developments in member Administrations and the challenges involved in responding to new psychoactive substances. The group's work plan for 2017/18 was also reviewed and finalised at the meeting.



Social Inclusion led by Scottish and Welsh Governments

The work sector is continuing to take forward its work on the topic of Carers. This work focuses on key areas including carer identification and young carers. The officials from this group have met four times since the Cardiff Summit – in Dublin, Guernsey, the Isle of Man and most recently in Edinburgh in January. These meetings have featured site visits, presentations and meetings with stakeholders and third sector representatives. This has helped facilitate the sharing of information between respective Administrations, particularly in the area of good practices, which will be released as a Good Practice guide at the final Ministerial meeting on this topic, due to take place at New Register House in Edinburgh on 20 April 2018. The group continues to work on identifying possible future topics for the work sector, which will be presented at the next BIC Summit.

Transport - led by Northern Ireland Executive

The work sector met in Jersey in May 2017 and in Dungarvan, Ireland in September 2017 and considered the topic of modal shift and behavioural change (led by the Scottish Government) and development of British-Irish Greenways Network. The work sector updated its Terms of Reference and Forward Work Plan. The work sector is preparing for a Ministerial meeting during 2018 on active travel and will meet next in Guernsey in Spring 2018.

Communications developments

As part of the BIC Communications Strategy agreed in 2015, the Secretariat undertook to implement a series of actions designed to:

- Raise awareness of the Council and its activity
- Demonstrate the value of the Council
- Identify learning and opportunities for collaboration and information sharing

Considerable work has been undertaken into growing the social media presence of the BIC Secretariat and to launch a new website that would facilitate these goals.

Social Media presence

Through coordinated efforts with member Administrations, third-party stakeholders and direct public engagement, 2017 saw a consistent growth in the Secretariat's social media presence. The number of followers of the Secretariat Twitter account increased by 1,491 in 2017, a ten-fold growth. The account was visited 14,731 times in 2017 and there were a total 217,271 tweet impressions arising from Secretariat

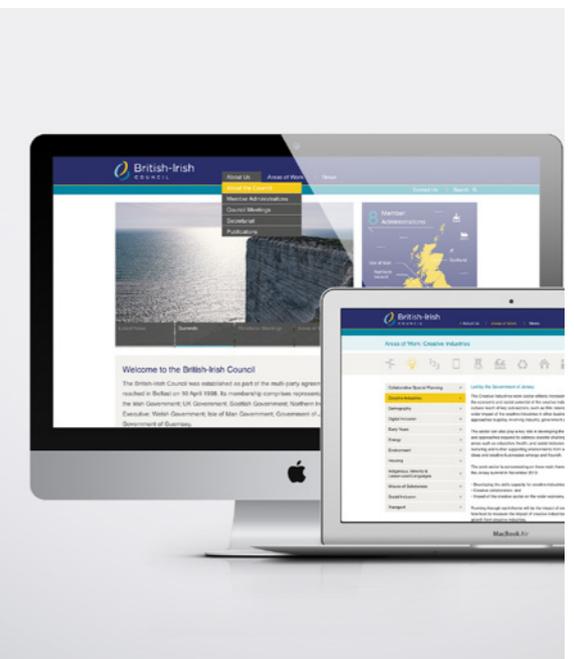
activity on the platform. 122,000 of these occurred in November alone, a result of careful coordination between the Secretariat and communication teams in all of the BIC jurisdictions around the Jersey Summit. Key to this high number was using #BICJersey on all social media references to the Summit, consistently reinforcing messaging across all Administrations. The Secretariat will continue to work with Administrations to ensure coordinated messaging in advance of all major BIC events in the future, beginning with the Environmental Ministerial to be hosted in Dublin in March 2018.



British-Irish Council website

In 2017, the BIC website was visited by 1,032 unique visitors who viewed 2,875 pages in total. Analysis shows that the main usage of the website revolved around the Summit in November as well as after the Ministerials in March, June and September. The Secretariat will continue to drive traffic to the website via social media and press engagement. Staffing levels permitting, the Secretariat will endeavour to work internally to develop additional functionality in the website to improve user experience and encourage repeat visits to the site.

www.britishirishcouncil.org



As part of the 2006 St Andrew's Agreement, the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of Ireland agreed that 'Following consultation with its other members, and with a view to giving further impetus to its work, the two Governments would facilitate the establishment of a standing secretariat for the British-Irish Council, if members agree'. Subsequently, the Council made a decision to create a standing Secretariat in Edinburgh which was formally established in January 2012.

The Secretariat currently comprises five full-time staff on assignment from the Council's Member Administrations.

The Secretariat running costs for January to December 2017 were £109,318.86. These costs are shared between the eight Member Administrations using an agreed set formula. With the exception of the Secretariat office manager, costs for individual staff are met by their parent Administration as they are on loan to the Secretariat. Funding for Summits and Ministerial meetings is met by the host Member Administration.

Contact



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You can also follow BIC on Twitter & Flickr:
twitter.com/BICSecretariat
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The Peace Bridge, Derry-Londonderry, Northern Ireland

The British-Irish Council was established on 2 December 1999 on the entry into force of the British-Irish Agreement which was signed by the UK and Irish Governments as part of the agreement reached in the Multi-Party Negotiations in Belfast on 10th April 1998, hereafter referred to as the "Multi-Party Agreement".

The text of the Agreement establishing the British-Irish Council can be found at:
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf

The British-Irish Council comprises the UK and Irish Governments, the devolved Administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and the Isle of Man Government, Government of Jersey and Government of Guernsey.

The aim of the British-Irish Council as set out in the Multi-Party Agreement is to "promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships amongst the people of these islands". It is a forum for members to exchange information, discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach agreement on

matters of mutual interest within the competence of the relevant Administrations.

The Council meets in different formats at Summit level normally twice per year, and in specific work sector formats on a regular basis with each Member Administration represented by the appropriate Minister. The Summit is normally chaired by the Head of the host Member Administration, and attended by Heads of Member Administrations and Ministers. At the Summit, Ministers consider the work of the Council in its entirety, including recommendations arising from progress in the work sector groups. In addition Ministers focus on key topics of current relevance.