



Eleventh Summit meeting – Scotland – 26th September 2008

The British-Irish Council (BIC), established under the Agreement reached in Belfast on Good Friday, 1998, held its eleventh Summit meeting today at Hopetoun House, in South Queensferry (near Edinburgh), Scotland.

The heads of delegations were welcomed by the First Minister for Scotland, the Rt. Hon. Alex Salmond MP MSP. The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach, Mr Brian Cowen TD, and the British Government delegation was led by the Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy MP. The Welsh Assembly Government was represented by the First Minister for Wales, the Rt. Hon. Rhodri Morgan AM. The Northern Ireland Executive delegation was led by the First Minister, the Rt. Hon. Peter Robinson MP MLA, and the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness MP MLA. The Government of Guernsey was represented by the Chief Minister, Deputy Lyndon Trott, and the Government of Jersey was represented by Chief Minister, Senator Frank Walker. The Isle of Man Government was represented by the Chief Minister, Tony Brown MHK.

A full list of delegation members is attached.

The BIC is a forum for its members to exchange information, discuss, consult and to agree as they see fit on co-operative measures in areas of mutual interest to them.

Demography

The Council noted the progress on migration issues, and endorsed further work on understanding migration and its impact; healthy independent ageing; fertility, and student flows.

Ireland offered to lead the sharing of information on the measurement of migration, with a view to enhancing the understanding of migration statistics and to provide a context for potential solutions to be explored.

Northern Ireland proposed to lead in the dissemination of research on migrant workers.

The Council agreed to identify the key policies in each Member Administration relevant to healthy independent ageing, with a view to identifying areas of work where sharing of experience would be beneficial.

Energy

The First Minister for Scotland discussed the viability of adopting Energy into the BIC work programme, and offered for Scotland to lead the new workstream. The Council agreed that Energy was an area of mutual interest, not only as a vital contribution to economic growth but also in the context of tackling climate change.

The Ministers discussed the need to ensure security of energy supplies including the opportunities in renewable energy resources such as harvesting the offshore energy between the coasts of Scotland and Ireland via a sub-sea grid.

The Ministers also considered the impact of Energy on climate change, and agreed that reducing emissions through improving energy efficiency would help towards reducing fuel poverty.

The Council agreed that carbon capture and storage presented parallel opportunities to make a contribution to climate change, and to export the advance technology as a commodity to other countries.

Update on Strategic Review of the Council

The Summit considered the papers setting out the progress on the review of the arrangements of the BIC which had been commissioned at the Belfast Summit in July 2007.

The paper on the proposal to establish a standing secretariat reported that agreement had been reached on a number of key parameters for the standing secretariat which the Council endorsed. The Council also noted the proposal for the remit of the standing secretariat to be expanded to provide for an enhanced role in managing the work of the BIC and supporting the agreed work programmes, in addition to continuing to fulfil its current Secretariat responsibilities.

The Council discussed further the principles for the location of a shared standing secretariat. It noted the likely costs of the standing secretariat and also considered the further work which would need to be done on developing the accountability and financing structures for the standing secretariat.

It mandated the current Secretariat, in consultation with Member Administrations' Coordinators, to continue their work with a view to presenting full proposals at the summit in Wales in early 2009.

The Council recognised the valuable work that had been achieved by the workstreams on tourism, the knowledge economy, and eHealth and agreed that these could now be concluded.

The Council agreed that the proposal from Scotland for an energy work stream, proposals on child protection, housing and collaborative spatial planning from Northern Ireland, and a proposal from the UK Government for a work stream on digital inclusion should be subject to further work and taken forward for decisions at the next Summit in Wales. The Council agreed to adopt an early years policy work stream, with Wales leading.

Misuse of Drugs

At the tenth BIC Summit the Council agreed to include a renewed focus on the families of problem drug users in any future drugs strategies prepared, with a view to providing increased support to those families and to better harness their potential to facilitate life improvements for problem drug users.

The Council will host a Misuse of Drugs Ministerial meeting, with a focus on engaging with communities around drug misuse, towards the end of the year.

Environment

Since the Council's Environment Ministerial meeting in February 2008, it has continued to take forward work on understanding extreme weather events, fishing for litter, renewable fuels and materials, managing radioactive waste, and integrated coastal zone management (ICZM). The latter, was progressed by the ICZM subgroup in August 2008 through consultation with Member Administrations on marine issues.

The ninth Ministerial meeting of the BIC Environment will take place in Jersey in Spring 2009, with a focus on climate change adaptation.

Knowledge Economy

BIC is about to conclude its work on the sustainability of small to medium sized businesses in the context of potential serious threats, by publication of good practice guidelines tailored with specific information for each Member Administration.

Currently, Member Administrations are considering an initiative to establish a permanent legacy of a professional practitioner group, which would result in a well co-ordinated response to a given incident or disaster, not only involving emergency services but also the business continuity of government departments.

Social Inclusion

The final report on the child poverty with a particular focus on lone parent work was presented at the Council's Social Inclusion Ministerial meeting in May 2008. The report included definitions of child poverty and lone parents, and identified the key challenges and barriers. It also provided examples of good practice, a literature review; a summary of specific initiatives taken forward in each administration; and comparative statistics on child poverty and lone parents across the Member Administrations.

The Council agreed that the next focus should be on the contribution of the voluntary and community sector in promoting social inclusion.

Tourism

The BIC has come to the conclusion that its tourism work has arrived at its natural end and this view has been reflected in the Update of the Strategic Review. The Council recognised the usefulness of the contacts made in the tourism field since its

adoption into the Council's work programme in 2001, and would consider annual informal meetings, chaired in turn by Member Administrations.

eHealth

With recent developments in the field of e-Health, the European Union (EU) has become increasingly active in this area and has begun to look at the work of the BIC in this field. Subsequently the Council, with the backing of the Isle of Man Government, agreed that with the work of the group largely superseded by the EU, it should now be brought to a close.

Transport

The Council has focussed on the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications; the mutual recognition of driving offences less than disqualification, and research into drugs and driving.

The BIC has agreed in principle to work towards the mutual recognition of penalty points charging officials to bring forward an appropriate transport programme of work.

The Council will host its first Transport Ministerial meeting later in the year.

Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages

The BIC has concentrated in the priority fields of: adult education provision; information and communication technology; data, research and language use surveys; and legislation. The Council has also included the following areas to take forward: community development; media; and fluency and usage.

The Council hosted an adult education seminar in January 2008, which allowed practitioners, academics and governmental policy makers, from across the BIC, to network and raised awareness between Member Administration on common issues.

Demography

At the BIC Demography Ministerial meeting in March 2008, the Council agreed to the future workplan of: understanding migration and its impact; healthy independent ageing; investigating policy interventions, fertility, and student flows.

Next Summit

The next BIC Summit will be held on 19-20 February 2009 and will be hosted by Wales. Jersey offered to host the subsequent Summit.

Any Other Business

The Council took the opportunity to consider the current global economic climate. Ministers expressed deep concern about the impact of the global financial crisis on the real economy. They noted and welcomed the efforts being taken internationally to stabilise the situation. Ministers noted the value and importance of learning from

and co-operating on measures taken and being considered in all BIC Member Administrations.

List of Delegates

British Government	
Secretary of State for Wales	Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy MP
Irish Government	
An Taoiseach	Mr Brian Cowen TD
Minister for Community, Energy and Natural Resources	Mr Eamon Ryan TD
Minister of State and Chief Whip, Department of the Taoiseach	Mr Pat Carey TD
Scottish Government	
First Minister	Rt. Hon. Alex Salmond MP MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth	Mr John Swinney MSP
Welsh Assembly Government	
First Minister	Rt. Hon. Rhodri Morgan AM
Deputy First Minister	Mr Ieuan Wyn Jones AM
Northern Ireland Executive	
First Minister	Rt. Hon. D Peter Robinson MP MLA
deputy First Minister	Mr Martin McGuinness MP MLA
Minister for Regional Development	Mr Conor Murphy MP MLA
Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment	Ms Arlene Foster MLA
Minister for Social Development	Ms Margaret Ritchie MLA
Junior Minister (OFMDFM)	Rt. Hon. Jeffrey Donaldson MP MLA
Jersey	
Chief Minister	Senator Frank Walker
Deputy Chief Minister; Minister for Treasury and Resources	Senator Terry Le Sueur
Guernsey	
Chief Minister	Deputy Lyndon Trott
Deputy Chief Minister and Minister, Public Service Department	Deputy Bernard Flouquet
Isle of Man Government	
Chief Minister	Hon Tony Brown MHK
Minister for Health and Social Security	Hon Eddie Teare MHK