



## **Communiqué**

The British-Irish Council (BIC), established under the Agreement reached in Belfast on Good Friday, 1998, held its Twelfth Summit meeting today at the SWALEC Stadium in Cardiff, Wales.

The heads of delegations were welcomed by the First Minister for Wales Rt. Hon. Rhodri Morgan AM. 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 Scottish Government was led by the First Minister for Scotland, the Rt. Hon. Alex Salmond MP MSP. 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 Terry Le Sueur. The Isle of Man Government was represented by the Chief Minister, Hon. 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 use best endeavours to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest.

### **Discussion of Economic Issues**

The Council had an extended discussion on the impact of the global downturn on their economies, noting the common challenges facing Member Administrations. It discussed the measures which each Member Administration had put in place to address the current recession, focussing on ways of helping the unemployed and those threatened with redundancy, while encouraging financial institutions to resume lending. The Council noted the importance of planning for the future to ensure that Member Administrations will be able to emerge from the recession with the skills necessary to benefit from the upturn. The Council called on officials to continue and extend ongoing exchanges of ideas and best practices in order to provide assistance to those most adversely affected.

### **Social Inclusion**

In May 2008 BIC Ministers agreed that 'the contribution of the voluntary and community sector' would be the next theme of the BIC Social Inclusion work area.

Social Inclusion was the theme of the Summit, and the Council considered three key issues in its discussion on social inclusion and the contribution of the voluntary and community sector (third sector): responding to the effects of the economic

downturn; developing the roles of the third sector; and voluntary and community action.

The Council noted that the third sector has a vital contribution to make during the economic downturn by helping to deliver services, developing communities, and supporting the vulnerable. The Council examined a number of ways of supporting third sector organisations at a time when demand for their services will increase.

The Council also considered the role and development of third sector. While independence and diversity of third sector organisations were recognised by the Council, it acknowledged that the current downturn is likely to have an adverse affect upon fundraising, grants and the competition for contracts. Efforts to encourage increased partnership among the third sector organisations were discussed, along with proposals to mainstream collaboration between third sector organisations and service planning.

The Council further examined the support that might be given to third sector organisations to engage and involve excluded groups as volunteers. The Council recognised the importance of volunteering as a means of encouraging wider active citizenship and community development. It examined what measures might be taken to assist the recently unemployed, and those who have been economically inactive for a period of time, to find employment. The Council noted the potential for Member Administrations to positively influence the third sector's efforts to promote volunteerism by using grant programmes to develop opportunities for "hard to reach" groups, promoting best practice in the recruitment of volunteers and continuing efforts to strengthen the volunteering infrastructure.

The Council concluded its discussion by endorsing the forward work plan of the sector and noting the potential for mutual co-operation in the area of social inclusion and, in particular, in the contribution of the voluntary and community sector. The Council recognised that the current difficult economic conditions pose new challenges for the third sector and for Member Administrations seeking to engage with them but was confident that the sharing of best practice and experience through the BIC framework would be a positive step towards addressing these challenges.

### **Update on the Strategic Review of the Council**

The Council 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.

An update paper on the proposal to establish a Standing Secretariat was presented to the Council on a number of key principles and details, all of which the Council endorsed. The Council agreed core functions, staffing profiles and secondment arrangements and noted the general location information provided by each of the four Administrations that have offered to host the Standing Secretariat. The Council also endorsed the principle that the costs of the Standing Secretariat should be shared among all the Member Administrations and tasked the secretariat and co-ordinators with presenting proposals for sharing the costs at the next Summit in Jersey.

The Council mandated the current secretariat, in consultation with Co-ordinators, to convene a meeting to examine the start-up and running costs of the standing secretariat and a model for sharing these costs.

The Council agreed to adopt four new areas of work: Energy; Digital Inclusion; Housing; and Collaborative Spatial Planning. The new energy work area will

comprise two elements: marine energy which will be led by Scotland and grid infrastructure which will be led by the United Kingdom. Digital Inclusion will be led by the Isle of Man. Housing and Collaborative Spatial Planning will be led by Northern Ireland.

### **Update on Work Sectors**

The Council discussed the Early Years work sector and noted that, whilst it had not been long established, it was an area of continuing media interest and looked forward to hearing the progress of the group's work.

The Council considered the progress of the work sector on Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used Languages, and noted the benefit of sharing best practice and expertise in the promotion of minority languages in respective Member Administrations.

The Council noted the progress of the work sector based upon the following reports:

### **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 better harnessing their potential to facilitate life improvements for problem drug users.

An officials' meeting in Jersey in September 2008 focussed on engagement with young substance misusers and examined the work of the Alcohol Liaison Nurse Service.

The most recent Ministerial Meeting took place in London in November 2008. Ministers shared their Administrations' experiences of engaging with communities coping with drug misuse. During their discussions they identified the harms caused to communities by problem drug or substance use and how best to harness the potential of communities to deal with these issues through community-based initiatives. They also agreed on the importance of ongoing monitoring of changes occurring in such communities and the evaluation of success levels of initiatives undertaken.

The sectoral group endeavour to cover a wide range of issues concerned with drug misuse in its annual work programme. The 2009 Work programme will focus on the following topics: the Youth Justice system; the dangers associated with psychoactive substance use ("legal highs"); the development and findings of Drug-Related Deaths Indices; drug Prevention; and Substance misuse in the prison setting - issues and treatment.

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### **Environment**

The sectoral group continued to look at ways in which Governments, agencies and researchers across the BIC regions can work together to improve understanding of the impacts of climate change. The group submitted a discussion paper to the second European Climate Change Programme to inform the development of the EU's Green Paper on Adaptation, working towards a White Paper.

The sectoral group is working towards their ninth Ministerial meeting of the BIC Environment which will take place in Jersey in April 2009, with a focus on climate change adaptation.

## **Social Inclusion**

In May 2008 BIC Ministers agreed that 'the contribution of the Voluntary and Community Sector' would be the next theme of the BIC Social Inclusion work area.

To date, the officials group has held two meetings and has agreed an initial work plan. Work will focus on examining how the voluntary and community sector can contribute to mitigating the social impact of the economic recession, investigating potential growth areas for social enterprise and sectoral involvement in delivering public services, and exploring the third sector's role in promoting volunteerism.

## **Transport**

Work in the transport sector has focussed on the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications; the mutual recognition of driving offences that attract a penalty less than disqualification, and research into drugs and driving.

It is expected that the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications will be operational this Spring, as the final details of legislation and administrative procedures are put in place.

Officials have been asked by Ministers in the three relevant Administrations to consider a programme of work towards UK/Ireland mutual penalty point recognition. This is likely to require penalty point recognition between Great Britain and Northern Ireland as a precondition. Officials are presently considering a programme of work.

The sectoral group is also examining the potential to share research on drink/drugs and driving with a view of developing best practice and sharing campaign research and publicity strategies across BIC Member Administrations. Additionally, the group is looking at transport links between Administrations, in recognition of the economic importance of key strategic connections.

Within this sector, Member Administrations are also working together to share information and experience in the area of accessible transport. A number of areas have been identified to explore in more detail, including available information for disabled people travelling from one area to another; appropriate disability training; the mutual recognition of travel concessions and the better engagement of advisory bodies across the eight Administrations.

Member Administrations are also exploring issues of common interest in relation to sustainable travel.

## **Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages**

The BIC work in this sector has concentrated in the priority fields of: community development; information and communication technology; data, research and language use surveys; and legislation. At the recent officials' meeting in the Isle of Man in October 2008, it was decided to focus the 2009 work programme on the areas of minority languages and young people and on primary education. The Council has also included the following areas to take forward: community development; media; and fluency and usage.

The legislation sub-group held a meeting in Douglas in October 2008, comprising representatives from Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. Issues under consideration at that meeting included practice of schemes; increasing capacity; language rights; the role of Commissioner and sanctions; the private sector; third party agreements; and education

The sub-group agreed to concentrate on the delivery and implementation of language schemes and will meet again in Edinburgh on 26 March 2009. The group will organise a seminar concentrating on languages rights and legislation, for practitioners in this field during 2009.

The group has undertaken a scoping exercise to examine policies in Member Administrations with regards to community development and language promotion strategies. On the basis of the results of this research, work will progress in this area to share best practice, experiences and expertise.

### **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.

In November 2008, GROS and the Scottish Government organised a conference entitled 'Independent Healthy Ageing: Showcasing research and identifying issues to inform public policy and develop the evidence base' which took place in Glasgow. The event brought together British academics, policy makers and analysts from across the public, private and voluntary sectors, as well as older people. The output from this event will be discussed at a future meeting of the BIC sector group with a view to wider dissemination.

Northern Ireland has commissioned research into the areas of the "Impact of Migration" and has agreed to host an event in Belfast in June on the outcome of this research.

### **Early Years**

The new Early Years work sector held its inaugural meeting in Cardiff in January 2009. The group committed to progressing work on early years education and health, which are seen as important in improving children's life chances, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The group identified four areas on which to focus its work: encouraging collaboration between all agencies concerned with the provision of health, education and social services; transition arrangements to improve children's outcomes; the early years workforce; and evaluation and obtaining better value for money.

### **Next Summit**

The next BIC Summit will be held in October 2009 and will be hosted by Jersey. The subsequent Summit will be hosted by Guernsey in Spring 2010.

### **Any Other Business**

The Council briefly discussed the benefits of international student migration and agreed that it should receive an update on this topic at the next Summit in Jersey.

**BIC Secretariat**

**20 February, 2009**

[www.british-irishcouncil.org](http://www.british-irishcouncil.org)

## List of Delegates

<b><u>Irish Government</u></b>	
An Taoiseach	Mr. Brian Cowen TD
Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	Mr. Eamon Ó Cuív TD
<b><u>British Government</u></b>	
Secretary of State for Wales	Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy MP
Minister for the Third Sector	Mr. Kevin Brennan MP
<b><u>Scottish Government</u></b>	
First Minister	Rt. Hon. Alex Salmond MP MSP
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health & Wellbeing	Ms. Nicola Sturgeon MSP
Minister for Culture, External Affairs and Constitution	Mr. Michael Russell MSP
<b><u>Welsh Assembly Government</u></b>	
First Minister	Rt. Hon. Rhodri Morgan AM
Deputy First Minister	Mr Ieuan Wyn Jones AM
Deputy Minister for Regeneration	Mr. Leighton Andrews AM
<b><u>Northern Ireland Executive</u></b>	
First Minister	Rt. Hon. D Peter Robinson MP MLA
deputy First Minister	Mr Martin McGuinness MP MLA
Junior Minister	Rt. Hon. Jeffrey Donaldson MP MLA
Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure	Mr. Gregory Campbell MP MLA
Minister for Social Development	Ms. Margaret Ritchie MLA
Minister for Finance	Mr. Nigel Dodds OBE MP MLA
Minister for Regional Development	Mr. Conor Murphy MP MLA
<b><u>Jersey</u></b>	
Chief Minister	Senator Terry Le Sueur
Deputy Chief Minister	Senator Philip Ozouf
<b><u>Guernsey</u></b>	
Chief Minister	Deputy Lyndon Trott
Minister, Health and Social Services Department	Deputy Hunter Adam
<b><u>Isle of Man Government</u></b>	
Chief Minister	Hon. J.A. Brown MHK
Minister for Health and Social Security.	Hon. W.E. Teare MHK