



## **Fifteenth Summit Meeting – Isle of Man – 13<sup>th</sup> December 2010**

The British-Irish Council established under the Agreement reached in Belfast on Good Friday, 1998, held its fifteenth summit meeting today at the Sefton Hotel in Douglas, Isle of Man.

The heads of delegations were welcomed by the Chief Minister of the Isle of Man, Hon. Tony Brown MHK. The Irish Government delegation was led by An Taoiseach, Mr. Brian Cowen TD, and the British Government delegation was led by Deputy Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Nick Clegg MP. The Welsh Assembly Government was represented by the Deputy First Minister, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones AM. The Scottish Government was represented by the Minister for Culture and External Affairs, Ms. Fiona Hyslop MSP. The Northern Ireland Executive delegation was led by the First Minister, the Rt. Hon. Peter Robinson MLA, and the deputy First Minister, Mr. Martin McGuinness MP MLA. The Government of Jersey was led by the Chief Minister, Senator Terence Le Sueur, and the Government of Guernsey was led by the Chief Minister, Deputy Lyndon Trott. A full list of delegation members is attached.

The British-Irish Council (BIC) plays a unique and important role in furthering, promoting and developing links between its Member Administrations through positive, practical relationships and in providing a forum for consultation and co-operation on East-West issues. Member Administrations consult, discuss and exchange information with each other on matters of mutual interest within the competence of the relevant Administrations.

### **The Economy**

The summit provided an opportunity for a substantive discussion on current economic developments affecting the Member Administrations, including Ireland's entry into a programme of international financial support, the Irish Government's four year National Recovery Plan and its 2011 Budget. The UK spending review and public expenditure reductions was also discussed and the Council consulted on the actions being undertaken across all of the Administrations to endeavour to stabilise public finances, repair banking systems, cut costs and boost employment. The Council acknowledged that Member Administrations continue to face serious challenges and agreed that the sharing of information and knowledge on measures and actions being

taken was invaluable as Member Administrators seek to rebound from current economic challenges.

### **Digital Inclusion**

The Council welcomed the discussion paper prepared by the BIC Digital Inclusion workstream. The paper highlighted the importance of a digitally inclusive society as citizens increasingly communicate, transact and access information online. The Council was updated on activities currently underway in the area of digital inclusion in their Administrations and approved the future work plan of the Digital Inclusion workstream which is focused on developing a body of knowledge and best practice around programmes to support digital inclusion; looking at how digital inclusion can deliver public cost savings; identifying and sharing cost effective ways to encourage and facilitate more widespread engagement of those digitally excluded including through involvement of all key stakeholders; and sharing statistics and other relevant information across Administrations.

### **BIC Standing Secretariat**

The Council discussed the progress on arrangements for the establishment of a BIC Standing Secretariat and considered a number of operational details relating to the establishment of the new Secretariat, including its functions and staffing arrangements. The Council also approved a cost-sharing model to apportion the running costs of the new Secretariat across Member Administrations, once established. The Council considered the draft running cost budget for the Secretariat, proposed by the First Minister of Scotland, noting the necessity for value for money and efficient management of resources. The Council agreed the budget in principle with a recommendation that it be reviewed on an annual basis. The Scottish Government undertook to bring to the Council a further proposal detailing the most cost effective accommodation available in Edinburgh to accommodate the new Secretariat once an opening date has been agreed by Member Administrations. The Council tasked the BIC Co-ordinators group with taking forward further work on the development of a number of new administrative procedures for the Secretariat, including appropriate arrangements for governance and accountability.

### **Update on Work Sectors**

The Council noted the progress of each of the eleven work sectors of the BIC based upon the following reports:

### **Collaborative Spatial Planning**

The Collaborative Spatial Planning workstream brings together officials responsible for regional development strategies, national planning strategies and frameworks in each Member Administration. The group met in Cardiff in March 2010 and was briefed by the Welsh Department of Public Services and Local Government on changes to European Union spatial policy objectives.

The group most recently met in Edinburgh in September 2010 where officials were provided with an overview of the Scottish Government's experience of undertaking a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of Strategic Development Plans. The group will meet next in March 2011.

## **Demography**

The Demography workstream continues to take forward the work plan endorsed by Ministers at their meeting in March 2008. A main focus of the group's work had been on understanding migration and its impact. However, the workstream will now focus its work on understanding the implications of wider student flows among the BIC Member Administrations. The group met in Edinburgh in November 2010 to discuss approaches and policies across Member Administrations in this area and to agree a work plan for the area.

## **Digital Inclusion**

The Digital Inclusion workstream held its inaugural meeting in the Isle of Man in September 2009 where it identified common themes and shared understandings on digital inclusion. The group decided to focus its work on five main areas: content; outcomes; trust; engagement; and skills and training. The group met on five occasions during 2010 to take forward work on these areas. The group also agreed that there is a need to identify practical issues which can be discussed and taken forward as key areas of work and agreed that in the longer term it would be useful to look at identifying areas, for example gathering statistics, which would make it easier to compare and contrast commonalities between the Member Administrations.

## **Early Years Policy**

The Early Years Policy workstream remains committed to driving forward work on early years' childcare, education and health policies, within which interventions are key in improving children's life chances, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and to support families in these challenging economic times. In February 2009, BIC Early Years Ministers endorsed four strands of work for the workstream: collaboration between all agencies concerned with health, education and social services to provide a "joined-up" service for children and their parents / carers and to make better use of resources; transition arrangements (between home and child care settings and then to school) to improve outcomes; the early years work force, and evaluation and obtaining better value for money. Officials from the Early Years Policy most recently met in Jersey in May 2010 and the group is currently to focusing its work on the fourth strand of value for money.

## **Energy**

At the Council's twelfth summit on 20 February 2009, the Council agreed to the introduction of a new Energy workstream focused on two areas – Electricity Grid Infrastructure and Marine Renewables. The Electricity Grid

aspect of the workstream is led by the UK whilst the Marine Renewables aspect of the workstream is led by Scotland.

### **Electricity grid infrastructure**

Electricity Grid Infrastructure was the main focus of discussion at the meeting of Energy Ministers in London in March 2010. At that meeting, BIC Ministers agreed that the Electricity Grid sub-group would focus its work on exchanging information and experience of research and development and other studies to promote greater understanding and cooperation in electricity grid infrastructure; sharing experience of and approaches to the regulation, environmental impact assessment and planning consents of electricity grid infrastructure; and working together to exert greater influence on the direction of emerging EU policy on and funding for grid infrastructure funding (where applicable to relevant members). The workstream is taking forward work on these areas and hopes to meet with representatives of the European Commission early in the New Year.

### **Marine renewables**

Marine Renewables was the theme of the last BIC summit in Guernsey in June 2010. At that summit, the Council noted the significant wave and tidal resources of BIC Member Administrations; the opportunities for the growth and competitiveness of this sector; and the benefits of Member Administrations working together to share best practice and collectively accelerating the marine renewables energy sector. The Council welcomed and endorsed the progress and future work plan of the Marine Renewables sub-group including continued exchange of best practice on marine environment and research issues; identification of key opportunities for ongoing collaboration across Administrations; and ongoing and constructive engagement between BIC Member Administrations and the European Commission in the development of European funding and policy initiatives in the area of marine energy. The workstream is taking forward work on these areas and hopes to meet with representatives of the European Commission early in the New Year.

### **Environment**

The Environment workstream continues to look at ways in which governments, agencies and researchers across BIC Member Administrations can work together to improve collective understanding of impacts on the environment. The workstream includes a sub-group on Integrated Coastal Zone Management. The Environment workstream held its tenth Ministerial meeting in the Dove Marine Laboratory in Cullercoats, Newcastle in July 2010. The focus of the meeting was on marine issues. Ministers were given the opportunity to view the work of the laboratory and were also briefed by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and Marine Climate Change Impacts Partnership (MCCIP), as part of a 'market place' event. Ministers were also presented with update papers on Fishing for Litter and Integrated Coastal Zone Management. Ministers welcomed the continued close co-

operation between Member Administrations on environmental issues and agreed that the next Ministerial meeting would take place in Wales in early 2011 on the theme of Waste.

## **Housing**

An initial meeting of BIC officials took place in Belfast in June 2009. The following issues were agreed as being pertinent across the jurisdictions: changing demographics; greening the housing stock; affordable housing; and investment in housing. A meeting of BIC Housing Ministers took place in Newcastle, Co. Down, on 4 December 2009. The meeting focused on four main areas: changing demographics; the need for more energy efficient housing/greening the stock; affordable housing products; and increasing private investment in housing. The European Investment Bank (EIB) and The Housing Finance Corporation (THFC) presented at the Ministerial meeting. The Housing workstream will meet next in early 2011.

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

Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used languages was the theme of the BIC summit meeting held in Jersey in November 2009. At the summit, the Council endorsed the forward work plan of the group and added the economic benefits of bilingualism to the group's remit. In February 2010 a seminar was organised by the legislation sub-group of the workstream in Edinburgh to discuss linguistic legislation. A Community Development Practitioners and Policy Makers' seminar was also hosted by Northern Ireland in Belfast in October 2010. The main objective of the seminar was to share best practice in the Minority Languages and Community Development field across BIC Member Administrations, and to produce a best practice booklet following the seminar. A further seminar focused on young people will be organised by the group during autumn 2011.

## **Misuse of Drugs**

The Misuse of Drugs workstream met in Dublin in January 2010 and officials discussed the policies of Administrations in tackling Alcohol Misuse. A Ministerial meeting of the work sector was hosted by the Isle of Man on 24 February 2010. Ministers discussed Substance Misuse in the Prison Setting and the responses necessary to address this issue. Ministers also discussed the issue of 'headshops' and the use of psychoactive substances ("legal highs"), exchanging information on the various measures planned and implemented across Administrations, and the outcomes of these interventions. Workstream officials last met in London in June where they discussed "New directions for drug and alcohol policy - meeting new challenges". The group also met in Jersey in September where they discussed Community Action in Dealing with Drugs, Alcohol and Anti-Social Disorder. The UK National Drugs Strategy which is due to be published at the end of 2010 will be among the items due to be discussed by the group during 2011. A Ministerial Meeting will also take place in Jersey in September 2011.

## **Social Inclusion**

At their Ministerial meeting in Edinburgh in March 2010, BIC Social Inclusion Ministers reviewed the report on the work carried out by the BIC Social Inclusion workstream on the area of “the Contribution of the Third Sector to Social Inclusion” and agreed a new work plan for the workstream focused on three main objectives: how the third sector working together can make communities more sustainable and socially cohesive; how wider civil activity can be enabled; and how third sector can be enabled to become part of the mainstream in service delivery. The group met with representatives of the Third Sector in the Isle of Man in September and in Dublin in December to discuss these issues. In March 2011, senior third sector representatives from each Member Administration will be invited to attend the officials meeting of the group in London to provide evidence of their work in terms of the three objectives, and to address their top three policy recommendations for engagement with the third sector.

## **Transport**

Work in the Transport workstream has focused 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. Member Administrations are also working together in the area of Accessible Transport. This work has included examining how to improve the information provision for disabled people who wish to travel from one Administration area to another through the development of common webpages, sharing standards of disability training schemes, and scoping the current level of concessionary travel across Administrations while also examining the potential for their mutual recognition. The Accessible Transport sub-group most recently met in London in December 2010 and a Ministerial meeting is likely to take place in early 2011.

## **Next Summit**

The Council agreed that the first BIC Summit in 2011 will be hosted by the UK Government. The Council also agreed that BIC Co-ordinators would examine the practicability of setting a fixed pattern of dates for future summits.

**BIC Secretariat**  
**13 December 2010**

## List of Delegates

<b><u>Irish Government</u></b>	
An Taoiseach	Mr. Brian Cowen TD
Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources	Mr. Eamon Ryan TD
<b><u>British Government</u></b>	
Deputy Prime Minister	Rt. Hon. Nick Clegg MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	Rt. Hon. Owen Paterson MP
<b><u>Scottish Government</u></b>	
Minister for Culture and External Affairs	Ms. Fiona Hyslop MSP
Minister for Parliamentary Business	Mr. Bruce Crawford MSP
<b><u>Welsh Assembly Government</u></b>	
Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport	Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones AM
<b><u>Northern Ireland Executive</u></b>	
First Minister	Rt. Hon. Peter D Robinson MLA
Deputy First Minister	Mr. Martin McGuinness MP MLA
Junior Minister	Mr. Robin Newton MLA
Minister for the Environment	Mr. Edwin Poots MLA
Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure	Mr. Nelson McCausland MLA
Minister for Employment and Learning	Mr. Danny Kennedy MLA
Minister for Social Development	Mr. Alex Attwood MLA
Minister of Justice	Mr. David Ford MLA
Minister for Finance and Personnel	Mr. Sammy Wilson MP MLA
<b><u>States of Jersey</u></b>	
Chief Minister	Senator Terence Le Sueur
Deputy Chief Minister and Treasury and Resources Minister	Senator Philip Ozouf
<b><u>States of Guernsey</u></b>	
Chief Minister	Deputy Lyndon Trott
Minister, Commerce and Employment	Deputy Carla McNulty Bauer
<b><u>Government of the Isle of Man</u></b>	
Chief Minister	Hon. James Anthony Brown MHK
Minister for Treasury	Hon. Anne Craine MHK
Minister for Economic Development	Hon. Allan Bell MHK