



Communiqué

The British Irish Council Housing workstream held its first Ministerial meeting at the Slieve Donard Hotel in Newcastle, Co. Down on 4 December 2009.

The British-Irish Council was established under Strand Three of the Agreement reached in Belfast on Good Friday 1998 as 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 within the competence of the relevant Administrations. The British-Irish Council (BIC) identified Housing as a new work sector at its Summit meeting held in Cardiff in February this year.

The meeting was hosted by Margaret Ritchie MLA, Minister for Social Development, who chaired the meeting. Minister Ritchie was accompanied by Edwin Poots MLA, Minister of the Environment, both representing the Northern Ireland Executive

The UK Government was represented by Lord McKenzie of Luton, Parliamentary under Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government; The Irish Government was represented by Michael Finneran TD, Minister for Housing and Local Services. The Scottish Government was represented by Alex Neil MSP; Minister for Housing and Communities. The Welsh Assembly Government was represented by Kath Palmer (Senior Official), the Jersey Government was represented by Deputy Sean Power, Assistant

Minister for Housing. The Guernsey Government was represented by Deputy Dave Jones, Minister for Housing and the Isle of Man Government by John Shimmin MHK, Minister for Local Government and the Environment.

The Ministers considered papers in relation to four specific areas of work and received short presentations from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the European Investment Bank and The Housing Finance Corporation.

The first paper looked at the issue of sustainable and more energy efficient housing, including the use of renewable technologies. Ministers agreed this was an important issue that had the potential both to boost the economy and help reduce the impacts of climate change and agreed that work should be taken forward to identify measures that could be introduced in new and existing homes.

The second paper sought to identify new opportunities to increase private investment to fund more social housing. It was accompanied by two short presentations from Tom Hackett of the European Investment Bank and Piers Williamson of the Housing Finance Corporation. The Ministers heard that since its inception in 1987, the Housing Finance Corporation had made over £2.5bn available to social landlords across the UK. In terms of European funding, Ministers welcomed the news that the European Investment Bank were to invest a record £345m this year into social housing across the UK bringing their investment to date to £810m. Ministers agreed this was a significant vote of support for their wider work in delivering social housing and agreed to work closely with both Housing Finance Corporation and European Investment Bank to make the case for continuing support, particularly when the Bank is facing pressure to invest elsewhere across Europe in other areas.

The third paper considered the changing demographics of the population across the BIC and the impacts this will have on future housing need. It was accompanied by a presentation from Joe Frey, Head of Research at the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Ministers heard that there would be an extra 2.4 million older households in Great Britain by 2026 and this would have an impact on the range and type of housing required to meet that growing need in the years ahead.

The final paper considered the need to provide more affordable housing products and Ministers reflected how challenging it was to deliver affordable housing during a period of reduced financial products in the Financial Sector. Ministers agreed to look further at exploring more innovative solutions with both financial institutions and developers alike to bring forward more holistic developer led affordable housing opportunities which the financial sector could support.

Ministers agreed that the issues at hand presented both challenges and opportunities for their respective jurisdictions, particularly in the current economic climate. Minister Ritchie agreed to update Ministers on progress in the Summer of 2010.

Ends