



MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE SOCIAL INCLUSION SECTORAL GROUP

2 -3 March 2006

COMMUNIQUÉ

Malcolm Chisholm, MSP, Scottish Executive Minister for Communities, chaired a Ministerial meeting of the British-Irish Council in Edinburgh on 2 and 3 March on matters of Social Inclusion.

The British-Irish Council was established under the Strand Three Provisions of the Good Friday Agreement as a forum for its members to exchange information and discuss, consult and endeavour to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within their respective competencies.

The devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales – the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government - lead the work of the Council on Social Inclusion.

The Scottish Executive was represented by Malcolm Chisholm, MSP, Minister for Communities, who hosted the meeting. The Irish Government was represented by Séamus Brennan, TD, Minister for Social & Family Affairs. The British Government was represented by Anne McGuire, MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work & Pensions and the Rt. Hon Lord Rooker, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office. The Welsh Assembly Government was represented by Huw Lewis, AM, Deputy Minister for Communities. Jersey was represented by Senator Paul Routier, Minister for Social Security. Guernsey was represented by Mary Lowe, Minister for the Social Security Department and the Government of the Isle of Man was represented by the Hon. Steve Rodan, MHK, Minister for Health & Social Security.

A full list of delegation members is attached.

Mr Chisholm welcomed delegates to the meeting. BIC Ministers reviewed the Group's progress on the phase of work covering disability and access to employment, education and training as agreed at their previous meeting in Cardiff in 2004.

Ministers acknowledged and recognized that disability can create significant challenges and barriers for people wishing to access employment, education and training opportunities in all of the BIC administrations and reiterated their commitment to helping people overcome these barriers in order to reach their fullest potential, free from poverty and social exclusion.

Ministers reviewed the work undertaken by the Officials Group, which had explored core common themes across the BIC administrations relating to disability and access to

employment, education and training. The Group had also shared experiences and learning points which had actively contributed to the development of thinking in this area across the administrations.

Ministers agreed that not only is work the best route out of poverty for disabled people, but that it also improves health, boosts dignity and self-esteem, and creates valuable links to the wider community. Ministers noted that strategies to assist disabled people into employment can have a major positive impact on their lives and the communities in which they live, but that they depend on effective engagement with employers and demonstration of the very real business case for taking disabled people into work.

The Council's work has looked at attitudes towards the employment of disabled people and examined best practice and experience at both national and local levels. This includes a focus on how best to deliver joined-up policy and services for disabled people to improve their access to employment, education and training across a range of interventions, whether through general advice, practical help, advocacy, or job-specific guidance. Ministers recognized that work need not necessarily be conventional, full-time employment and that for some disabled people sheltered employment remains a preferred option. However opportunities should always remain available to people to move on to new challenges and realize their potential more fully.

Ministers agreed that BIC Member Administrations have continued to learn a great deal from the exchange of information, knowledge and ideas. Furthermore, this transfer of information promises to have a significant influence across the BIC Member Administrations as they develop strategies for helping ensure that disabled people have fair access to employment markets and to education and training opportunities. BIC Members agreed to continue this exchange of information and good practice and to learn from each other's experiences.

Ministers further agreed that the next topic for work within the Council's Social Inclusion theme would be [insert here next topic once decided.]

LIST OF DELEGATES

The Scottish Executive

Malcolm Chisholm, MSP

Mike Palmer

[Neil Langhorn

Minister for Communities

Head of Social Inclusion Division

Head of Social Inclusion Strategy Team]

Welsh Assembly Government

Huw Lewis, AM

Anne Stephenson

Tracey Breheny

Lynne Schofield

Deputy Minister for Social Justice and
Regeneration

Head of Communities Directorate

Joint Head, Social Justice Co-ordination Unit

Joint Head, Social Justice Co-ordination Unit

Irish Government

Séamus Brennan, TD

Frank Letif

Tom Rowley

Orlaigh Quinn

Minister for Social and Family Affairs

Special Advisor

Press Officer

Social Inclusion Policy

British Government

Anne Maguire, MP

Rt. Hon. Lord Rooker

Mike Daley
Dr Gerry Mulligan

Arlene McCreight

Nigel Treanor

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
for Work & Pensions (Disabled People)
Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office

Department for Work and Pensions
Head of Equality and Social Need, Northern
Ireland Office

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First
Minister, Northern Ireland Executive

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First
Minister, Northern Ireland Executive

States of Jersey

Senator Paul Routier

Ann Esterson

Minister for Social Security

Chief Officer

States of Guernsey

Mary Lowe

Malcolm Nutley

Minister for the Social Security Department

Chief Officer Social Security Department

Isle of Man Government

Hon. Steve Rodan, MHK

David Cooke

Andrew Swithinbank

Minister for Health and Social Security

Director of Social Services

Assistant Director of Social Services