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## COMMUNIQUÉ

The British-Irish Council established under the Agreement reached in Belfast on Good Friday 1998 held its fourth Summit meeting today in New Lanark, Scotland. The meeting was chaired by the First Minister the Rt Hon Jack McConnell MSP.

The Irish and British Governments were represented by the Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern TD and the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, the Rt Hon Robin Cook MP respectively.

The Welsh Assembly Government was represented by the Rt Hon Rhodri Morgan AM, First Minister.

The Isle of Man was represented by the Hon Richard Corkill MHK, Chief Minister of the Isle of Man Government, Guernsey was represented by Deputy Laurie Morgan, President, States of Guernsey

Advisory and Finance Committee and Jersey was represented by Senator Pierre Horsfall OBE, President

of the States of Jersey Policy & Resources Committee.

A full list of delegation members is attached.

The British-Irish Council is a forum for its Members to exchange information, discuss, consult and endeavour to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within the respective competencies.

The Council noted with regret the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive and looks forward to the restoration of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, established under the Agreement, as soon as possible in advance of the scheduled elections.

### **Social Inclusion**

The main focus of today's meeting was the issue of Social Inclusion and, in particular, Financial Inclusion, on which the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government take the lead within the BIC. The Council recognised that the problems of social and financial exclusion affect communities throughout all BIC Administrations and the meeting highlighted the range of strategies that Members are working on to combat these problems. Members reiterated their commitment to promoting social inclusion across the Member Administrations of the Council.

In order to address the challenges in this important area, the Council agreed that future work on Financial Inclusion will include promoting best practice by creating opportunities for practitioners and policy makers to share ideas and information on aspects of financial inclusion. This work would include the identification

and promotion of practical financial inclusion measures at the community level, including, for example, the use of credit unions. Members agreed that there should be greater exchanges on promoting access to appropriate financial products and encouraging savings.

In addition, the Council agreed that the promotion of financial literacy is an essential element in tackling financial exclusion. In order to promote best practice, Members agreed to exchange information on the most effective methods of imparting basic skills and budgetary advice. Given the importance of the role played by intermediary organisations across the BIC, including those based in the community, the Council agreed that considerable benefit could be derived from the exchange of experience among members on how such organisations could best be supported.

The Council also noted that the Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly Government hosted a conference on Financial Inclusion for practitioners and policy-makers in September of this year in Glasgow as part of preparatory work for this Summit.

Following the discussion on Social inclusion, the Council was updated on work being undertaken in other British-Irish Council areas by relevant Administrations

## **Drugs**

Ireland is the lead Administration within the Council on the Misuse of Drugs. Since the last Summit in June, a number of events have taken place including a seminar on the UK's Positive Futures initiative, which provides sporting programmes for youngsters at risk, and a conference on drug and alcohol

strategies which took place in the Isle of Man. Following the successful conference on the exchange of information on Assets Confiscation in Guernsey in May of this year, a second conference on the issue is to take place in the near future. Scotland and Ireland are scheduled to host a seminar on education, training and employment opportunities for recovering drug misusers later this year.

A further Ministerial meeting in Dublin is scheduled to take place in February 2003.

### **Environment**

The UK is the lead Administration on the environment. Work has continued on waste management, climate change, Sellafield and radioactive waste.

Since the June summit, the Waste Management Working Group has met to discuss a range of issues, share experience, exchange ideas and identify scope for co-operation.

The sub-group on Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation met as part of their continuing exchange of information and experience. Technical work on the development of the new climate change scenarios covering all BIC members is underway. A public awareness seminar on the matter is scheduled to take place in November.

The UK Government will host a further meeting of Environment Ministers in the near future.

### **Transport**

Northern Ireland is the lead Administration on Transport. Work on the initial priority areas identified by

Ministers in Belfast in December 2000 is continuing. On integrated transport, the group is co-ordinating work looking at transport links between BIC Administrations, approaches to the development and implementation of environmentally sustainable transport policies and the integration of land use as well as transport policy and practice. The issues of the use of Public Private Partnerships in relation to transport infrastructure; co-operation on road safety issues and regional air links, of particular concern to a number of Members are also under consideration.

### **Knowledge Economy**

The issue of the Knowledge Economy, on which Jersey is the lead Administration, was the main item on the agenda at the last BIC Summit in June 2002.

Since then, officials have met to continue the development of the work mandated by the Council, focussing on broadband provision, the switchover to Digital TV and a range of internet access issues, including physical access to equipment and services, encouragement of public use of technology, and the skills and learning issues that might inhibit such practice. As proposed at the Jersey summit, a seminar on research issues, which allowed Members the opportunity to exchange information on matters of mutual interest was held earlier this month.

### **Health: The Application of Telemedicine**

The Isle of Man is the lead Administration on the application of Telemedicine and e-health. Officials have met on a number of occasions to share information on telemedicine initiatives in each Administration and discuss some of the issues encountered in getting e-health accepted in routine healthcare. There have

also been BIC study visits and presentations on telemedicine facilities in Scotland and Wales.

The focus of the work in this area is on how Telemedicine and e-health projects can be most appropriately implemented, and on identifying successful projects and methodologies which it is hoped would prove of interest within BIC Administrations.

### **Tourism**

Guernsey has taken the lead on tourism within the BIC. Officials have met on a number of occasions to discuss how best to take forward work in this area. The group is focusing on exploring issues of common interest and mutual benefit to all Administrations. Work to date has concentrated on methodologies for data collection within BIC Administrations. The environment and tourism, transport access, and staff training and recruitment issues, including the opportunities for exchange schemes, also form part of the work programme for the Group.

### **Minority and Lesser-Used Languages**

Further to the Council's agreement last BIC Summit meeting in June 2002 that the Welsh Assembly Government should take the lead on Minority and Lesser-Used Languages, a preparatory meeting of officials is due to take place shortly to discuss how to take work forward in this area.

### **Future Summit Meetings**

The Council noted that Northern Ireland and Wales are scheduled to host summits in 2003.

British-Irish Council

22 November 2002

[www.British-IrishCouncil.org](http://www.British-IrishCouncil.org)

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### List of Delegates

<b>Scotland</b>	
First Minister	Rt Hon Jack McConnell MSP
Minister for Social Justice	Margaret Curran MSP
Permanent Secretary, Scottish Executive	Sir Muir Russell, KCB
<b>Irish Government</b>	
Taoiseach	Bertie Ahern TD
Minister for Social and Family Affairs	Mary Coughlan TD

Minister of State at the Department of Finance with special responsibility for the Office of Public Works	Tom Parlon TD
<b>British Government</b>	
President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons	The Rt Hon Robin Cook MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	The Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP
Financial Secretary to the Treasury	Ruth Kelly MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office	Des Browne MP
<b>Welsh Assembly Government</b>	
First Minister	The Rt. Hon Rhodri Morgan AM
Deputy First Minister	Michael German, OBE AM
Minister for Finance, Local Government & Communities	Edwina Hart MBE AM
<b>Jersey</b>	
President of the Policy and Resources Committee	Senator Pierre Horsfall OBE



Chief Executive, Policy and Resources Department	John Mills
<b>Guernsey</b>	
President, Advisory and Finance Committee	Deputy Laurie Morgan
Chief Executive, Advisory and Finance Committee	Mike Brown
<b>Isle of Man</b>	
Chief Minister	Hon Richard Corkill MHK
Minister for Health and Social Security	Hon Clare Christian MLC