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## COMMUNIQUE

The British-Irish Council, established under the Agreement reached in Belfast on Good Friday 1998, held its seventh Summit meeting today at Villa Marina on the Isle of Man. The meeting was chaired by Chief Minister Donald Gelling MLC.

The Irish and British Governments were represented by the Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern TD and the Deputy Prime Minister, the Rt Hon John Prescott MP respectively.

The Welsh Assembly Government was represented by the First Minister, Rt Hon Rhodri Morgan AM and the Scottish Executive by the Rt Hon Jim Wallace MSP, Deputy First Minister.

Guernsey was represented by Chief Minister Laurie Morgan, and Jersey was represented by Senator Frank Walker, President of the Policy and 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 recognised the ongoing commitment of the two Governments to the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and noted, following the recent Westminster Elections, the re-engagement with the political parties in Northern Ireland with a view to moving the process decisively forward.

The Council looked forward to the restoration of the devolved institutions, established under the Agreement, as soon as possible.

### **Telemedicine**

The main focus of today's meeting was telemedicine, the sector in which the Isle of Man takes the lead within the BIC.

The Council recognised the strong potential of telemedicine to modernise the delivery of health and social care and highlighted both the common challenges BIC members face in this area, and the mutual benefits of exchanging experience and best practice.

The Council discussed the opportunities which telemedicine offers to address health and social

care issues affecting BIC administrations. Such issues include support for rural and remote communities and challenges in meeting demand for consultant and expert advice. It was also noted at the meeting that successful implementation of telemedicine in all BIC administrations relies on investment in the associated information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure.

The Summit recognised that patient confidence is a significant factor in fully realising the benefits of telemedicine. With this in mind the Council agreed that BIC Members would co-operate in examining relevant issues, including the safe and secure electronic transfer of patient data/records and effective ways of ensuring that telemedicine and e-health information from the Internet can be quality assured.

In addition to the discussion on Telemedicine, the Council was updated on work being undertaken in other British-Irish Council areas by the relevant administrations.

### **Misuse of Drugs**

The Irish Government leads the work of the Council in relation to the Misuse of Drugs. BIC Ministers with responsibility in this area met in Edinburgh in November 2004 and agreed on a number of important topics of mutual concern for future consideration by the group. These included interventions with young people through formal and informal education projects, children of drug misusing parents and confidential enquiries into drug-related deaths. Work on all of these areas continues to be progressed and a fourth Ministerial meeting is planned for

July 2005.

## **Environment**

The UK is the lead Administration on the Environment. At their sixth Ministerial level meeting in Dublin in April 2005, BIC Environment Ministers discussed papers on climate change, waste strategies, integrated coastal zone management and ASCOBANS – which is an important means of ensuring conservation measures are taken for dolphins, porpoises, small whales and other cetaceans. It was also agreed that the issue of Sellafield and radioactive waste was an area of concern to a number of BIC members and should remain on the group's agenda for future meetings. A further Ministerial is provisionally scheduled for January 2006.

## **Tourism**

Tourism was the main topic of discussion at the last BIC Summit in Guernsey in November 2004. Since then the tourism group has been working to progress the Summit recommendations on tourism satellite accounting and staff training, recruitment and retention pilot projects. In response to the discussions at the Guernsey Summit the group has also been looking at the importance for BIC members of future inbound tourism from China.

## **Knowledge Economy**

Jersey takes the lead on the work of the BIC in relation to the Knowledge Economy. A report on "*Access to Information Communication Technology by those with disabilities*" has been

completed and meetings to disseminate its findings and, in particular, develop cross-sectoral links with the BIC Social Inclusion Group regarding employment opportunities for people with disabilities are planned.

## Transport

Northern Ireland is the lead administration on transport. The work of the Group has been focussing on road safety and transport links between members. Work is also planned in the area of public private partnerships and consideration will be given to the scope for sharing best practice among BIC members on experience to date and developments in the use and treatment of PPP arrangements. A meeting of road safety experts to exchange information on drugs and driving and advertising is also planned for June 2005.

## Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used Languages

The Welsh Assembly Government takes the lead in the indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages work sector. The group recently reviewed its programme of work and agreed on a number of priority areas for future activity including language transmission within the family and the teaching of indigenous, minority and lesser used languages in adult education. The group also intend to examine strengths and weaknesses in the provision of information and communication technologies for indigenous, minority and lesser used languages.

## **Social Inclusion**

The Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government take the lead on the work of the BIC in relation to Social Inclusion. The group's work in the area of financial inclusion concluded with a successful conference for credit union staff and volunteers in Wales in February 2005. Since then the work of the group has focussed on disability and employment issues and this was the subject of a two day study visit to Northern Ireland by officials in April 2005. A Ministerial level meeting is planned for early 2006.

## **British-Irish Council**

**20 May 2005**

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

## List of Delegates

<b>Government of the Isle of Man</b>	
Chief Minister	Hon Donald Gelling MLC
Minister for Health	Hon Stephen Rodan MHK
<b>Irish Government</b>	
Taoiseach	Mr Bertie Ahern TD
Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children	Ms Mary Harney TD
<b>British Government</b>	
Deputy Prime Minister	Rt Hon John Prescott MP
Minister of State for Health	Lord Warner
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	Rt Hon Peter Hain MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State	Mr Shaun Woodward MP
<b>Welsh Assembly Government</b>	
First Minister	Rt Hon Rhodri Morgan AM
Minister for Health and Social Services	Dr. Brian Gibbons AM
<b>Scottish Executive</b>	
Deputy First Minister	Rt Hon Jim Wallace MSP
Minister for Health and Community Care	Mr. Andy Kerr MSP
<b>Jersey</b>	

President - Policy and Resources Committee	Senator Frank Walker
President – Health and Social Services Committee	Senator Stuart Syvret
<b>Guernsey</b>	
Chief Minister	Deputy Laurie Morgan
Minister of Health and Social Services Department	Deputy Peter Roffey