



Welcome

We are pleased to present the British-Irish Council (BIC) Annual Report for 2024/25 outlining the Council's work from April 2024 to March 2025.

The highlights of the year were the two BIC Summit meetings in the Isle of Man in June, and in Scotland in December 2024.

The summer Summit in the Isle of Man focused on how Member Administrations could realise the full potential economic and social benefits of renewable energy.

The winter Summit in Edinburgh built on that, looking at ways in which a just transition to a green economy could be financed. The December Summit also marked the BIC's 25th anniversary of its first meeting in December 1999 in London.

At Ministerial level, there were two meetings in the reporting year. In September, Ministers with responsibility for Housing policy met in Belfast to discuss important aspects of housing affairs across these islands. Ministers also visited examples of social housing initiatives in Belfast and Lisburn.

Then in November, a Planning and Places Ministerial meeting convened in Derry/Londonderry to discuss domestic and shared priorities. Ahead of the meeting, Ministers were brought on an informative walking tour of the historic City Walls and heard about the city's history and ongoing work on development and regeneration.

At both these meetings Ministers reviewed BIC shared activities and collaboration across these islands and approved new work programmes.

At official-level, the BIC's ten Work Sectors - Creative Industries; Drugs and Alcohol; Early Years; Environment; Energy; Housing; Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-used Languages; Planning and Places; Social Inclusion, and Transport - met regularly throughout the year to implement their agreed work programmes, as well as share best practice on issues of common interest and to strengthen working relationships.

Some examples illustrate the range of activities. Officials from the Creative Industries and Social

Inclusion Work Sectors had an intensive joint visit to Jersey in September 2024 to meet with numerous social enterprises and creative organisations supporting the Island population's health and wellbeing. The visit culminated with the opportunity to view the flagship refurbishment project of Jersey's Opera House in St. Helier.

In October, the Energy Work Sector visited University College of London's (UCL) East Campus in Stratford, London, to learn about research taking place on issues such as biomass energy, green hydrogen and carbon capture storage.

In March, officials from the Early Years and Drugs and Alcohol Work Sectors went on a joint visit to Powys, Wales, to learn about the trauma-informed approach and support being provided to families and individuals dealing with the impacts of drug and alcohol misuse.

As the British-Irish Council moves into its 26th year, we look forward to the upcoming opportunities to support strengthened collaboration across these islands, ensuring the Council remains a productive forum in facilitating shared learning.

In closing, the Secretariat would like to place its warm thanks on record to all those that have supported the Council's work over the past reporting year in support of the BIC's mission: *"to promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships amongst the people of these islands"*.



BIC Secretariat Joint Heads - Eddie Brannigan (L) and William Sinclair (R)

Eddie Brannigan
William Sinclair

History and Purpose

The British-Irish Council was established on 2 December 1999, as part of the British-Irish Agreement signed by the UK and Irish Governments, which itself was a key part of the Multi-Party Agreement reached in Belfast on 10 April 1998, more commonly known as the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

The aim of the Council is to "promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships among the peoples of these islands".

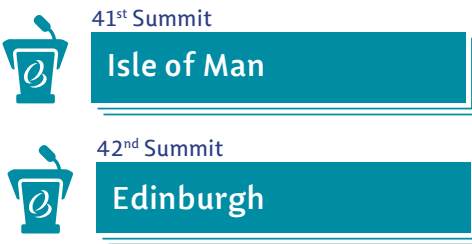
The Council comprises the Government of Guernsey, Government of Ireland, Isle of Man Government, Government of Jersey, Northern Ireland Executive, Scottish Government, UK Government and Welsh Government.

The Council serves as a forum for discussion, consultation and shared information exchange on shared strategic priorities within the competence of the relevant administrations. At the bi-annual Summits, Heads of Administration review the work of the Council in its entirety, including recommendations arising from Work Sector groups and Ministerial meetings, and focus on key topics of current relevance.

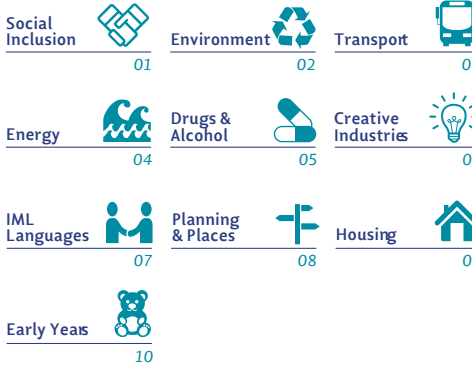


The Council meets in different formats. Heads of Administration meet at Summit level bi-annually, with administrations hosting Summits on a rotational basis. The Council also meets at Work Sector level, both at the portfolio Ministerial level, and more frequently at meetings of officials.

2 Heads of Administration Summits



10 Work Sectors



2 BIC External Events

- Drugs and Alcohol Webinar
- Celtic Media Festival

Summit hosted by the Isle of Man Government, 20 June 2024

The 41st British-Irish Council Summit took place on 20 June 2024 on the Isle of Man. Leaders and other principals were hosted by Alfred Cannan MHK, Chief Minister of the Isle of Man Government.



Family Photo (L-R): Deputy Lyndon Trott, Jeremy Miles MS, Simon Harris TD, Hon Alfred Cannan MHK, Rt Hon Chris Heaton Harris, Emma Little-Pengelly MLA, Aisling Reilly MLA, Rt Hon John Swinney MSP, Deputy Lyndon Farnham

Unlocking the Economic and Social Opportunities of Renewables Across These Islands

The Council discussed the initiatives which administrations are developing in order to reap the economic and social benefits of renewable energy; namely boosting economic growth and supporting decarbonisation targets.

Political Developments

The Summit also discussed a range of domestic and international political developments. Leaders also welcomed the return of the Northern Ireland Executive, as well as the restoration of the devolved institutions and the North South Ministerial Council. The Council also noted that 2024 marks the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the British-Irish Council.



Press Conference following the 41st BIC Summit, Isle of Man, June 2024



Scan the QR Code
for a link to the full
Summit Communiqué

Summit hosted by the Scottish Government, 6 December 2024

The 42nd British-Irish Council Summit took place on 6 December 2024 in Edinburgh. Leaders and other principals were hosted by the Rt Hon John Swinney MSP, Scottish Government First Minister.



Family Photo (L-R): Deputy Lyndon Trott, Deputy Lyndon Farnham, Emma Little-Pengelly MLA, Michelle O'Neill MLA, Simon Harris TD, Rt Hon John Swinney MSP, Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer KCB KC MP, Rt Hon Eluned Morgan MS, Micheál Martin TD, Hon Alfred Cannan MHK

Financing a Just Transition

At the Summit, the Council discussed a range of initiatives aimed at ensuring that communities across Member Administrations are supported on the journey to net zero. It also considered efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across various sectors in a way which is compatible with the principles of a Just Transition.

Political Developments

The Council reflected on several topical domestic policy issues and international developments.

25th Anniversary of the British-Irish Council

The Council noted the milestone 25th anniversary of the British-Irish Council as an institution established in 1999 under the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (1998). Members affirmed the continued importance of the Council in promoting positive relations across these islands.



Press Conference following the 42nd BIC Summit, Scotland, December 2024



Scan the QR Code
for a link to the full
Summit Communiqué

Housing Ministerial Meeting – Belfast – September 2024



Family Photo (L-R): Deputy Sam Mézec, Alan Dillon TD, Aisling Reilly MLA, Gordon Lyons MLA, Deputy Lindsay de Sausmarez, Paul McLennan MSP, Baroness Taylor of Stevenage, Hon. Tim Crookall MHK, Jayne Bryant MS

A Housing Work Sector Ministerial meeting took place on 19 and 20 September 2024 in Belfast, hosted by the Northern Ireland Executive, and chaired by Gordon Lyons MLA, Minister for Communities.

Ministers reviewed the Work Sector’s activities across 2021-2024. Ministers also approved a new Work Plan focussing on residential retrofit, the private rental sector, affordable housing models, attracting private sector investment for housing, and homelessness and temporary accommodation.

For practical illustration of work underway, Ministers participated in a site visit to the King’s Hall site to view an innovative housing project – led by Choice Housing Ireland Limited - at a mixed-tenure apartment development providing private, affordable, and social housing.

The visit showcased how projects can be designed utilising green technologies and sustainable materials for energy efficiency to lessen the ecological footprint. The Ministers also visited MACS (Mulholland After Care Services), where they heard about the work of the charity in supporting vulnerable young people aged 16-25 at risk of homelessness, mental health challenges, and other issues. Ministers were impressed to hear how MACS empowers

young people through tailored interventions and community involvement, with a focus on well-being, personal development, and building confidence.



Ministers visited the Lisburn premises of MACS, a charity which supports vulnerable young people at risk of homelessness, mental health challenges, or other issues

Scan the QR Codes below for a link to the Ministerial Communiqué and Housing Report



Planning and Places Ministerial Meeting – Belfast – November 2024



Housing Ministerial Plenary, Derry/Londonderry, November 2024

In November 2024, a Planning and Places Ministerial meeting took place in Derry/Londonderry hosted by the Northern Ireland Executive and chaired by John O’Dowd MLA, Minister for Infrastructure (NIE).

Ministers agreed a new Forward Work Plan for 2025-27, to primarily focus on two themes – that of Climate Change and the Biodiversity Emergency, and the issue of Skills and Capacity for the Public Sector Planning Profession.

The first reflects the reality that Member Administrations all face the urgent challenge of reacting to the climate change and biodiversity emergency, but with limited resources and within a context of continuing planning reforms. The second primary focus area, on skills and

capacity, responds to the challenges of attracting and retaining public sector planning staff at a time when many public sector planners face ever-increasing workloads and continuously changing policy contexts.

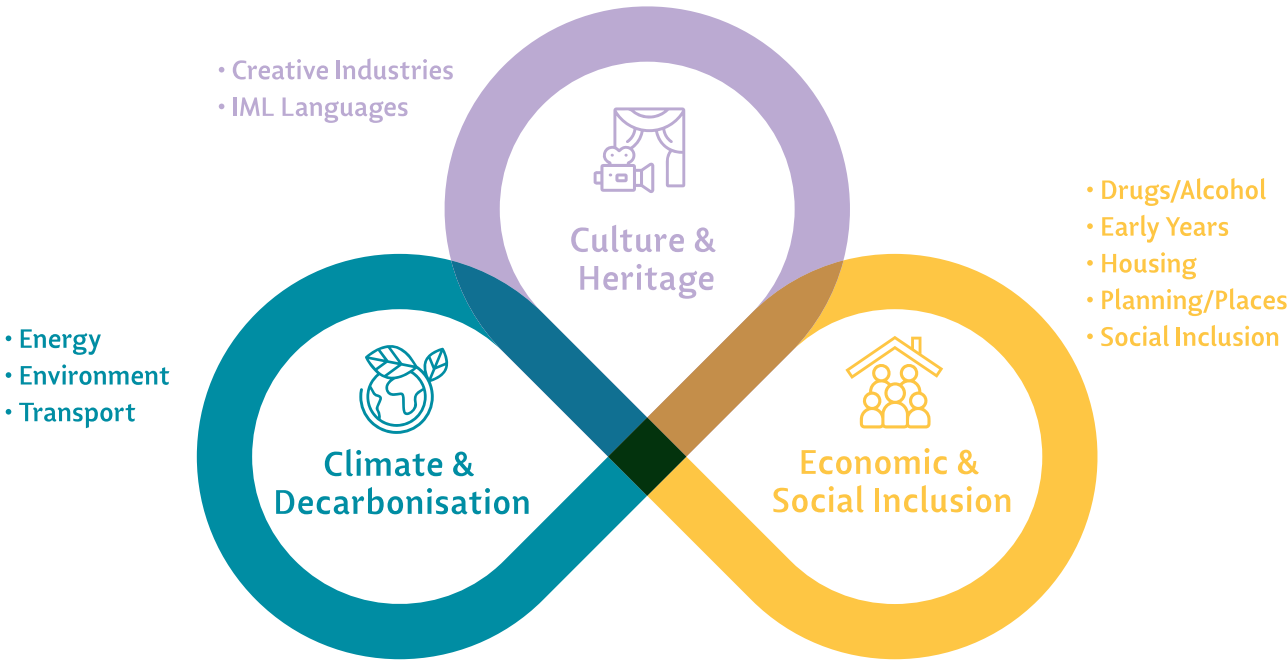
Ministers also reviewed and activity over 2021-24, which focused on areas such as the contribution of spatial planning to ‘Building Better Places’ during Covid recovery, the revitalisation of towns, best practice in national/regional planning frameworks, and the promotion of expert learning and experience sharing.



Family Photo (L-R): Rebecca Evans MS, Ivan McKee MSP, John O’Dowd MLA, Baroness Taylor of Stevenage, Pam Cameron MLA

Scan the QR Codes below for a link to the Ministerial Communiqué and Planning & Places Report





Indigenous, Minority & Lesser-Used Languages – Led by Welsh Government

The Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used (IML) Languages Work Sector continued implementation of its Work Plan. The Work Sector organised a Place Names Exchange session where administrations shared experiences and policies to protect placenames in their respective IML languages.

The Work Sector also visited Belfast in November 2024, hosted by the Northern Ireland Executive. The group visited the Ulster-Scots Agency and Belfast's Gaeltacht

Quarter where officials heard from a range of organisations supporting the use of Ulster-Scots and Irish, respectively, in the community.

Over these twelve months, the Work Sector continued to develop virtual resources to support language learning. This included the production of multiple phrase sheets supporting BIC Ministerials meetings, displaying greetings and words associated with the policy areas in all the languages of these islands.



IML visit to Gaeltacht Quarter, Belfast



Celtic Media Festival 2024

In June 2024, the British-Irish Council, led by the IML Work Sector, continued its partnership with the Celtic Media Festival to help showcase the rich linguistic and cultural heritage of these islands. This year the BIC sponsored a panel session entitled 'Livelihoods and

Language: Making Your Living Where You're Living'. The panel focussed on enabling people to use IML languages creatively in their own communities to create dynamic media content, and make a livelihood in their place of residence.



Celtic Media Festival panel discussion, Cardiff, June 2024



Millennium Centre, Cardiff

Creative Industries – Led by the Government of Jersey

The Creative Industries Work Sector has continued to share experience and best practice in a range of areas. This began with an engaging presentation from the Government of Ireland on its pilot Basic Income for Arts Programme in April 2024.

The Creative Industries Work Sector also participated in two in-person visits across the reporting year. In September 2024, the Work Sector participated in a joint visit to Jersey with the Social Inclusion Work Sector to meet with a series of organisations and social enterprises supporting the Island population's health and wellbeing. This included a visit to St Ouen where a new venture is being established to create an indoor skateboarding space for young people on the Island, led by Skate Space. Officials also had the opportunity to view the major structural and interior refurbishment of Jersey's Opera House in St. Helier.

In March 2025, the Creative Industries Work Sector were hosted by the Northern Ireland Executive on a visit to Belfast to meet with two organisations: Ulster Orchestra, a professional orchestra at the centre of musical life in Northern Ireland; and Studio Ulster, a state-of-the-art facility driving technological innovation and research in the entertainment industry.



Work Sector officials visit Skate Space in Jersey, September 2024



Officials visit Jersey Opera House renovation, September 2024



Officials visiting Studio Ulster in Belfast in March 2025. The facility is a world-leading virtual film production studio



Energy – Led by the Scottish Government and UK Government

The Energy Work Sector supported the development of two discussion papers that were presented to Heads of Administration ahead of both the 41st Summit in the Isle of Man, on the economic and social opportunities of renewable energy, as well as the 42nd BIC Summit in Edinburgh, exploring the financing of a Just Transition.

Separately, on 31 October, UK Government organised a Work Sector visit to University College of London's (UCL)

East Campus in Stratford where BIC officials were given an in-depth tour of UCL's hydrogen research facilities and met with researchers and lecturers. Attendees received several presentations covering a wide range of topics including biomass energy, green hydrogen and carbon capture storage. Officials were also given a tour of UCL East Campus' facilities, including the impressive Advanced Propulsion Laboratory.



Officials with UCL staff at UCL East Campus, London, November 2024



The Advanced Propulsion Laboratory facility, UCL East Campus, November 2024

Environment – Led by the UK Government

In November 2024, Invasive Species officials were hosted in Dublin by the Government of Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service and the National Biodiversity Data Centre. Officials attended the Shared Island Biosecurity and Invasive Species Forum 2024 in what was a chance

to discuss issues and shared challenges in protecting the natural habitats of these islands. Professor Helen Roy gave a powerful keynote speech about the global state of nature and efforts worldwide in protecting native species.



Work Sector visit to Customs House, Dublin, November 24



Shared Island Biosecurity & Invasive Species Forum, Dublin, November 2024



Transport – Led by the Northern Ireland Executive

In April, the Transport Work Sector was hosted by the Government of Ireland in Dublin. Officials attended the Transport Research Arena (TRA) conference in the Royal Dublin Society (RDS).

The conference offered a great venue for researchers, policymakers and industry representatives to get together and contribute to the discussion on how research and innovation can reshape the transport and mobility system. The conference provided a unique opportunity to hear about mobility trends in different parts of Europe, learn from achievements in the industry as well as share best practices of policies and deployments.

Officials were also given a tour of Irish Rail's new state of the art National Train Control Centre, in Heuston Station in Dublin.



Transport Research Arena conference, Royal Dublin Society, April 2024

Economic & Social Inclusion



Drugs and Alcohol – Led by the Government of Ireland

On 29 August 2024, the threat of Synthetic Opioids, and the range of public health responses to this challenge, were the focus of a BIC Drugs and Alcohol Work Sector webinar attended by over 90 delegates. These included a mixture of officials, public health experts and academics, who shared expertise and perspectives and reviewed public health responses across these islands to synthetic opioids and surveyed external developments and trends in Europe, the USA, and beyond.

In March 2025, the Drugs and Alcohol Work Sector also participated in a joint visit to Powys, Wales with the Early Years Work Sector. The event, hosted by the Welsh Government, focused on an approach being adopted across Wales to being trauma-informed and Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) aware. As part of the visit, officials were given the opportunity to visit Kaleidoscope, an organisation supporting upwards of 10,000 people a year across Wales dealing with the impacts of drug and alcohol misuse.



BIC officials on a visit to Kaleidoscope support centre in Powys, March 2025



Early Years – Led by the Welsh Government

In September 2024, the Early Years Work Sector were hosted by the Government of Guernsey at the Joyous Childhood Conference at St Sampsons High School and met with Early Years practitioners on the Island. The trip also afforded officials the opportunity to discuss initiatives across these islands to improve the public perception of childminders.

As part of the Conference, the group were given the opportunity to attend workshops led by prestigious

Early Years Specialists on topics such as outdoor learning and storytelling and play pedagogy. The Conference also featured a keynote speech from Baroness Floella Benjamin OBE on the message 'Childhood Lasts a Lifetime'.

Welsh Government also hosted the Early Years and Drugs and Alcohol Work Sectors on a visit to Powys to share learning on the approach in Wales being trauma-informed and Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) aware.



BIC officials at the Joyous Childhood Conference in Guernsey, September 2024



Officials learning about the trauma-informed approach to ACEs in Powys, Wales, March 2025

Housing – Led by the Northern Ireland Executive

As noted above, the main activity was the Housing Work Sector Ministerial meeting on 19 and 20 September 2024 in Belfast, hosted by the Northern Ireland Executive, chaired by Gordon Lyons MLA, Minister for Communities.

The Work Sector has since focussed on implementing its work programme, focussing on five themes: residential retrofit, the private rental sector, affordable housing models, attracting private sector investment for housing, and homelessness and temporary accommodation.



Scan the QR Codes for a link to the Housing Phrases Sheet



Minister Gordon Lyons MLA and Junior Minister Aisling Reilly MLA during the Housing Ministerial Plenary.



Planning and Places – Led by the Northern Ireland Executive

Also, as noted above, the highlight in this sector of November 2024, a Planning and Places Ministerial meeting took place in Derry/Londonderry hosted by the Northern Ireland Executive, chaired by John O'Dowd MLA, Minister for Infrastructure (NIE).

Earlier in 2024, the group visited Leeds, hosted by the UK Government as part of their focus on town and city revitalisation to consider the development of the Leeds Local Plan 2040, and how the council works with multiple stakeholders to deliver its regeneration ambitions and create a coherent approach across the city.



Scan the QR Codes for a link to the Planning & Places Phrases Sheet



BIC officials on a visit to Leeds, April 2024

Social Inclusion – Led by the Welsh Government and Scottish Government

In September 2024, the Social Inclusion and Creative Industries Work Sectors undertook a joint visit to Jersey. The two-day programme included visiting a mix of social enterprises as well as organisations supporting the Island population's health and wellbeing.

One of several highlights included a visit to Beresford Street Kitchen (BSK), a local organisation providing training

and employment opportunities to islanders with learning disabilities. Officials had the opportunity to meet with staff employed by BSK to learn how the initiative was supporting them and their community. The Work Sectors were also invited to attend the launch of the Government of Jersey's social prescribing framework at the iconic La Hougue Bie heritage site, a neolithic burial chamber which is one of the oldest archaeological sites in the world.



La Hougue Bie heritage site, Jersey



BIC officials attend the launch of the Government of Jersey's social prescribing framework, September 2024

Chair Network

The BIC Chair Network met virtually in May 2024 to discuss ways to support and encourage collaboration between the BIC’s ten Work Sectors. As referenced above, two joint in-person initiatives took place across 2024/25: the first in Jersey involving the Social Inclusion and Creative Industries Work Sectors and the second in Powys, mid-Wales, between the Drugs and Alcohol, and Early Years, Work Sectors.

The Secretariat continues to work with all Work Sector Chairs to support them in their role, and following the virtual meeting in May 2024, the forum agreed to meet in-person in July 2025 to identify further opportunities for collaboration across the BIC’s network and deepen working relations.

Council Secretariat

The standing Secretariat was established by the British-Irish Council in Edinburgh in January 2012, based in Haymarket.

This derived from the 2006 St Andrews Agreement, wherein the UK Government and the Government of Ireland agreed that *‘Following consultation with its other members, and with a view to giving further impetus to its work, the two Governments would facilitate the establishment of a standing secretariat for the British-Irish Council, if members agree’*.

The Secretariat currently comprises six full-time staff on assignment from the Council’s Member Administrations. The Secretariat running costs for the financial year April 2024 to March 2025 was £107,673.58.

The Secretariat is funded jointly by the eight Member Administrations using an agreed split funding model. With the exception of one role - the Office and Administration Manager, salary costs for individual staff assigned to the Secretariat are met by the relevant Member Administrations.

Note of Thanks

During this reporting year, Marc Allan, the Secretariat’s former Office and Administration Manager, and Bronagh Trainor, one of the Secretariat’s former Stakeholder Engagement Managers, departed to take up new positions within the Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive. The Secretariat, as well as officials from all Member Administrations, thank Marc and Bronagh for their contributions, and wish them well for the future.



Contact

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