

# European and External Affairs Committee

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## Update on the Work of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary

### Purpose

1. To update the Committee on the work of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body (BIIPB).

### Recommendations

It is recommended that the European and External Affairs Committee notes:

2. The prospects for the development of an agenda for the Body that concentrates less on political developments and stability in Northern Ireland and more on themes of common interest.

3. That the Body's agenda for reform offers opportunities for the Body to increase its relevance to the devolved legislatures.

### Action for European Committee

4. The views of the Committee are sought to assist in providing direction and adding value to future participation by the Assembly delegation in the activities of the Body.

### Background

5. The British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body was established in February 1990. Initially, the Body provided a link between the UK and Irish Sovereign Parliaments, though since 2001 it went through a post devolution enlargement exercise incorporating the Scottish Parliament, the devolved assemblies and the crown dependencies within its structure.

6. The Body consists of twenty-five Members from each sovereign Parliament; five each from the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the National Assembly Wales; and smaller delegations from the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey. The composition of the Assembly's cross-party delegation was agreed between the party groups and subsequently endorsed by the Presiding Officer:

Full Members (Committee)	Associate Members (Committee)
Deputy Presiding Officer	
Alun Cairns AM	Darren Millar AM (C)
Michael German AM (B)	Jenny Randerson AM (B)
Dai Lloyd AM (D)	Bethan Jenkins AM
Joyce Watson AM (C)	Alun Davies AM (B)

7. The purpose of the Body is to bring together Members of the British and Irish legislative bodies to participate jointly in a wide range of non-legislative parliamentary activities. The Body meets for two plenary sessions each year, alternating between the UK and the Irish Republic and usually held at venues other than Dublin and London. The Body normally debates matters of political and general concern, reports from its Committees and Government responses, and has a question period with a Minister from the host country. The day-to-day work of the Body is carried out through its four Committees. The Assembly is represented on Committees B, C and D and is represented on the Standing Committee by the Deputy Presiding Officer. The subject committees are:

A, Sovereign Matters (exclusive to Sovereign Parliaments)

B, European Affairs

C, Economic

D, Environmental and Social.

8. Committee reports are presented to the plenary sessions of the Body, which usually comments on them in the form of a Resolution. They are sent to both Governments and Executives, which make formal replies to the Committee's recommendations. These replies are also published and considered by the plenary session.

9. The Assembly has sent delegations to each plenary session since October 2001. Plenary sessions tended to follow a predictable pattern in which the first debate was a political motion concerning the Northern Ireland Peace process and the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

#### **Issues**

10. Since the restoration of devolved governance in Northern Ireland the Body has moved towards considering other themes of common interest to its Members. At its most recent plenary meeting the agenda covered two main themes, both of which the Assembly delegation was able to contribute to from an Assembly perspective:

Tourism as a Driver for Economic Development;

The Drugs Problem, its Effects and Impact on our communities

11. The Body's committees and the inquiries they undertake represent an opportunity for the exchange of information between the Body's constituent Members. The Assembly hosted a visit by Committee D to Wales on July 6-7 as part of its inquiry into the experience of integration of recently arrived migrants. The subject of this inquiry mirrored a current piece of work by the Assembly's Equal Opportunities Committee and demonstrated the potential for co-operation and information sharing.

12. The Body is engaged in a process of re-assessment given the change in emphasis since the restoration of devolved governance in Northern Ireland. The Assembly is contributing to this process through its representation on the Steering Committee. The agenda for change includes:

A change of name to something more inclusive of the devolved legislatures, the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly; taking on the role of the East-West parliamentary forum envisaged in the St Andrews Agreement;

Active engagement with the British Irish Council, recognising its potential for strengthening further relations between its Members

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