

**BRITISH-IRISH PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES REPORT 4th Term**

Background

At the request of Members of the Oireachtas in Dublin and the Parliament at Westminster, the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body was established in February 1990 with the consent and co-operation of both Governments.

In 2001 membership was enlarged to include the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the High Court of Tynwald and the States of Guernsey and Jersey. In 2008, the name British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly was adopted to reflect a new era of relations between Britain and Ireland.

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES’ REPRESENTATION**

The National Assembly for Wales is allocated five full members and four associate members on the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, members are selected for the duration of the Assembly term.

**Membership for the 4th Term 2011-2016**

Full Members

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Deputy Presiding Officer | David Melding AM |
| Labour Member | Joyce Watson AM |
| Conservative Member | Darren Millar AM |
| Plaid Cymru Member | Lindsay Whittle AM |
| Liberal Democrats Member | William Powell AM |

Associate Members

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Labour Member | John Griffiths AM |
| Conservative Member | Nick Ramsay AM |
| Plaid Cymru Member | Elin Jones AM |
| Vacant |  |

Official

Robert Lloyd-Williams - International Relations Team

**Foreword**

During the 4th term the National Assembly for Wales continued to be active in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) and has added valuable input to the Plenary Conferences and Committees held in the UK and Ireland.

The BIPA has provided a mechanism allowing members from across the political parties represented in the parliaments and assemblies of Britain, Ireland and the Crown dependencies to meet and discuss matters of common interest, in particular ‘The Economy’, ‘Energy’ and ‘The UK and the European Union’.

We continue to support the BIPA in its work and in the future by attending Plenary Conferences with a full complement of five Assembly Members and endeavour to place Welsh interests at the heart of the main themes selected.

In 2014 the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly visited Flanders to commemorate the anniversary of the First World War. During the visit I laid wreaths on behalf of the National Assembly for Wales at the Welsh Memorial in Langemark and at the Menin Gates, Ypres. The Assembly delegation also visited the grave of the Welsh poet Hedd Wynn.

Our Assembly Members also continue to participate in committee inquiries, taking evidence in Britain and Ireland on inter-parliamentary issues, with some committee meetings being held in the Senedd taking evidence from Welsh Government Ministers and local organisations. Committee inquiries have examined ‘Youth Unemployment’, ‘Human Trafficking’ and ‘The European Investment Bank’ amongst other issues.

We look forward to welcoming Members to the 53rd BIPA Plenary Conference to Cardiff in November 2016 with one of the proposed themes being ‘*Youth Participation*’ a common objective in all legislatures.



**David Melding AM**

Deputy Presiding Officer

**BIPA PLENARY CONFERENCES – 4th TERM**

**42nd BIPA Plenary Conference – Cork**

The 42nd Plenary Conference took place at Rochestown Park Hotel, Cork, from Sunday 12-14 June 2014.

The main theme for the plenary was – ‘***The Economy***’

**43rd BIPA Plenary Conference - Brighton**

The 43rd Plenary Conference took place at The Grand Hotel Brighton, from Sunday 23-25 October 2011.

The main theme for the plenary was – ‘***Northern Ireland and Human Rights***’

**44th BIPA Plenary Conference - Dublin**

The 44th Plenary Conference took place in the Seanad Chamber, Leinster House, Dublin, from Sunday 13 to Tuesday 15 May 2012.

The main theme for the plenary was – ‘***Making business easier between Britain and Ireland****’*

**45th BIPA Plenary Conference - Glasgow**

The 45th Plenary Conference took place at the Hilton Grosvenor hotel, Glasgow, from Sunday 21 to Tuesday 23 October 2012.

The main theme for the plenary was – ‘***The Scottish Economy and Irish/Scottish Relations***’

**46th BIPA Plenary Conference – Letterkenny**

The 46th Plenary Conference took place at the Letterkenny Institute of Technology, Letterkenny Co Donegal, from Sunday 3 to Tuesday 5 March 2013.

The main theme for the plenary was – ‘***Energy***’

**47th BIPA Plenary Conference – London**

The 47th Plenary Conference took place at Church House Conference Centre Westminster, London, from Sunday 20 to Tuesday 22 October 2013.

The main theme for the plenary was – ‘***Good Friday Agreement- 15 Years on***’

**48th BIPA Plenary Conference – Dublin**

The 48th Plenary Conference took place at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin, from Sunday 30 March to Tuesday 1 April 2014.

The main theme for the plenary was - ‘***The Future of Work and the Reform of the Public Sector***’.

**49th BIPA Plenary Conference – Ashford & Flanders**

The 49th Plenary Conference took place at the Ashford International Hotel, Kent, from Sunday 19 October to Tuesday 21 October 2014.

**The plenary marked the Centenary of the First World War with a visit to the battlefields of Flanders (Belgium). The plenary also had a lecture on Ireland (North and South) and the First World War**.

**50th BIPA Plenary Conference – Dublin (February 2015)**

The 50th Plenary Conference took place at Leinster House, Dublin, from Sunday 22 February to Tuesday 24 February 2015. This was the 25th Anniversary of the formation of the Assembly.

The main theme for the plenary was – ‘***Sport in promoting cultural and community development and the significance of British Irish Parliamentary Assembly – 25 Years Later***’.

**51st BIPA Plenary Conference – Cheltenham (November 2015)**

The 51st Plenary Conference took place in Cheltenham, from Sunday 15 to Tuesday 17 November 2015.

The plenary included discussions on: ***Horse Racing in Britain and Ireland, Policing North and South (Ireland), Ireland, The UK and The European Union and Constitutional relationship between The Crown Dependencies and the UK***

***The latest Plenary Conference and Committee reports can be found on our web site*** - [here](http://www.assembly.wales/en/abthome/about_us-commission_assembly_administration/about_us-international-relations/Pages/about_us-bipa.aspx) and further details on the [BIPA web site](http://www.britishirish.org/).

*Robert Lloyd-Williams*

*BIPA Official National Assembly for Wales March 2016*

**BIPA COMMITTEES**

British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly committees conduct inquires on matters of common concern. Committee reports are presented to plenary sessions which usually comment on them in the form of a resolution. Reports are sent to both Governments and Executives which then make formal replies to the recommendations.

These replies are also published and considered by the BIPA in plenary session.

**COMMITTEE A -** *Sovereign Matters* (Exclusive to Sovereign Parliaments)

Committee A considers sovereign matters of relevance to both Britain and Ireland

**COMMITTEE B** - *European Affairs*

The National Assembly for Wales’s representative on this committee is **William Powell AM.**

I became the Welsh Liberal Democrat member of the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) when I was first elected as an Assembly Member in 2011 – and I have made my BIPA work a priority throughout this 4th Assembly.

During this time I have attended and spoken in every BIPA Plenary – from the Grand Hotel, Brighton in October 2011 to the most recent Plenary at Cheltenham Racecourse as well as playing a full part in the work of Committee B, the European Committee. It has been an enormous privilege to meet and debate with younger and veteran politicians from both Dublin, Westminster and every devolved administration in the British Isles.

During our Committee B discussions, I have contributed to several Inquiries, including being co-rapporteur on our Inquiry on the role of the Irish EU Presidency in delivering CAP reform under Agriculture Minister Simon Coveney TD. This is of particular relevance to my work as Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for the Environment, Food and Farming and reinforces my own strong conviction that continued UK membership of the European Union is profoundly in the interest of all the nations of the British Isles. My membership of BIPA – and participation in Committee B – has also given me greater insights into the detrimental consequences for British–Irish relations of any UK vote to leave the European Union. After all, our shared membership of the European Community since 1973 has been the very cradle of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Peace Process.

I particularly enjoyed contributing to our Committee B Inquiry into the European Investment Bank – and, alongside the work of colleagues on the Committee of the Regions – I feel that we have gained a useful understanding of the potential that we in Wales have to learn from Ireland’s experience of harnessing innovative funding. We had a most informative visit to the European Investment Bank in Luxembourg in January 2014, hosted by the EIB Vice President, Jonathan Taylor.

The BIPA Plenary sessions, in many locations around the British Isles, including the Senate Chamber, in Dublin; Church House, Westminster and in Ashford, Kent, ahead of a solemn act of Remembrance at the Mennen gate. Participating in the BIPA allowed me the chance to lobby Michael O’Leary, CEO of Ryanair on flight links to Cardiff Airport, question the Taoiseach and to challenge the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt. Hon Theresa Villiers MP on the impact of Brexit, which she apparently favours, upon the precious but at times fragile Peace Process.

The final BIPA Plenary in Cheltenham saw all members bid each other a fond farewell. Some Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland parliamentarians not seeking re-election, others hoping to continue. I have several BIPA friends who have served in the Dail since 2011 – and are currently battling it out in the Irish General Election campaign.

All in all, my membership of BIPA since 2011 has been one of the richest experiences of the Fourth Assembly and it has been an honour to represent my party and my country within this unique parliamentary assembly.

*William Powell AM*

*Welsh Liberal Democrat Assembly Member for Mid and West Wales*

**COMMITTEE C** - ***Economic Affairs***

The National Assembly for Wales’s representative on this committee is **Lindsay Whittle AM.**

I became a reserve member of the BIPA when I was first elected as an Assembly member in 2011. By 2013 I was the member on that organisation.

During this time I have attendee 8 committee meetings, 3 for our discussions on Credit Unions, 1 on Renewable Energy and 4 on Youth Unemployment. I have also attended 5 plenary sessions.

During our discussions Tidal and Wave energy I was able to contribute to the debate and inform committee of the work around the prospect of the Swansea bay Tidal lagoon. The possibility of wave power at the Menai Straits and future technology ideas for the Severn Barrage. Due to inclement weather I was sadly unable to visit the experiment at the Orkney Islands.

The enquiry on Credit unions was more than interesting. We in Wales have a long way to go to emulate the success of Ireland. One of the lessons learnt was that in Ireland Credit unions are in such a position of financial strength they are able to loan money to business at a much more competitive rate than banks.

For our sessions on Preventing Youth Unemployment and Education and Training I was pleased that committee came to Cardiff. There we were able to question our own Minister of Skills. There was a fruitful visit to the Coleg Gwent Learning Zone on the site of the old Ebbw vale steelworks. Our success there is similar to the success the committee visited at the H and W shipyard at Belfast docks and the Titanic experiment.

The Plenary sessions have all proved to be most interesting. I never imagined I would ever get the opportunity to question the Irish Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD. Also meetings with the Chief executive of Ryanair and a number of ex Irish rugby internationals on how they promote the Irish language.

Our brief visit to the memorials at Flanders will stay with me for ever. A solemn event at the Mennen gate and also very proud to read prose written by our own Hedd Wynn at his grave side. Proud to read in both Welsh and English.

The final committee C was held recently and all members bid each other a fond farewell. Some not seeking re-election, others hoping to continue.

Following lengthy debate the next topic for enquiry will be “**The implications of on-line sales for the retail sector in the BIPA countries”**.

This will affect every single High St and I genuinely hope I am there to play my part in ensuring our Welsh voice is heard.

I have been honoured to represent the Senedd at all of the events.

*Lindsay Whittle AM*

*Plaid Cymru Assembly Member for South Wales East*

**COMMITTEE D** - *Environmental and Social Issues*

The National Assembly for Wales’s representative on this committee is

**Joyce Watson AM**

As a member of the 3rd term (2007 – 2011) British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) (formerly British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body), I was prepared to hit the ground running in the 4th term, contributing to the Committee D inquiry into human trafficking in the UK and Ireland.

In June 2012, at the first stage of the inquiry, the committee met at the National Assembly for Wales. As chair of the All-Party Working Group on Human Trafficking in Wales, I appeared as a witness. At the Cardiff session, the committee also took evidence from Bob Tooby, the Welsh Government’s first Anti-Human Trafficking coordinator, and Mwenya Chimba from Black Association of Women Step Out (BAWSO).

Committee D’s following inquiry, ‘Travellers, Gypsies and Roma: access to public services and community relations’, noted the good example of Pembrokeshire County Council’s Traveller Education Service, whereby infant education, childcare, healthcare advice and other forms of advice can all be found at the local school hub, which invests significantly in building trusting relationships with the Traveller and Gypsy communities. I promoted this best practice both within and without (through the media) the Assembly. In December 2015 the Assembly’s Cross Party Group on Gypsies & Travellers organised a special outreach meeting at Monkton Priory Community Primary School.

I have sought to develop crossover between my work at the Assembly (for example, the Enterprise and Business Committee’s work on the maritime economy, which explored connectivity with Ireland) and BIPA, and to make a contribution at each conference and evidence session. It has been an honour to represent the Assembly at committee meetings – in Belfast, Dublin, Cardiff, London, Edinburgh and Glasgow – and Plenary Sessions, from Brighton in 2011 to Cheltenham last November, where I argued in favour of Britain and Wales remaining in the EU.

It was a special privilege to attend the visits organised to mark the First World War Centenary, to lay a wreath at the Welsh memorial, designed by Tenby artist Lee Odishow, in Langemark, Belgium. It was a very moving occasion for BIPA colleagues, one hundred years since British and Irish people stood together to fight against threatening forces on the continent of Europe.

*Joyce Watson AM*

*Welsh Labour Assembly Member for Mid and West Wales*