

CENTRAL MANAGEMENT BRANCH



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Mike Nesbitt MLA
Committee for the First and deputy First Minister
Room 435
Ballymiscaw
Parliament Buildings
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

Dear Mr Nesbitt

INQUIRY INTO THE BAROSSO TASK FORCE

The Department of Regional Development has been invited to comment on the Inquiry into the Barosso Task Force commissioned by the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister within the context of the following *terms of reference*:

- a. *Consider the work and structures of the Taskforce including the Barroso Taskforce Working Group since its inception in 2007;*
- b. *Identify the outcomes from the taskforce and assess against the objectives;*
- c. *Identify and consider lessons learned from the functioning of the taskforce in order to inform recommendations for future engagement in EU affairs post Barroso.*

The Department for Regional Development has been particularly proactive in engaging with the institutions and organisations of the European Union and has, therefore, developed a strong and productive operating network across a range of (primarily transport related) policy areas. The establishment of this network has been instrumental in delivering high success levels for the Department in terms of securing EU funding and it is reasonable to state that this work has been bolstered by the collective efforts of the Taskforce rather than having been defined by it.

The Taskforce has been helpful in giving focus and drawing attention to the issue of EU relationship building and influencing the drawdown of competitive EU funds with the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive operating effectively as a *de facto* Agency of the Taskforce in many respects.

The structures and functions of the Taskforce have, to an extent, and as would be expected over the course of time, been re-shaped and evolved as a consequence of (the almost constantly) shifting dynamics of the European Commission and its various agencies. The move towards a three-stranded structure focusing on economic, social and environmental dimensions is, in the view of this department, timely and has the potential to more effectively sensitise the work of the Taskforce to more closely reflect EU policy priorities. This view is, of course, predicated on the assumption that in policy (and by extension funding) terms, the search for Northern Ireland and EU commonalities must continue and be built upon thereafter.

The Department has, in the course of its Taskforce related activities, contributed to different thematic groups and has recently invited relevant officials to consider the potential for inviting non-governmental members on to thematic groups as a means of simultaneously broadening perspective and raising the profile of the Taskforce itself.

The Taskforce 'brand' is unique, and the Department is, through its own experiences, conscious of the need to constantly upgrade the corporate memory of the European Commission; simply because of the constant 'churn' of key personnel and contacts within its various entities. It is, therefore, considered highly important that the Taskforce continues to address this particular challenge in order to retain its profile and effectiveness in the future.

In looking forward, any successor group would, in the opinion of the Department, benefit from a clear understanding of what precisely it seeks to achieve, whether this is, for example, to successfully influence EU policy-making, to access higher levels of funding from 'traditional' sources or to develop a presence within historically unexplored programmes. Strong consideration should, therefore, be given to the precise nature

and terms of reference for any successor group and plans put in place to ensure, a) the communication of these and; b) the delivery of these within *SMART* parameters.

In summary, and within the context of an existing departmental strategy that seeks to proactively engage at a European level, the Department has found the Taskforce to be a usefully supportive mechanism for its work.

This letter is fully disclosable under FOI.

I am copying this letter to the Clerk of the Committee for Regional Development.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Doherty', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

ALAN DOHERTY
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer