



Our Ref: Docs 166902

Being dealt with by: Deirdre Ferguson

Date: 27<sup>th</sup> March 2014

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Mike Nesbitt MLA  
Committee Chairman  
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister  
Room 435  
Parliament Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast, BT4 3XX

Dear Mr Nesbitt

## **Inquiry into the Barroso Taskforce**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the above inquiry. Please find our provisional response below pending final ratification by Council on 1<sup>st</sup> April.

As you may know, Belfast City Council, through our European Unit, has worked closely with the Barroso Taskforce since its establishment in 2007, and its subsequent re-invigoration in 2011. The work of the Unit is cited in the NI Assembly's 'Winning in Europe' strategy and the annual NI Executive EU priorities with respect to the Barroso Taskforce work.

Our work with the Barroso Taskforce may be summarised as follows:

- Attendance and input at the Barroso thematic working group meetings although these have not been regularly held.
- Attendance and input at the NI Assembly EU Advisory Panel chaired by the chair of the OFMDFM committee.
- Taking a lead role in supporting the NI EU funding priority work by way of organising an annual conference at the Brussels Open Days programme in October each year for NI stakeholders.
- Leading the establishment of the NI European Regional Forum (NIERF) in May 2012. The Forum is led by the European Unit of Belfast City Council and the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, and provides a strategic platform for collaboration on EU policy and funding. Its objectives are to:
  - maximise EU funding opportunities
  - shape EU policy to the benefit of the region and
  - influence future funding calls to the benefit of regional stakeholders
- Lead thematic working groups to mirror the 4 working themes of the Barroso Taskforce, namely:
  - Social Cohesion
  - Competitiveness and Employment
  - Innovation and Technology
  - Climate Change and Energy

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**INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE**

- Establish links with the 4 Barroso desk officers located within the NI Executive Bureau in Brussels.

We are currently revising the focus of the NI European Regional Forum to reflect the change of the Barroso thematic working areas to focus on:

- Economy
- Social Cohesion
- Environment

The over arching aim of the Barroso Taskforce has been to heighten N Ireland's engagement in drawing down the competitive EU funds. It is unclear how successful this has been given the Taskforce work really intensified towards the end of the EU funding period 2007-2013.

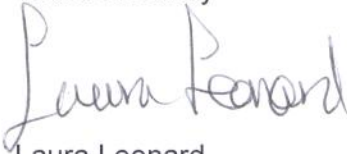
It is the EU Units opinion that the Taskforce has certainly been successful in the following areas:

- Raising Northern Ireland's profile at the level of the EU Institutions in Brussels.
- Having direct personal access to named individuals in 17 of the EU Commission departments (Directorate Generals).
- Energising NI government departments and agencies to up the ante in terms of promoting EU funding opportunities, both within departments and with stakeholders. Two examples of this are the solid DETI preparation to promote and support access to the new Horizon 2020 innovation and research programme, and the establishment of the Task and Finish Health and Prosperity Board and subsequent Health Eco System in NI.
- OFMDFM's decision to co chair the NI European Regional Forum and provide resources to create a post to support the growing work of the Forum and to create an NI EU Capacity fund to help Forum members improve their access to EU funds.

The EU Unit believes that the NI Barroso Taskforce will bear a legacy through the continued work of the Forum but would strongly encourage a more visible and strengthened role for the desk (now known as liaison) officers in Brussels, by way of creating and delivering a communications plan on EU funding and policy similar to the highly successful approach taken by the Irish Regions Office.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to respond. Should you wish to follow up on anything please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely



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European Manager

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