



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	EU Training Event for Councillors
Date:	21 February 2008
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Relevant Background Information

As Members will be aware Northern Ireland's First and Deputy First ministers travelled to Brussels for meetings with senior European Union officials in the first week of January 2008.

During the two-day visit, Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness held talks with European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso. Mr Barroso visited Northern Ireland last May and promised EU support to help strengthen the economy. He also announced the creation of a taskforce aimed at creating economic growth, innovation and improving Northern Ireland's engagement in Europe. During their Brussels visit, the Stormont delegation met Regional Policy Commissioner Danuta Hubner who was appointed by Mr Barroso to head the taskforce.

The outcomes of the taskforce's work are expected to be announced at the end of February. In light of this strong lobbying within Europe, Belfast City Council and its stakeholders need to equip themselves with a solid knowledge of EU systems in order to position Belfast even more strongly within Europe.

To this end the European Unit is facilitating a training and awareness event for Members and officers within Belfast City Council and the other councils that make up the COMET area. The event will take place from 09.30 – 1.00pm on Friday 28 March 2008

The training will help to develop skills and knowledge around lobbying in Europe as well as initiate thought around policies affecting Council. As we are entering a new funding round with increased queries for support from Members, it is essential to heighten Belfast's profile in Europe. Members also sit on monitoring committees for the new EU funding streams and the Council as a whole is also heavily engaged in other EU programmes such as Peace III, Urbact II and Interreg IV.

Members and officers therefore need to be informed and engaged in EU policy developments. A training event such as this will begin a process of awareness and capacity building.

Key Issues

- The launch of the Taskforce's findings and recommendations at the end of February 2008
- Placing Belfast in a stronger position to influence and capitalise on opportunities within the EU.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the training event and attend the course from 09.30 – 1.30pm on 28 March 2008