



Report to: Development Committee

Subject: Launch of Northern Ireland European Regional Forum

Date: April 2012

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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	<p>Members will be aware that in September last year the recommendations from an independent review on the European Unit carried out by FGS McClure Watters in association with PMG Consulting were reported to the Development Committee. The report included a recommendation that the Belfast in Europe platform co-ordinated by the European Unit should develop to become a greater asset for Council by taking on a more strategic role as the Northern Ireland European Regional Forum (NIERF). This Forum would provide a strong platform for collaboration on European (EU) policy and funding.</p>
1.2	<p>Committee agreed the recommendation and in October of last year letters were sent to existing members of the Belfast in Europe platform and to new organisations inviting them to re-affirm membership and/or to join the Forum to build a strong platform of strategic alliances and to ensure a balanced makeup of voluntary, private and public sector members.</p>
1.3	<p>There are now 46 people listed as members of the Northern Ireland European Regional Forum (see appendix 1). It has senior representation from the European Commission Office in Belfast, Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), Northern Ireland Assembly, government departments, the community and voluntary sector and key agencies such as Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) who are actively involved in European affairs. Forum members meet four times each year, a terms of reference has been agreed (see appendix 2) and members work together to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- collaborate to identify suitable funding opportunities, to support bid development and project implementation- promote our region in Europe, demonstrating local good practice in a European context to attract new business/investment opportunities

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promote best practice from other European cities in areas such as housing, security, employment, health and social services, education and economic regeneration to achieve maximum effect within the region - facilitate information exchanges between local people, professionals and politicians by hosting inward visits and showcasing our region in Europe - co-ordinate and share resources and information on current and future EU related activities - share information they have available on EU policy and utilise EU contacts and networks such as Eurocities to influence EU policy development.
1.4	Given the growing membership, representation at senior level and growing profile of the Forum, the newly established Northern Ireland Assembly EU Advisory Panel will keep a watching brief on the work of the Forum and feed key issues to and from the panel.
1.5	<p>In addition, growing interest in the Forum has been shown by the Northern Ireland Barroso Task Force on Europe. The Task Force is coordinated by the OFMDFM and reports directly to the two Junior Ministers. The Task Force is structured around four high level multi sectoral working groups led by a senior civil servant for each and supported by four new Brussels based desk officers around the themes of;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social cohesion - Competitiveness and employment - Innovation and technology - Climate change and energy.
1.6	In order to tie neatly in with the work of the Task Force, the BCC led Northern Ireland European Regional Forum will henceforth have four sub committees led by Forum volunteers.
1.7	It is anticipated that the sub committees will meet three times a year and report to the 4 main Forum plenaries. Barroso Task Force coordinators and the EU Advisory panel secretariat have welcomed this and intend to invite BCC to a future meeting of the OFMDFM Committee to brief members on the Forum.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Given the growing membership and senior level of representation of the Northern Ireland European Regional Forum led by BCC, it is proposed that John McGrillen as Director of Development should chair the Forum supported by the European Manager and team.
2.2	The Forum is planning an official launch to take place at an evening event which would be opened by the Lord Mayor on 29 May 2012. This will coincide with a meeting of all 13 European Empowerment and Inclusion networks in Belfast and Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) European Unit's annual publicity event which will showcase current Northern Ireland European Social Fund projects. Representatives from the European Commission from both Brussels and Northern Ireland, Managing Authorities from across the European Union as well as local authorities and EU-funded projects will come to Belfast for these events. The Forum has agreed this would be an excellent opportunity for a formal launch and is covering costs of the launch from its own budget.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	It is anticipated that the launch of the Northern Ireland European Regional Forum will cost no more than £3,500. This has been agreed and allocated within the Forum budget. This budget was rolled over from the former Belfast in Europe grouping and is held by BCC as secretariat of the Forum.
3.2	In its role as secretariat the EU Unit will work with the Forum to plan the launch event.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no Equality and Good Relations considerations attached to this report.

5	Recommendations
	It is recommended that:
5.1	A proposal is made to the Forum that John McGrillen should become the Chair given the growing number of members and senior level of representation from member organisations.
5.2	Approval is given for the Chair, Deputy Chair and Director of Development to attend the launch of the Forum on 29 th May 2012.
5.3	Approval is given for the Chair of the Development Committee or his nominee to attend an OFMDFM Committee briefing in the near future, along with the European Unit Manager to brief Member of the Local Assembly (MLA's) with respect to the work of the Northern Ireland European Regional Forum.

6	Decision Tracking
There is no Decision Tracking attached to this report.	

7	Key to Abbreviations
<p>EU – European OFMDFM – Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister NIERF – Northern Ireland European Regional Forum ESF – European Social Fund MLA – Member of the Local Assembly PSNI – Police Service Northern Ireland DEL- Department of Employment and Learning</p>	

8	Documents Attached
<p>Appendix 1 – List of members Appendix 2 – Terms of reference</p>	