



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	THE ROLE OF ELECTED MEMBERS IN EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
Date:	12 th June 2012
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will recall a discussion at the Development Committee meeting on 20 th March 2012, around the role of Belfast City Council and, in particular, the elected Members in relation to Eurocities and future EU engagement. At this meeting, the Members agreed continued engagement in the Eurocities Network, but asked that a report be produced in due course reflecting on the role of elected Members.
1.2	Like all Eurocities Network members, Belfast City Council engages in various thematic Fora within Eurocities, meeting with officer counterparts on a quarterly and bi-annual basis and engaging in project and policy development. Elected Members from Belfast City Council, through the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of Development attend the Eurocities annual conference in November of each year. In the past, they have also occasionally attended high level political meetings in Brussels to lobby on the role of Cities with the EU Commission and EU Parliament. Within Belfast City Council, the remit of European Affairs lies with the Development Committee although the EU Unit works across all departments. In other cities, it is led by the Mayor and Leader of the Council who act as champions for EU affairs, eg Sir Richard Leese of Manchester City Council or Councillor Flo Clucas of Liverpool City Council. Although the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of Development within Belfast City Council attend the Eurocities AGM, there is the potential to increase elected Member involvement in our EU work.

1.3	There are opportunities throughout the year where Members could play a greater role. An upcoming example is where Belfast City Council has been asked to host the Eurocities Knowledge Society Forum here in Belfast in June 2012. The theme of the event is cyber security and Belfast has many examples of best practice to showcase during this 2-day event. The Chairman of Development will speak at this event, which will be attended by approximately 70 domestic and European delegates. Other recent examples of elected Member involvement have been through Belfast City Council-led EU projects such as the ongoing B Team project led by the Arterial Routes team.
1.4	In addition, the Chairman of Development or nominee officiates each year at the launch of the European Day of Languages and opens the annual Opportunity Europe event in St. George's in October.
1.5	Political representation in Europe has typically been limited to political engagement delivered through the 4 Committees of the Regions representatives (organised through NILGA), the 3 MEPs and through the 2 Junior Ministers.
1.6	<p>Since 2010, the 2 Junior Ministers have played an enhanced role in EU affairs in NI and lead the NI Barroso Task Force. This is a unique platform to engage senior NI civil servants with their Commission counterparts in Brussels. Smart targets have been set to enhance NI engagement and draw down on non structural funds by 20% per government department annually. Work plans around 4 themes to achieve this are currently awaiting NI Executive sign off, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Cohesion • Competitiveness and Employment • Innovation and Technology • Climate Change and Energy
1.7	At an Assembly level the OFMDFM Committee has created a new NI EU Advisory Panel to provide a working brief on EU affairs. Belfast City Council's EU Manager participates on the panel.

2.	Key Issues
2.1	There is a real need for the development of a political engagement between Members and a range of political representatives in relation to the shape of the EU funding programme for the period 2014-2020. Given the clear role that cities play in the regional economy, Belfast and Derry City Councils, in particular, need to emphasize the need for a programme, which focuses on the development of urban areas, similar to the Rural Development Programme, which currently exists. It is important that the Council seeks to influence key political players who will contribute to the shaping of this policy, particularly the Minister of Finance, MEPs and the Junior Ministers with OFMDFM. This should be included in the agenda for any future meeting between the Party Leaders, Chairmen of the SP&R and Development Committees and the Minister for Finance.

2.2	An opportunity also exists to secure agreement from the DFP Minister for a devolved programme for the Belfast area under the future funding arrangements. This would allow Belfast City Council to administer EU funds for the City as opposed to bidding through government departments to access resources. Again, it would be important that the Council seeks to influence key decision-makers to shape the future funding arrangements to ensure that this can happen.
2.3	Members could also consider the nomination of specific Members to acts as EU political champions as the other Councils do, to work closely with the EU Unit, to attend occasional events in Brussels and aspire to represent and promote the City at EU conferences. It is important that Belfast/NI position itself and not be overlooked in favour of newer regions in Europe.
2.4	The Eurocities Network is currently looking at ways to better engage elected Members in EU Affairs in Cities and within the Network. Belfast City Council's EU Manager recently sat on a panel with other Eurocities officers giving examples of NI Political Engagement in Europe. Other examples of City experiences are outline in Appendix 1 attached to this report, which may be of interest to Members.
2.5	Finally, Members should consider attendance at the annual Brussels Open Days in October of each year. To date, for 3 years running, the EU Unit has organised a funding and policy information session with EU Commission representatives for all NI delegates visiting Brussels at this time. It is usually chaired by the COMET Chairman who to date has not been a Belfast City Council elected Member.
2.6	Belfast City Council has 2 seats on the COMET INTERREG Partnership Board. Unfortunately, due to very busy diary commitments, the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of Belfast City Council's Development Committee (as Board nominees) have regularly been unable to attend. Member consideration could be given to nominate alternative Members within the Development Committee to sit on the COMET INTERREG Partnership Board, thereby ensuring that Belfast City Council is represented as a full partner alongside the other 5 councils. This is an important time to influence the shape of Interreg V, which will provide further opportunities to apply for funding to assist with City Investment Programme and try to extend the eligible area to allow Belfast City Council to work with Dublin, in the future, as a more natural partner than rural border communities.

3.	Resource Implications
3.1	There are no resource implications at this stage, but should Members decide to engage in EU events, travel and subsistence within reason can be found within the Eurocities budget within the EU Unit.

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

5.	Recommendations
5.1	<p>Member are asked to consider better engagement in EU activity and to –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominate political champions to work closely with the European Unit to become skilled in EU policy and programmes and attend EU events, where appropriate, to represent and promote the interests of Belfast. • Continue attendance at the Eurocities AGM, but through the above-mentioned political champions. • Ensure councillor attendance and EU champions at the annual Brussels Open Days and represent Council at the COMET-led seminar organised by the EU Unit. • Member consideration should also be given to the selection of alternative Development Committee Members to sit on the COMET INTERREG Partnership Board.

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

	Key to Abbreviations
NILGA	NI Local Government Association
MEPs	Members of the European Parliament
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

	Documents Attached
Appendix 1 'Mission impossible? Getting politicians more involved in EUROCITIES'.	