



Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Inquiry into the Barroso Taskforce
Date:	18 March 2014
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that in May 2007, the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, announced a European Commission Taskforce for NI.
1.2	This inaugural Taskforce for a specific region in the EU was created in order to support the Peace Process, with particular emphasis on how to support Northern Ireland in its efforts to improve its economic competitiveness and to create sustainable employment. After the Executive took up their new mandate in May 2011, Junior Ministers assumed the Chair of the Barroso Task Force Working Group (BTWG).
1.3	At its meeting on 19 February 2014, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) agreed the following terms of reference for an Inquiry into the Barroso Taskforce: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consider the work and structures of the Taskforce including the Barroso Taskforce Working Group since its inception in 2007 – Identify the outcomes from the Taskforce and assess against the objectives – Identify and consider lessons learned from the functioning of the Taskforce in order to inform recommendations for future engagement in EU affairs post Barroso
1.4	Belfast City Council (BCC), through the EU Unit has subsequently been asked for Council views on the work of the Barroso Taskforce to date.

2	Key Issues
2.1	BCC through the EU Unit has engaged with the Barroso Taskforce since its establishment in 2007, and its subsequent re-invigoration since 2011. Indeed, 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.
2.2	<p>This work may be summarised as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Social Cohesion – Competitiveness and Employment – Innovation and Technology – Climate Change and Energy – Establish links with the 4 Barroso desk officers located within the NI Executive Bureau in Brussels.
2.3	<p>It is important to note that since late 2013, the Barroso themes and Brussels based desk officer posts working on these have been revised to 3 thematic working areas including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Economy – Social Cohesion – Environment
2.4	<p>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.</p>
2.5	<p>It is the EU Units opinion that the Taskforce has certainly been successful in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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

