



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Northern Ireland Taskforce Visit to Belfast
Date:	Friday, 11 March, 2011
Reporting Officer:	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive (Ext. 6002)
Contact Officer:	Laura Leonard, European Manager (Ext 3577)

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that on 9 December, 2010, Belfast City Council was represented at the official opening of the NI Executive Office in Brussels which acted to re-ignite the work of the NI Taskforce for Europe.
1.2	The first meeting of the Taskforce to take place since this visit will occur in Belfast on 30 March and the Council has been requested to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) provide a venue along with audio visual equipment for a plenary session which has been arranged to take place in Belfast Castle; andb) host a drinks reception at the City Hall from 6.30pm to 8.30pm on the evening of 30 March for 150 guests which will include delegates from Brussels as well as officials from Belfast.

2	Key Issues
2.1	In May 2007, Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, set up the NI Taskforce for Europe. The purpose was to ensure that NI government departments work more closely with their EU Commission counterparts to maximise EU opportunities for NI. This resulted in a report in May 2008, whereby the NI Assembly set out its commitment and targets which would encourage better engagement with Europe.
2.2	On 9 December, President Barroso reignited the NI Taskforce on Europe at the official opening of the NI Executive Office in Brussels. At the opening of the office, President Barroso and the First and Deputy First Ministers for NI, committed publicly to a newly launched NI Taskforce in Europe. In practice, this means that each government department in NI will have assigned officers who will work closely with their counterpart colleagues in the similar departments of the EU Commission. Their job will be to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify and maximise EU funding for NI; and – Intervene at early stages with respect to the formulation and influencing of European policy and legislation.
2.3	On 15 December 2010, the Deputy First Minister, on behalf of the NI Assembly, made a speech again publicly committing NI government to the NI Taskforce whose job it was, he explained, <i>“to provide us with a route map to better and more effective engagement with the European Union and to exploiting the opportunities that this presents”</i> .
2.4	<p>From March 30 to April 1 officials from Brussels and members of the Taskforce will meet in Belfast. During their meetings they will take forward previous discussions held and will focus on 4 key themes, namely,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitiveness and Employment • Social Cohesion • Energy and Climate Change • Innovation and Technology <p>These discussions will inform future NI engagement in Europe with the aim of increasing funding leverage by 20%.</p>
2.5	On the evening of March 30 th a drinks reception will be held at the City Hall. Members are invited to attend this event which will provide an opportunity to improve key relationships between Belfast and Brussels and will showcase the city in respect of how important it is and can be in the future to Europe.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	Provision has been made in the revenue estimates for hospitality and the amount of £2,000 to cover the cost of the drinks and canapés can be met from the relevant budget.
3.2	Provision has been made with the EU unit Budget for the cost of £800 associated with the hire of Belfast Castle for the plenary meeting. Costs for catering of the event will be covered by OFMDFM.

4	Equality Implications
4.1	N/A

5	Recommendations
5.1	The Committee is asked to agree to:
5.1.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the use of the City Hall on 30 March to host a drinks reception which will include delegates from Brussels as well as officials from Belfast and to cover the cost associated with the provision of hospitality in the form of red/white wine and soft drinks and canapés, expected cost approximately £2,000; and
5.1.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approve the use of Belfast Castle as the venue which will host the Taskforce plenary meeting on 30th March, at a cost of £800 which will come from the EU unit budget.

6	Decision Tracking
Officers responsible: Laura Leonard, European Manager April 2011	

7	Key to Abbreviations

8	Documents Attached
N/A	

