

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

31 March 2008

**FOSTER ANNOUNCES FUNCTIONS FOR NEW COUNCILS**

Environment Minister Arlene Foster today spelt out details of the future shape of local government.

In a statement to the Assembly, the Minister said that the Executive's vision for local government would mean a reduction in the number of councils but these would be responsible for added functions. The Minister said:

**“Our vision is one of a strong, dynamic, local government creating communities that are vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe, sustainable and have the needs of all citizens at their core. Central to this is the provision of high quality, efficient services that respond to the needs of people and continuously improve over time. It reflects the strong desire that central and local government should work in partnership.**

**“The current 26 council areas will be rationalised to create 11 new council areas. This strikes a balance between reducing some of the diversity between the existing areas in terms of population characteristics and rating wealth and promoting the ability of councils and their communities to identify and interact with each other.**

**“New innovative and creative models of service delivery will be developed to promote modern and efficient practice, by grouping councils together for the delivery of significant services, such as planning, regeneration, building control and environmental health. These will work in tandem with other service providers.”**

The Minister outlined that following consideration of the responses to the Emerging Findings report that was published on 19 October 2007 the functions to transfer to local government would include:

- local development plan functions, development control and enforcement;
- Local public realm aspects of roads functions including streetscaping; town and city centre environmental improvements; street lighting; off-street parking; permitting local events to be held on roads etc ;
- Urban regeneration and community development delivery functions including those associated with physical development, area based regeneration (such as Neighbourhood Renewal) along with some community development programmes and support for the voluntary and community sectors;
- A range of housing functions; and
- A number of functions associated with driving forward local economic development, local tourism and local arts, sports and leisure.

Arrangements will also be developed whereby local government will have a formal input to the decisions in relation to a number of responsibilities that are remaining with central government. The Minister continued:

**“The strengthening of local government will be a process not an event. The Executive will review the family of functions to be delivered by local government 12 months after the new Councils become operational and periodically thereafter.**

**“The decisions I have set out today provide the firm foundations and framework for a once in a generation opportunity for us to create strong, effective local government that is at the heart of vibrant, safe and sustainable communities, delivering co-ordinated services for all our citizens.”**