

14 October 2009

### **Poots visits new council area representatives**

Environment Minister Edwin Poots addressed the Transition Committee of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Councils during their meeting on Tuesday 13 October.

Transition Committees have been set up in each of the 11 new council areas and their role is to undertake much of the preparatory work to facilitate the convergence of amalgamating councils. This will pave the way for Statutory Transition Committees, which will be established by early 2010, to take key decisions in advance of the new councils coming into effect in May 2011 and ensure a smooth transition.

Mr Poots said: **“The Local Government Reform Programme is now moving into the critical implementation phase so I felt that it was important to personally meet each of the Transition Committees.**

**“The Antrim and Newtownabbey Transition Committee will be central to delivering this transition to a new council in May 2011. I do not for one minute underestimate the workload involved in amalgamating these two councils but I am confident that in continuing to work together, we can and will successfully change the face of local government for the better.**

**“I am heartened from my visit today to see the progress already made by the Committee in this ambitious programme and I encourage them to ensure that the momentum they have built up is maintained.”**

Joint Chairs of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Transition Committee, Cllr Oran Keenan and Cllr Victor Robinson welcomed the Minister and thanked him for taking time to visit their Committee.

Cllr Keenan said: “The Minister’s visit demonstrates the importance of our plans to create the new Antrim and Newtownabbey Council in May 2011. Our two merging councils are working well together, having already appointed a Transition Co-ordinator and developed a short term vision strategy for the provision of services within the new council.”

Cllr Robinson added: “We recognise that there is still much to do but we believe that what is achieved during the next two years will set the direction of local government for a generation. We are committed to making the transition process work for the benefit of citizens and staff alike and we are keen to build on the success of both councils.”

Cllr Keenan concluded: “I know that our Transition Committee has found the Minister’s visit helpful and productive and I am sure other Transition Committees will find this personal approach key to taking forward reform.”

The Minister completed his visit by stating that he remained committed to doing everything possible to deliver on the local government reform timetable. He said: **“I firmly believe that this offers us an opportunity to transform services so that we are more proactive, co-ordinated and responsive to the needs of our citizens. It is right to deliver improved public services as close to the people as possible, with councils fulfilling the leading role at the heart of the local community.”**

**Notes to editors:**

1. The Local Government Reform Programme will see the existing 26 councils reduced to 11 in May 2011. It will involve the transfer of a range of central government functions to local government including responsibility for planning, regeneration and certain road functions.
2. This visit was the second in a series of visits to each of the Transition Committees throughout Northern Ireland.
3. Following guidance issued by the Department of the Environment, all 11 new council areas have now established Transition Committees.
4. The Antrim and Newtownabbey Transition Committee consists of councillors from the two constituent Borough councils.
5. All media enquiries should be directed to the DOE Press Office on 028 9054 0003. Out of office hours please contact the duty press officer via pager number 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.