

20 October 2009

### **Local government reform on track for May 2011 – Poots**

Environment Minister, Edwin Poots, today outlined in the Assembly the progress that is being made in the reform of local government.

The Minister also launched a short period of stakeholder engagement on the economic appraisal for the reorganisation programme.

The Minister said: **“I want to make it clear that I am absolutely committed to successfully delivering local government reform in May 2011.**

**“Since the Executive took these decisions in March 2008 I and my predecessors have been working hard to ensure the necessary legislation and practical arrangements are in place for the move to 11 councils in May 2011.**

**“We are making real progress and the publication of the economic appraisal demonstrates an important step forward in this process. This document outlines the available options and clearly demonstrates how reform can be achieved; the associated costs and the financial and non-financial benefits including a projected saving of £438million over a 25-year period.”**

The Minister welcomed the views of his fellow MLAs, local government and other interested stakeholders and asked them to give the report careful consideration before feeding back their views by the end of November.

Mr Poots continued: **“This is a uniquely challenging process and I recognise that change on this scale does not happen overnight or without associated costs. The economic appraisal clearly demonstrates that the long term gains quickly outweigh these implementation costs if we push ahead and embrace wholesale change.**

**“In this harsh economic climate efficiency and savings are everyone’s number one priority. This is precisely why a programme that demonstrates effectiveness and value for money is even more relevant now than it was 18 months ago.**

**“It will produce better performing, stronger and more effective councils to deliver real improvements in services to local communities.”**

The Minister concluded: **“Local government reform is something that affects each and every citizen in Northern Ireland so these are not decisions that I or anyone else involved in the process are taking lightly. However I firmly believe that if we make the right decision on the design of our new local government, then reorganisation will provide significant benefits to the people of Northern Ireland.”**

**Notes to editors:**

### **Local Government Reform Programme:**

1. In March 2008, the Executive announced the go ahead for Local Government Reform. The vision is of a strong, dynamic local government that creates vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe and sustainable communities that have the needs of all citizens at their core. Central to that vision is the provision of high quality, efficient services that respond to people's needs and continuously improve over time.
2. The Local Government Reform Programme is one of the most complex and challenging areas of the Reform of Public Administration. It involves a reduction in the number of local councils from 26 to 11.
3. It affects over 9,000 staff in local government and involves the transfer of approximately 1,000 staff from central government. It also includes the transfer of a large part of the planning function in the Department of the Environment, and important functions from the Department for Social Development and the Department for Regional Development's Roads Service.
4. It involves the delivery of three major pieces of legislation through the Assembly (Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions, Finance and Reorganisation Bills).
5. Structures have been put in place to ensure that all decisions are rigorously monitored and have the assent of the five main political parties, which are each represented on the Strategic Leadership Board. The Strategic Leadership Board is chaired by the Environment Minister, Edwin Poots. The Board was established to oversee the effective creation of 11 new councils. Members include ten political party representatives, nominated by the five main political parties and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA).

### **Economic Appraisal:**

6. Consultancy support is used for a range of specialist work, particularly for the development of the business case for Local Government Reform. PricewaterhouseCoopers produced the full economic appraisal of the Reform Programme which includes a detailed assessment of the options for delivery of the key services by the 11 new councils; a full economic appraisal of each option; and an outline implementation plan.
7. This appraisal will be put through a rigorous quality review to ensure that it is fit for purpose. In addition to scrutiny by the department it requires political buy-in through the agreement of the Strategic Leadership Board.

### **Further Information:**

8. Copies of the report are available for download on the Local Government section of the Department of the Environment website <http://www.doeni.gov.uk>.
9. Copies of the document are available by request from Local Government Policy Division Tel: 028 9025 6064 , Fax: 028 9025 6080 Email: [stephen.western@doeni.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.western@doeni.gov.uk) or write to Stephen Western Local Government Policy Division, Department of the Environment, Goodwood House, 44-58 May Street, Belfast, BT1 4NN.
10. All media enquiries should be directed to the DOE Press Office 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.