

19 November 2009

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

Environment Minister Edwin Poots paid tribute to the crucial preparatory work being carried out by the Mid Ulster Transition Committee at their meeting on Wednesday 18 November.

During his visit the Minister commended the Committee as they prepare for the amalgamation of Cookstown, Dungannon & South Tyrone and Magherafelt Councils in May 2011.

Transition Committees have been set up in each of the 11 new council areas. Whilst they will not become statutory until early 2010, the work currently being carried out will enable the Statutory Transition Committees to take key decisions in advance of the new councils coming in to 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 Mid-Ulster 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 three 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 pleased 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.”**

The Mayor of Dungannon and South Tyrone Council, Cllr Robert Mulligan, and the Chairman of the Mid Ulster Transition Committee, Cllr Francie Molloy, greeted the Minister and thanked him for taking time to visit their Committee.

Cllr Molloy said: “The Minister’s visit demonstrates the importance of our plans to create the new Mid Ulster Council in May 2011. Our three merging councils are working well together, having already appointed a Transition Co-ordinator and developed a Vision, Mission, Values and Strategic priorities for the provision of services within the new council.”

Cllr Molloy added: “We recognise that there is still much to do but we believe that what is achieved during the next 18 months 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 the three existing councils.”

Cllr Molloy 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 his 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. Minister Poots made a statement to the Assembly on the way forward for local government reform on 20 October. He also published the economic appraisal of the programme and launched a 6-week period of stakeholder engagement. This appraisal 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. Copies of the report and the Minister's statement are available on: [http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/local\\_government/local\\_government\\_service\\_delivery-2.htm](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/local_government/local_government_service_delivery-2.htm)
3. This was the fifth in a series of visits to each of the Transition Committees throughout Northern Ireland.
4. Following guidance issued by the Department of the Environment, all 11 new council areas have now established Transition Committees.
5. The membership of the Mid-Ulster Transition Committee comprises councillors from Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council, and Cookstown and Magherafelt District councils.
6. 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.