

15 January 2010

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

Environment Minister Edwin Poots addressed the Transition Committee of Fermanagh and Omagh District Councils at their meeting on 15 January.

Transition Committees have been set up in each of the 11 new council areas. 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 early in 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 Fermanagh and Omagh 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 pleased from my visit today to see the significant progress made by the Fermanagh and Omagh Committee. The establishment of a vision and agreed arrangements for working together to implement priorities including a comprehensive work plan should mean that the convergence to the new council is as seamless as possible. I encourage them to ensure that the momentum they have built up is maintained.”**

Joint Chairs of the Transition Committee, Cllr Bertie Kerr (Fermanagh) and Cllr Patrick McGowan MBE (Omagh) welcomed the Minister and thanked him for taking time to visit their Committee and respond to their questions.

Cllr Kerr said: “We recognise that much remains to be done and there is a very challenging work programme ahead of us. We will continue to work together so that the local community of the new council area will benefit from the reform of local government.”

Cllr McGowan continued: “We welcomed this opportunity to pose questions to the Minister about issues of concern and thank him for his candid responses.

“Our Transition Committee has found the Minister’s visit both helpful and productive and I am sure that other Committees will welcome this personal approach as we all seek to move forward in the reform process.”

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. I appreciate there are concerns at the moment but my position remains that 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. I continue to do everything within my power to progress this.”**

**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 was the eighth 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 membership of Fermanagh and Omagh Transition Committee comprises councillors from the two constituent District 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.