

26 November 2009

Poots visits council cluster.

Environment Minister Edwin Poots addressed the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Transition Committee at their meeting on 25 November.

The merger of Armagh City and District, Banbridge District Council and Craigavon Borough Council will take place in May of 2011, but the three councils are already working well together to ensure a seamless service for residents.

Voluntary 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 help with the merger of the amalgamating councils.

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 Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon 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.”

Current Chair of the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Transition Committee, Cllr Kenneth Twyble, welcomed the Minister and thanked him for taking time to visit their Committee.

Cllr Twyble said: “Our three councils are working well together. We have already appointed a Change Management Officer and developed a short term vision for the provision of services within the new council. We have also set up a number of project teams who are making great progress in the merging of services.”

Cllr Twyble added: “We are building on the success of all three councils and are committed to making the transition process work for both our residents and staff. 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.”

Cllr Twyble concluded: “The Transition Committee has found the Minister’s visit helpful and productive and we look forward to reporting our further progress to him.”

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 was the seventh 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 Voluntary Transition Committees. Their work 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.
4. The Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Transition Committee consists of councillors from Armagh City and District Council, Banbridge District Council and Craigavon Borough Council.
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.