

20 January 2010

Poots visits new council area representatives

Environment Minister Edwin Poots paid tribute to the crucial preparatory work being carried out by the Derry City and Strabane District Council Transition Committee at their meeting today.

During his visit the Minister commended the Committee as they prepare for the amalgamation of Derry City and Strabane District Councils in May 2011.

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 Transition Committee of Derry City and Strabane District Councils 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 progress already made by the Committee in this ambitious programme. The establishment of a

mission statement and vision and the fact that joint working is already taking place on key issues such as service delivery, IT and finance should mean that the convergence to the new council is as seamless as possible for staff and residents. I encourage them to ensure that the momentum they have built up is maintained.”

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 tenth 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 Transition Committee of Derry City and Strabane District Council comprises of 16 members, eight from each 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.