

10 December 2009

Poots visits new council area representatives

Environment Minister Edwin Poots today addressed the Transition Committee of Down and Newry and Mourne Councils.

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 by early next year, 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 Down and Newry and Mourne 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 progress already made by Down and Newry and Mourne Transition Committee in this ambitious programme and I encourage them to ensure that the momentum they have built up is maintained.”

Joint Chairs of the Transition Committee, Cllr William Dick (Down District Council) and Cllr Charlie Casey (Newry and Mourne District Council) welcomed the Minister and thanked him for taking time to visit their Committee.

Cllr Casey said: "Ministers Poots' visit underlines the importance of our work to create a new council for Down and Newry and Mourne. Our two merging councils are already working well together on a number of projects and are currently developing a short term vision for the provision of services within the new council area."

Cllr Casey added: "We recognise that there is a great deal to do in advance of May 2011, but we are committed to building on the positive relationship between our existing councils and to making the transition process work for the benefit of our residents and staff alike."

Cllr Dick concluded: "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. 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
3. This was the eighth 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 Down and Newry and Mourne Transition Committee comprises councillors from Down District Council, and Newry and Mourne District Council.
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.