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**RESTRUCTURING OF THE EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARDS:
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOUTHERN BOARD AREA**

Following a four year review of educational administration, Michael Ancram announced in June that the number of education and library boards should be reduced from 5 to 3. A new South-Western Board would be formed by the addition of the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council areas (currently in the Western board) to the existing Southern Board. On the subsequent publication of the draft legislation, the Minister also indicated his view that the Headquarters of the new South-Western Board should be in Omagh, rather than Armagh, the current HQ of the Southern Board.

The District Councils have supported the campaign initiated by the boards to preserve the status quo. However, without prejudice to their opposition to the restructuring, the District Council areas which make up the Southern Board (Newry and Mourne, Banbridge, Craigavon, Dungannon, Armagh and Cookstown) have lobbied in support of the retention of Armagh as the HQ of any new board. Michael Ancram met a deputation of these District Councils on 26 November at which Dungannon was represented by Cllr Vincent Currie.

The present position is that the Minister is considering all the views which have been put to him during the consultation period, which ended on 29 November, and that no decisions have been taken.

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