

## Unregulated exams fail children and parents: Bradley

SDLP Education spokesperson, Dominic Bradley MLA, said unregulated transfer tests such as the AQE cannot be allowed to become a permanent feature of the educational system.

He said: "We must wish the children who have been successful well, but we must also recognize that selective systems by definition reject many, many more children than they ever select."

"The current transfer situation is an educational failure, a social failure and above all a political failure by Minister Caित्रona Ruane who has abandoned parents and children. She is doing nothing, absolutely nothing to achieve the sort of consensus needed to end selective education."

"We will not allow the present chaos to endure. That is why the SDLP last year put forward proposals for an edu-

cator-led panel to find an early compromise to end unregulated transfer testing while we work on a long-term solution. We are pleased that other parties have responded positively and we hope that the panel will have interim proposals to put before the Assembly Education Committee as early as Easter.

"We in the SDLP hope that a compromise can be found similar to the very proposals which the Minister put forward in 2008 and then withdrew in a huff. Her opposition to selection will ring hollow if she and Sinn Fein continue to ignore the only initiative which has the faintest chance of ending the current transfer mess. Let this be the last year in which children and parents are put through the torture of multiple unregulated tests."

## Newry and Mourne District Council hosts major Community Planning Conference



Pictured with Mayor John Feehan at Wednesday's Community Planning Conference are Barbary Cook and George Black (seated) and (rear) Eddie Curtis, Conor Patterson, Alan Christie, Aisling Rennick, Jerome Burns and Thomas McCall.

ON Wednesday last Newry and Mourne District Council hosted over one hundred delegates at a major conference exploring the potential for the introduction of Community Planning.

The introduction of Community Planning will be one of the most fundamental changes to the functions of Northern Irish Councils in many years. The Conference brought together representatives from the Community, Public and Private Sector to jointly discuss the implications of Community Planning and the contribution each sector can make to its development.

Community Planning has been in place in Scotland since 2003 and has been re-

garded as having made significant progress in bringing organisations together to work for the wellbeing of communities. In particular, the Community Planning process in Glasgow has been hailed as an example of excellent partnership working. Newry and Mourne District Council was delighted to have Mr George Black, Chief Executive of Glasgow City Council as the keynote speaker at the conference.

Mr Black spoke about the Glasgow experience, highlighting its successes and the processes followed to achieve success. He outlined the challenges faced in developing the Community Planning vi-

sion for the city how it operated in practice.

Councillor John Feehan, Mayor of Newry and Mourne said "Community Planning has the potential to contribute significantly to improving the health and wellbeing of communities by bringing together organisations to plan, provide and promote wellbeing and provide opportunities for communities to become more involved in decision-making, which affects their lives and wellbeing."

## Bessbrook station targeted in Real IRA gun attack

By Brónagh Murphy

THE Real IRA gun attack on Bessbrook police station last weekend was a 'reckless attack on each and every resident' of the village, says the PSNI's Sector Commander for south Armagh, Inspector Davey Beck.

Shortly after 9.00pm last Sunday January 21st, a car pulled up at the gates of the station. A number of shots were fired at the base before the car made off in the direction of Convent Hill. No one was injured in the attack.

Inspector Beck said: "This attack was not only an attempt to kill officers who are serving the local community but also a reckless attack on each and every resident of the Bessbrook area. Despite this incident and the previous attacks on my officers at Crossmaglen, we will continue to provide a policing service to the community in south Armagh."

The day after the attack, a man purporting to be from the Real IRA called the newsdesk of this newspaper. Using a recognised codeword, he said the organi-

sation carried out the shooting and also claimed responsibility for two recent gun attacks on Crossmaglen police station.

MP for the area, Sinn Féin's Conor Murphy, said the shooting was 'an attempt by a tiny group with no support in this area to make themselves relevant at the expense of the local community.'

"Those responsible want to see the British Army back in south Armagh. Our community does not want this. This group will not succeed in dragging us back to the dark days," Mr Murphy said.

Voicing his condemnation, SDLP Newry and Armagh MLA Dominic Bradley said: "This looks like a bit of low-risk action by the would-be heroes of dissident republicanism designed to drive a wedge between our policing service and the community they serve, but it will not work."

Ulster Unionist MLA Danny Kennedy described the shooting as 'cowardly and utterly reckless'.

"There is no doubt that the weapon used in this incident was a high velocity gun and highlights the extent of the capa-

bility and threat posed by dissident Republicans," he said.

Commenting on the fact that Bessbrook police station is earmarked for closure, Mr Kennedy called on the Northern Ireland Policing Board to revisit the decision it has taken in respect of the station's future.

He expressed relief that neither PSNI officers or nearby residents were injured in the incident and said the nature of the attack confirmed that the republican dissidents responsible were ruthless terrorists who had no moral qualms about launching despicable attacks of this nature.

Detectives investigating the shooting are keen to speak to the driver of a vehicle which was travelling on Convent Hill in the direction of Bessbrook village, adjacent to the station, at approximately 9:10pm. The driver, or anyone who witnessed the incident or has information in relation to it is asked to contact detectives in Newry on 0845 600 8000.

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