

# SAVING MONEY THROUGH SHARING COUNCIL SERVICES

In the current economic climate councils across the country are seeing major cuts in government grants. At the same time many residents are suffering a squeeze on their incomes and are not keen to see either increases in the council tax or higher charges for services that councils provide. Clearly, savings in spending need to be made.

We believe that our local councils and other public bodies have a choice about how to approach this and think that the best way to do this is through working with other councils to share services.

This can vary from sharing senior management to amalgamating departments across two or more councils. It's not rocket science: councils up and down the country are now saving significant sums this way. According to a recent (December 2011) Local Government Association report 219 councils are now saving money through sharing services, with savings of £156 million a year.

For more details on this go to:

[www.local.gov.uk/better-for-less-po-map](http://www.local.gov.uk/better-for-less-po-map)

(PO stands for productivity opportunities).

The map shows councils across the country who are saving money and also allows a search by category of saving eg. Shared management.

It's an idea that has full government support - from successive governments - and from others.

**'Shared services are among the easy wins for councils looking for ways to improve efficiency and make savings, according to John Cridland, director general of the CBI'**  
(Municipal Journal 24th March 2011).

## So what's happening locally?

Not nearly enough, according to the local Liberal Democrats. Though council motions, questions and budget proposals they've been pushing for shared services for years. The Conservatives running Stratford District Council have rejected two possibilities. Discussions took place with the obvious partners - Warwick District Council - but the talks between the two collapsed. Then the Conservatives talked to Malvern hills District Council - but again without success. Meanwhile surrounding councils were gradually setting up joint working arrangements, meaning that the number of possible partners for Stratford steadily diminished.

The current position is that the Liberal Democrats still believe progress is possible and have put forward a number of specific suggestions. Finally one of these - making better use of council buildings through sharing - looks like bearing fruit. The county council is taking up spare space in the District Council's offices in Stratford - savings estimated at £120,000 a year.

# Do we need 6 Council offices in Warwickshire?



Above: Stratford council offices



Above: Rugby council offices



Above: Nuneaton council offices



Above: County Council offices



Above: Warwick council offices  
Below: Atherstone council offices



When the Government looked at re-organising local government they asked Councils to put forward their views. One option was 'Unitary' - merging the County and District Councils.

But the Conservative run County Council rejected the Unitary option - and admitted that no financial work was done on the possible savings before taking this decision.

Yet Councils elsewhere have predicted huge savings. Liberal Democrats believe that at the very least this option should have been costed to identify savings, and then local people should have been asked for their opinion.

Instead, the Tories running our County and District Councils decided to go for the status quo. The Lib Dems believe the Unitary option should have been costed - if only to provide a benchmark for future savings.

## HUGE SAVINGS ELSEWHERE

In the current review twenty six Councils submitted proposals to go the Unitary route. Some of those Councils are Conservative controlled and all have looked at the financial impact of their decision on Council Tax payers.

Surrey claimed they can save Council taxpayers £80 million a year through going Unitary. Bedfordshire said they can save £25 million a year. Buckinghamshire stated they could save £10 million a year on management headcount alone. All these three Councils are Conservative run.

## SO WHAT HAPPENED THEN?

The Liberal Democrats put forward a motion to the District Council asking for financial targets to be set from closer working with other Councils in the area.

Council reports suggest that savings may be available by reducing management numbers, integrated procurement, accommodation rationalisation and common IT platforms.\*

Without targets for savings the Lib Dems suspect that the full potential of savings may not be realised so we've been keeping the pressure on the Conservatives to start delivering for Council tax payers.

We still believe that sharing services is the way forward - and eventually even Stratford will have to go this route.

\* for more details see District Council Executive papers for 7th April 2008, Item 4 - shared services.