

## Appendix 4.

Frequently Asked Questions extracted from One Council for Wiltshire Website:

# Unitary Authority - Both Sides of the Story

You may have seen lots of publicity about what sort of local government would make best sense for Wiltshire in the future. Here we have listed the sort of objections that have been raised – and give our side of the story too. If you have other points you would like to raise, please contact us and we will provide you with an answer. In summary we believe one authority for Wiltshire will make it easier for people to access services and deliver real savings.

### **The county council is trying to take over the districts.**

**Fact:** Not true. A unitary council would be a completely new organisation and would replace both the county council and the four district councils.

### **The county council is in financial difficulty and is using the unitary bid as a way of acquiring district funds.**

**Fact:** All county councils have challenging budgetary pressures but Wiltshire is not in financial difficulty. On the contrary, latest financial figures indicate the county council is heading for a balanced budget this year.

### **The creation of a unitary authority would be very expensive and would cost more than it would save**

**Fact:** There would be set up and transition costs but independent accountants support the view that a new council could deliver the same or better services for **£15 million less each year**. There would be obvious economies too - one council would have 98 councillors instead of the current total of 244 district and county councillors, and the present five chief executives and five management teams will be reduced to one. The overall savings that would follow from one council for Wiltshire would mean there would be less pressure to increase council tax levels.

### **The unitary authority would be a remote bureaucracy - not able to keep in touch with localities or support local parish and town councils.**

**Fact:** It will be easier for local people and for parish and town councils to work with the unitary council as it will be a single point of contact and one voice for Wiltshire. Its boundaries would be the same as the PCT. One council will still have offices and points of customer contact across the county and would work even closer with parish and town councils and community groups. There would also be many local access points and local forums, thus making it easier for local people to receive a joined up service in their local community. And when you want to contact your councillor – there will be just one – not a district and a county councillor.

### **The unitary authority would create a democratic deficit with insufficient numbers of councillors**

**Fact:** One council would have 98 councillors instead of the current total of 244 district and county councillors. But one council will still have offices and points of customer contact across the county and would work even closer with parish and town councils and community groups.

## **Creation of a unitary authority would mean job losses**

**Fact:** Economies of scale and more streamlined working will mean one council for Wiltshire would require a smaller and more focused workforce. It is hoped that most of this reduction in staff numbers would occur through normal staff turnover. For instance the present five chief executives and five management teams will be reduced to one.

## **Surely a referendum should have been held before the bid for unitary was made?**

**Fact:** Given the timescale imposed by the White Paper, it was not feasible to consult local people. However a large number of partners have been asked for their views and if the bid makes it through the first stage, there will be a period of consultation. In the meantime, information boards are in local libraries and leaflets are available explaining the bid. There is also lots of detail on the council website.

## **A unitary authority would mean the abolition of district councils.**

**Fact:** No. Actually the creation of One Council for Wiltshire would mean the abolition of the county council and the district councils – and the creation of a new council for the whole county.

## **Surely it's just better to develop partnerships between district and county councils. Working together can bring cost effective service delivery**

**Fact:** .We already work well with our partners but establishing one council for Wiltshire would give us the opportunity to pool all the good work from our five organisations, our different skills and resources, to ensure the people of Wiltshire get the best quality service possible along with value for money. For instance at the moment, waste collection is dealt with by the district councils and waste disposal by the county council. Pooling our resources would mean a more effective and efficient service.

## **Contact details**

### **By Post**

Corporate Communications  
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County Hall  
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Trowbridge  
Wiltshire  
BA14 8JN

### **By Email**

[whitepaperqa@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:whitepaperqa@wiltshire.gov.uk)

### **By Telephone**

01225 713110 / 713003

### **By Hand**

County Hall, Trowbridge

# Why One Council Makes Sense

We believe One Council for Wiltshire really makes sense. Read the viewpoint of Wiltshire County Council Chief Executive Keith Robinson and see how we measure up to the government's criteria for these proposals.

## **Wiltshire County Council Chief Executive Keith Robinson explains why he thinks One Council would be best for the county**

One telephone number to call; one website where you can do everything from renewing your library book to booking a squash court and paying your council tax; one service centre in your town where you can talk to the person you need – doesn't this make sense?

One Council in Wiltshire could achieve just that.

One Council would be cheaper to run than the current five councils, saving money on everything from senior managers to IT systems.

And One Council could join up services which are currently provided by two separate councils – e.g. collecting the rubbish (district council) and getting rid of it (county council). One Council would mean one councillor for your area. We estimate that approximately 100 councillors could run the council in place of the present 250 district and county councillors. If they were paid the same as current county councillors that would save £225,000 per annum. But would it still be local government? The establishment of area boards in Wiltshire towns would enable councillors to take local decisions and shape local services to suit their communities. Savings of £15 million per year can be made without centralising any services. (And these calculations are being checked by the Audit Commission, the Government's independent watchdog.)

We know the One Council bid does have its opponents but we really believe the bid is the best for Wiltshire. Take a look here to see our common sense answers to critics or email us with your queries.

## **Bids for unitary councils have to measure up against five criteria from Communities and Local Government.**

### **Take a look at how we think Wiltshire measures up:**

#### **Affordable**

Yes – transitional costs of forming a new council will be repaid within two and a half years

#### **Supported by a broad cross section of partners and stakeholders**

Yes – the bid is supported by North Wiltshire District Council and a wide range of stakeholders including the business community. A full consultation is currently underway

#### **Provide strong, effective and accountable strategic leadership**

Yes – the new council would be based on strong visible accountability. The council would elect a leader for the first four years who would appoint a cabinet, establish strong overview and scrutiny arrangements that would hold the executive to account, and establish 20 community area boards led by frontline members. One Council means the county would have a stronger voice at regional and national level.

## **Deliver genuine opportunities for neighbourhood flexibility and empowerment**

Yes – One Council would build on the experience of working successfully in the 20 community planning areas by establishing community boards which will bring together councillors, community leaders, service providers and residents. There will also be greater involvement of town and parish councils.

## **Deliver value for money and equity on public services.**

Yes – Real savings can be made by moving from five councils to one. Savings totalling £45 million can be achieved during the first three years by taking advantage of economies of scale, reduction of management costs and bringing together services.