



Blackpool Council

BUILDING A BETTER COMMUNITY FOR ALL

Grant Shapps MP
Minister for Housing and Local Government
Department for Communities and Local
Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Our Ref: CE/DLT
Your Ref:
Direct Line: 01253 477001
Date: 11th June 2010
e-mail: chief.executive@blackpool.gov.uk

Dear Mr Shapps, MP

REDUCING BURDENS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Thank you for your letter dated 28th May. As requested outlined in brief below are what we would see as five priorities to pursue to reduce unnecessary, unhelpful and costly burdens for Local Government.

Place Survey

The second Place Survey is due to be conducted by all councils in the autumn of this year with substantial direct and indirect costs. The Place Survey when conducted in 2008 had its publication significantly delayed due to concerns about its integrity. Also whilst each Council understands the need to ensure it is effectively engaged with its communities, this perception based survey with mandatory questions is not seen by many as an effective tool for this. Many authorities supplemented these mandatory questions, at further cost, to ensure that feedback of specific value is received at all from this exercise. It was also developed with a direct link to the Organisation Assessment element of the Comprehensive Area Assessment. A quick response on this is required as we are required to tender imminently and we wish to avoid any liability through withdrawn tender notices if the survey is scrapped.

National Indicators

Whilst the number of National Indicators has recently reduced, to a limited extent, this could be taken further and councils given the freedom to select their own performance indicators that are relevant to their priorities. Associated with this the DCLG's Data Interchange Hub could be scrapped. The data contained on this site is out of date and duplicates information already supplied through other government websites (i.e. Floor Targets Interactive and Data4NR). The data on the Hub is often inaccurate and does not match data held by the council. It also does not provide any benefits in terms of benchmarking information. Currently many authorities have engaged costly consultants to provide a benchmarking tool (circa £7k per annum) for them to ensure meaningful comparators of their performance in delivering National Indicators.

The requirement for expensive statutory and public notices in paid for local media

This requirement results in high costs levied by newspaper companies despite their continuous decline in circulation which means that the public are not actually being adequately informed.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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For example in Blackpool there are 70,000 homes, but the local newspaper which also covers two neighbouring boroughs has only a 28,000 circulation. If this resource was redirect into an improved online service such as directgov, existing council websites, social networks and more direct communication such as postings on lampposts, leaflets through doors in areas directly affected, and bulletins at local community facilities costs could be reduced by up to 50% and the public would be more effectively informed.

Council Tax

(i) Banding Adjustments

Amend the requirement currently placed on the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) to backdate banding adjustments to 1 April 1993. Local authorities are still receiving changes to council tax bands back to 1993. This has a significant work impact as all occupiers are affected and the change in liability has a knock on effect on any council tax benefit during the period.

(ii) Billing information

Simplify the information contained in council tax demand notices and accompanying information. Information required to be included is constantly changing. Efficiency information means very little to most customers but generates avoidable contact and significant cost in compilation and publication.

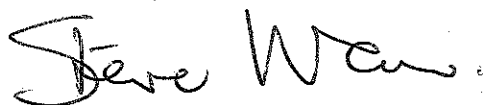
Amend allowable freedom of information requests

The Freedom of Information Act is being abused in that it is being used by private sector companies to obtain information with the aim of generating profits. FOI should only be about transparency for individuals.

In addition I take this opportunity, whilst we are considering reducing local government burdens, to comment on the Government's proposed requirement that Council's publish details of all spending above £500. I ask that phasing is considered for this new requirement as the low threshold, particularly for large unitary authorities, would require a large administrative burden at a time when resources should be directed and protected for the front line.

I appreciate this opportunity to contribute and Blackpool Council would be interested in working with you further to address these and other identified burdens.

Yours Sincerely



Chief Executive

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Grant Shapps MP
DCLG
Email: lg_burdens@communities.gsi.gov.uk

11 June 2010

Dear Minister

Thank you for your letter of 28 May 2010 asking us to identify the Council's top five ideas for reducing the burdens on local government. We welcome the opportunity to comment and our suggestions are outlined below:

1. Reduce the level of central prescription over what local authorities must do and how they must do it

There is a general tendency for government to over prescribe what should happen at a local level rather than recognising that local council's are autonomous organisations with their own democratic mandate. This over-prescription is manifested in various ways:

A recent example is the decision to require council's to introduce a petition system. In addition to the requirement itself, detailed guidance was then issued stating exactly what the scheme must look like. The requirement for all councils to publish expenditure over £500 is another example. In both cases we support the spirit of what you are trying to achieve in terms of openness and transparency, but question the need for government to be intervening and issuing guidance in such detail.

There are also significant requirements to report data back to government departments; examples include information about council tax, salaries, and interest receipts. We understand that CLG intends to require full quarterly financial reporting which has the potential significant resource implications. We are grateful for the government's decision to abolish CAA and we would also welcome the abolition of these reporting requirements and the complex national performance indicator regime.

In contrast there are limited means for local suggestions to government to be pushed forward. We would like to see the proposals that have emerged from local communities through the Sustainable Communities Act process to be given serious consideration.

Cambridge City Council
Guildhall, Cambridge CB2 3QJ



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2. Replace the Housing Revenue Account system

We welcome the intention of CLG to replace the existing Housing Revenue Account Subsidy system, which has for many years, collected and redistributed housing resources nationally, with a system that is fairer at a local level. In broad terms, the proposals being made will allow local authorities to make appropriate decisions to meet locally identified priorities and to plan effectively for the longer term. We will be submitting detailed comments on the current proposals in response to the consultation document. We are keen to meet housing need in the City and hope the proposals will be implemented speedily.

3. Reduce the burden of Local Development Frameworks

The current Local Development Framework system is significantly more expensive than the previous Local Plan system and no more effective. Previously all planning policies were contained in one Local Plan. In 2005 the public examination costs for this document were approximately £200,000.

Under the new LDF system councils have to produce more plans all of which are subject to public examination. Cambridge has already adopted two Area Action Plans and expects to have to produce a further Area Action Plan and the following plans, to complete its LDF:

A Core Strategy,
A Development Control policies plan,
A Site Allocations plan

We estimate the public examination costs alone to be in the order of £150,000 per plan or £900,000 in total for the whole LDF. In addition we are now required to produce a more detailed evidence base than for the Local Plan including new studies concerning the strategic housing market, and infrastructure provision, the latter alone costing around £100,000.

4. Reduce the number of statutory partnerships and bodies

We would like to see a reduction in the number of statutory partnerships which local authorities are required to set up. Many also come with prescription about who should be round the table and how they should be run. Authorities should not be forced into “arranged marriages” but should have the freedom to set up partnerships where there is mutual benefit in doing so and with the partners they think are appropriate for their local context.

We are an authority that is embracing the need for housing growth in order to deliver much needed affordable housing in the city and to support the city's

economy. We would like to see greater freedom in how we deliver that growth. Locally we have been required to set up a “local delivery vehicle” to access government funding for the infrastructure needed to support growth. We have also been required to enter into joint plan making committee with our neighbouring district and the county council (under Section 29 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004). Both require extra resources to run and there could be significant savings in running costs without them. We are committed to working with local partners and have a strong track record of doing so. We are not seeking to avoid partnership working, but what we would like is greater freedom to decide how we do it and what structures are needed. We would like to see funding coming directly into local authorities, or the voluntary partnerships we have decided to set up recognising the need to make joint bids where appropriate.

5. Remove the requirement for national approval of local solutions

We offer two examples of different scale:

- (a) The removal of the need for Secretary of State approval of bye laws, for example, for example for verge parking.
- (b) The need for The Local Government Boundary Commission to approve consensual boundary changes.

Inappropriate boundaries between South Cambridgeshire District Council and the Cambridge city means that joint arrangements are necessary. Both authorities have submitted a consensual proposal to The Local Government Boundary Commission suggesting new boundaries between the two authorities, which would remove the need for complex additional governance structures and joint arrangements. The new boundaries would put planned urban extensions firmly into the City, rather than straddling the two councils. Despite this being a consensual proposal, we have no means of agreeing the boundaries between the authorities and no assurance as to when the Boundary Commission might look at our proposal. This is a simple change which would make significant efficiencies and for both councils as well as giving clearer governance structures for local people.

Yours sincerely

Antoinette Jackson
Chief Executive
Cambridge City Council

Grant Shapps MP
Minister for Housing and Local Government
Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

Your ref: <Recipients reference>

Date: 10th June 2010

Dear Minister,

Reducing burdens on Local Government

We welcome the decision to curtail CAA and LAAs.

In order to further reduce the burdens that exist as a consequence of the relationship between Central and Local Government, we have identified the following recommendations for change;

1. Review the required content and format for the Annual Year End Accounts

We recommend that CLG assign CIPFA and the Audit Commission to review the usefulness and complexity of the Annual Year End Accounts format, currently required by the Local Authority Accounting Code of Practice.

As Local Authorities are service lead rather than profit lead organisations, we would question whether it is appropriate for the Annual Year End Accounts to mirror the disclosure requirements of Public Limited Companies.

The information contained in the accounts is not easily accessible to local residents and stakeholders in its current statutory format; therefore, we are currently duplicating effort by producing the same information in accessible formats.

A survey to find out what type of financial information and in what format stakeholders and local residents would find most useful will help us to provide one auditable statutory publication which meets all of our needs more effectively.

2. The requirement to publish all 'new' expenditure over £500 will require a disproportionate increase in resource.

Support staff will have to assess every payment over a monthly period and decide:

- Whether it is 'new' or not
- Whether it would/would not contravene the Data Protection Act or Commercial Confidentiality.
- How each item should be described when published – Discussions may need to be held with Heads of Service, Budget Holders, Portfolio Holders and Departmental Directors.

In order to reduce this burden, maintain transparency and ensure that stakeholders are able to access appropriate financial information; Local Authorities could regularly publish spending



against each service's budget. This could be subjectively analysed by the 'Level 1' headings in the Best Value Accounting Code of Practice.

3. Review the value of a separate Housing Revenue Account

As many of the Government controls on council owned housing have now been removed, we would question the value of a separate Housing Revenue Account.

In order to ensure that residents can see how effectively their rents are being spent, councils can continue to provide a comprehensive income and expenditure statement to tenants in more accessible formats.

4. Simplification of processes to procure services in partnership

Currently the legislation to procure services in partnership is complex and difficult to understand. Local authorities should be able to advertise contracts and frameworks openly and not incur their own separate tendering costs.

The current legal constraints are very complex with considerable risks being incurred if local authorities work together. Recent case-law has overturned arrangements being put in place in good faith to allow collaborative working. For example, the Court of Appeal recently ruled that it is beyond the power of any local authority to set up and participate in a mutual insurer; *RMP v Brent* (2009).

5. Planning legislation

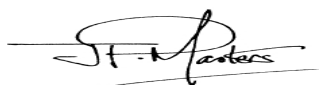
We would caution against any radical or whole-scale change in the operation of the current land use planning system which has experienced fundamental overhaul in recent years. The abandonment of Regional Spatial Strategies already means an urgent review of inter-authority planning work and an urgent refocus on priority delivery of Core Strategies and other Local Development Documents.

6. Conclusion

The current reporting arrangements and regulatory requirements are costly to collate, inhibit innovation and divert local authorities from focusing on service improvement, value for money and service delivery.

We welcome the recent announcement that the CAA process is to cease and look forward to discussions about reviewing service inspections and performance indicators (i.e. the national indicator set). We would like to see a robust process to ensure that councils are held to account for the money that they spend within a framework that minimises the burden on staff time and holds service outcomes for the local community at its core.

Yours sincerely



Paul Masters
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Mr G Shapps MP
Department for Communities and Local Government
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Date: 11 June 2010
Our Ref: DM/LC/CE11

Dear Mr Shapps

Reducing Burdens on Local Government

With reference to your letter dated 2 June 2010, I would suggest the following issues are reviewed or removed. My list could have been significantly longer but I have restricted myself to 5 items and given a range in terms of their scale.

1. Whilst the Standards regime appears to be on the way out, will Government quickly identify if the local regime for investigating Code of Conduct complaints is to remain in place? If it is, will Government start to recognise the impact of Parish and Town Council allegations having to be funded by council tax payers when perhaps now is the time to get the parish and town councils to pay for such investigations? The current requirements place a very significant impact on legal teams with District Councils having no control over the actions of Town and Parish Councils or the behaviour of their elected Members.
2. Remove the need to advertise planning applications in the press, rather than put the advertisements on web sites. There are a number of types of applications that require advertisement. The last Government has just gone through an exercise where the overwhelming response from local planning authorities was to stop this practice but decided not to go ahead.
3. Stop the requirement to use International Financial Reporting Standards to report financial performance in the annual accounts for 2010/11 onwards. The purpose of this is to allow financial comparisons to be made across all sectors on a global basis. This would appear to be a rather meaningless thing to be able to do. It takes a significant amount of time to comply with. The 2010/11 figures will need to be restated in a different format, our statement of accounts will increase in size by approximately 50% (its already 68 pages) and our audit and training costs will increase.
4. Remove the requirement to report on national performance indicators and instead allow each Council to measure and manage it on performance against its Corporate Plan and priorities.

5. Do not insist that Councils report on transactions above £500. This will create work to comply with and having reviewed the example of Windsor and Maidenhead, add no value at all. Rather it is only likely to result in requests, and therefore further work when the few people who bother to look at it, ask for further clarification. On a related subject, the Freedom of Information Act should be revisited. It's initial and laudable aim was to allow individuals to access information held about them by public authorities. In practise it is mainly used by companies, contractors, consultancies, students, employees, journalists and the public to access information for commercial, academic, editorial, or other purposes.

I'd be happy to expand on any of these points and I look forward to seeing the outcome of your work on reducing the burdens.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David McIntosh', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David McIntosh
Chief Executive
East Dorset District Council

11 June 2010

Grant Shapps MP
Minister for Housing and Local Government
Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
LONDON SW1E 5DU

Dear Grant,

Thank you for your timely letter requesting feedback on reducing burdens on local government. I am delighted to have the opportunity to comment. Following consideration and discussion, I have taken the liberty of making seven suggestions (and we could add more). These are as follows:

1. Freeing up the prescriptive regime on how Councils set their fees and charges for land charges and building control services.
2. Removing the onerous and over prescriptive regime of the Tenants Services Authority - replacing the national prescription with a regulatory framework based on local standards.
3. Reducing the overall cost of the Audit regime by ensuring that Audit requirements are based on need and risk, and avoiding excessive control.
4. Reducing the number of statutory plans we are required to produce, instead producing greater reliance on local determination of how the plans are produced with better links to the Councils overall planning process. Good examples would be the Food Safety Plan or the Home Energy Conservation Act Plan. Again, I could compile a much longer list.
5. Removing the current national indicator set and replacing with locally determined key indicators.
6. Removal of the 'petition scheme' requirements of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act.

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7. Considering the role of the Electoral Commission and removing the requirement for completion of assessments against the performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers.

May I take the opportunity of suggesting that we need to be careful about replacing these with new unnecessary bureaucracy. I have some reservations about how the proposal to publish every item of expenditure in excess of £500 will work and fear that as this figure has been set too low, it may prove a heavy and unproductive task. Similarly it would be unfortunate to reintroduce time consuming and document heavy bidding rounds to obtain funding in the future. A return to the Single Regeneration budget bidding approach does not seem sensible.

Gloucester would be delighted to send either a member or officer representative to join your working group if that would be of assistance to you. Please let me know if that would help.

Yours sincerely

JULIAN WAIN
Chief Executive

From: Donald Graham [Donald.Graham@hertsmere.gov.uk]
Sent: 11 June 2010 14:33
To: LG Burdens
Subject: Reducing Burdens on Local Government

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

Dear Mr Shapps,

Please find below Hertsmere Borough Council's views on reducing burdens on local authorities

Detail

*A longer lead in time for preparation for elections- given the Coalition govts statement that elections will take place following a five year fixed term, this in itself will ease the logistics burden of preparation eg postal votes, printing services, securing polling stations, admin preparation

*Clarification on land charges - as councils are now being placed in an uncompetitive position- LA's are expected to provide a service from which overheads cannot be recovered. No private business would function in this manner.

- Ending the requirement to publish legislative statutory notices in local newspapers. Other modern and more accessible means are available than the traditional route of local newspapers where the circulation is often small and inconsistent. Current practices add costs unnecessarily and create delays.

- Publishing Forward Plans- a statutory requirement that can be replaced by good local communications.

- Gov Connect- the free line runs out in 2011. From then charges will be levied by Cable and Wireless to provide the GCSX line. This will cost a small authority on average an additional £18k per annum. The sanctioning of partnership GCSX lines would enable partnerships to develop within LA's, reduce costs, reduce bureaucracy.

- The recent announcement on transparency as to expenditure above £500 will in turn create its own burden and as yet unknown commercial difficulties in terms of private sector partnerships. Careful consideration needs to be given to ensure a policy objective is met without creating a significant burden that may also affect commercial partnerships.

- Ending the requirement to produce the annual Whole of Government Accounts. This requirement is in addition to what local authorities already do in terms of producing their annual and three year budget projections.

- Ending the duty to produce Food health and safety plans- ending the need to collate and produce EH NI's 182 and 184
- Reforming the current anomaly in licensing laws. Section 193 of the Gambling Act 2005 enables the LA to revoke a licence where arrears exist for payment of fees. Under the Licensing Act of 2003 there is no similar provision. This leads to bad debt and an associated costs and admin burden.
- Improving the drafting of various elements of Planning Laws e.g. National Validation guidance; General Permitted Development Order for household extensions; NI 157, a, b and c; the Core Strategy regime is regarded as disproportionate; Enforcement legislation is unwieldy - these elements are considered to be poorly drafted. The debate on regional planning is already taking place within government.
- The impact of FOI enquiries on successful administration where mischievous and or those pursuing a vested interest cannot be rejected.
- Lifting restrictions on freedom to trade for LA's to provide services that support the third sector, local community enterprises and others LA's

In terms of the Top Five

These are:

1. Complex and obtuse strategic planning requirements
2. The need for a simpler performance regime that focuses on local needs and restricts itself to what local authorities can actually deliver ie local services and partnership activities
3. The need to simplify the approach to local strategic partnerships, total place, and the associated surveys that increase costs by seeking to justify something where the knowledge is by definition only held by an interested minority
4. Reducing the plethora of requirements stemming from regional and statutory bodies seeking information or contributions that are beyond the direct powers and capacity of a local authorities within tiered arrangements ie significant regional economic development; strategic spatial planning when such planning only occurs on a very local scale; economic investment when the financial and direct contributions are beyond the means of district councils within each area;
5. Health and well being - being more realistic when it comes to District Councils as to what are the real contributions that such councils can make to this agenda rather than measuring them against an agenda that is determined by health bodies such as the PCT

Yours sincerely

Donald Graham

Chief Executive

Hertsmere Borough Council

Donald Graham

Chief Executive

Hertsmere Borough Council

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Please contact:  
Your ref:  
Our ref: AJ/RDM  
Date: 14 December 2010

Grant Shapps  
Minister for Housing and Local  
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**Councillor Alan Jarrett**  
Finance & Deputy Leader  
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E-mail address: Alan.Jarrett@medway.gov.uk

Dear Grant

## **REDUCING BURGENS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Can I respond to your very welcome letter throwing down a joint challenge for central and local Government to quickly reduce burdens.

You have asked for our top 5 suggestions but I have taken the liberty of putting a few more and hope you will accept these in the positive spirit of your letter to us.

1. **Abolish the annual Place Survey** (min £15,000 per Council), which contains doubtful methodology and is of limited value to the public and replace by allowing Councils to use local measures they already collect. As a general statement, I believe that the inspection regime overall should be reviewed and replaced with a reduced regulatory framework that has a sharper and more effective focus.
2. **Statutory data returns** – this was the point that the previous Government ignored when saying they had reduced the reporting burden to “just” 198 indicators. We have already submitted 29 adult social services returns alone in the last 6 months. The array of children’s data collected is unwieldy and one wonders what use is made of this or if it is of any use to the public. Environmental Health has to provide returns to DEFRA, CLG, CIPFA and DfT – the same information but all in a different format. All Council returns need to be fully justified and outcome focussed and meaningful to the public.
3. **Regional Improvement and Efficiency Programmes** – the secretariat overhead and real added value is questionable. A better outcome would be to rationalise RIEPs, reduce their existing funding allocations and reallocate some of that to Councils for ‘invest to save’ projects with defined financial savings targets.
4. **Air Quality Management Plans** – over 220 Councils have to produce these. They are virtually pointless as they simply record the issues around air quality but do little to solve the problem. Abolish the requirement for the plans and return the monitoring role for air quality to local determination.



5. **Abolish Natural England** and merge with the Environment Agency. Cllr Castle of Essex CC mentioned at the Thames Gateway Parliamentary reception last week a requirement to pay around £50mil to relocate wildlife at DP Ports in the Thames Estuary to allow development to proceed. This is an absurd amount of private sector capital.

Medway recently nearly lost an application for 6,000 new jobs at Grain, Medway over Natural England's objections about 'bugs' on the site of a former oil refinery.

Natural England are now raising wildlife concerns about an underground pipeline which will actually (as a first in Britain) take emissions from our power stations to pump them into depleted oil fields in the North Sea massively reducing carbon emissions. Because that aspect is looked after by the Environment Agency it is of no concern to Natural England so they are happy to object on wildlife grounds.

Natural England has turned into a single-issue organisation full of well meaning nature anoraks that are, effectively sabotaging legitimate and much needed development delivering quality jobs. Merging them with the Environment Agency would permit a more rounded and measured response to environmental issues.

6. **Abolish the Children in Need Census** – it was introduced in 2008/9. Local authorities already collect these returns and separate double entry into a centralised database on top of that is time consuming and is taking social workers away from delivering important front line services. We have never seen any justification why Government requires this information or what it does with it.
7. **Area Based Grants (ABG)** – The previous Government always said that most of the ABG money was not ring fenced yet we had numerous comments from auditors (Audit Commission) and others along the lines that we have not spent up an 'allocation' for x or y having reallocated it to a more pressing service and then castigating us for local decision taking. If ring fencing has gone we fully support it but the Audit Commission need to know that non-ring fenced grants mean exactly that.
8. **Local Area Agreements** – we presume that now the reward grant has gone we will not have to continue with the bureaucracy around collecting LAA data. In this context, I also believe that aspects of the LSP arrangements are overly burdensome, and should be simplified to facilitate more direct and effective partnership working.
9. **GO's** –we see little justification for keeping a SE Government Office – it delivers little of practical benefit to delivering excellent public services.
10. **RDA's** – along with our colleagues at Kent County Council we see no justification for retaining SEEDA. Its job is really done in Kent and Medway and local Government with its development partners needs to be entrusted

to get on with the job of regeneration delivered through Local Enterprise/ Prosperity Boards. The RDA assets need to be transferred to upper tier authorities as part of a deal that if sites are not delivered during the lifetime of the Parliament they are returned to Central Government. CLG pays the bulk of the RDA finance and we would therefore ask you to very seriously consider backing this.

11. **Public Rights of Way Improvement Plans** – unnecessary and should be wrapped up into Local Transport Plans.
12. **Speed of dealing with planning applications** – this was an issue a few years but most Councils now deal with applications in a much more joined up and speedy way. Collecting data 4 times a year and then auditing it is not a priority as it is largely a job done. Abolish the need for quarterly returns and leave to local determination.
13. **Status Survey** – a return we are required to produce based on a survey of what our tenants think about our housing services. Tenant feedback is provided in a number of other ways through tenants forum, committees, customer response forms and this centralised mechanism simply repeats information that we already have.
14. **CLG annual homeless persons survey**. We have no issue with collecting the data but why does it need someone from CLG to accompany us when we collect it and why can we not then give advice on shelters etc. to the homeless person – at present because of CLG rules, we have to go back at a later time to give them that advice which is a ridiculous waste of time.
15. **Empty Dwellings**. We are fully in favour of getting empty dwellings management orders to work but the bureaucracy involved means that most councils (ourselves included) have achieved one or two orders at most. We are committed to this but need to look at streamlining the process to get many more orders much faster.
16. **16 – 17 year olds in looked after care**. Following the Southwark judgment we have been left with the responsibility of funding this responsibility. Either the law needs to be changed or we need to be allocated funding.
17. **Standards hearings** – I understand that the standards Board for England has been abolished. For standards hearings locally, it would be helpful to simplify the existing bureaucracy and processes, that derive from national guidance; essentially, they prolong and complicate hearing decisions. Similarly, where a complaint emanates from a Parish council, that organisation should pay for all costs associated with the standards hearing.
18. **Equalities** – Whilst I agree with the principles associated with fairness and equality, I think that some of the obligations included in the existing legislation should be reviewed. I am not convinced that they promote community cohesion as effectively as they could.

19. **Spending transparency** – I agree with the concept of transparency however, I would like to question the threshold of £500. Reporting will be relatively easy to implement, but I envisage that the resultant enquiries (both general and FOI) will be excessive and possibly vexatious, and will not assist public accountability. Please can you reconsider the level of the threshold.

Many thanks for the invitation to change what we do. I am more than happy to expand on any of these and if your civil servants want to link up with my officers we will be happy to facilitate a dialogue in any way we can.

Congratulations on your new appointment and we look forward to making positive changes together.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alan Jarrett', is written over a light blue rectangular stamp or watermark.

**COUNCILLOR ALAN JARRETT**  
**Finance & Deputy Leader of Medway Council**

## **Reducing the Burdens on Local Government**

Our top 5 suggestions are:

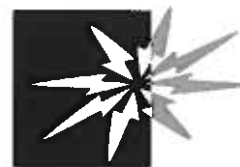
1. Removing the restrictions on trading activities such as land charges and building control which ring-fence these activities and prevent the surpluses being used to reduce the council tax or support other priorities
2. Give us the freedom to set charges for services such as licensing and planning so that costs can be fully recovered.
3. Continue to free-up Local Government through the removal of the CAA, national indicators, and Corporate Governance statements; and empower us to opt out of initiatives like the national Fraud initiative where there is clear evidence that they do not deliver tangible benefits for our area.
4. Avoid setting the limit at £500 for publication of local government expenditure items when the central government limit is £25,000. This will generate a huge amount of activity at high cost. Set the sum at a more reasonable level.
5. Free us up from the current national rent setting and housing subsidy regime and introduce a local self financing scheme for housing revenue accounts.

And a sixth! – Stop the nonsensical restrictions on government email addresses which prevent my council from having a “dot gov” email address.

Andrew Muter  
Chief Executive  
Newark and Sherwood District Council

01636 655200

[andrew.muter@nsdc.info](mailto:andrew.muter@nsdc.info)



Interim Assistant Chief Executive [Policy, Performance, Partnerships and Communications] :

Wayne Longshaw

Grant Shapps MP  
Minister for Housing and Local Government  
Department for Communities and Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London  
SW1E 5DU

Date: 11 June 2010  
Direct dial: 020 8489 2683  
Email: Wayne.longshaw@haringey.gov.uk

Dear Minister

### Reducing the Burdens on Local Government

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on reducing the burdens associated with secondary legislation and other forms of regulation. In addition to the issues you have identified we would like to propose the following:

- 1. Whilst we fully understand and welcome the Governments intention to increase transparency around local government finance we believe that the £500 threshold set in recent proposal that all LAs publish new items of spending over £500 needs to be reviewed and that it should be phased in over a longer time period.**

At a time when our financial expertise needs to be fully devoted to the task of reducing expenditure and managing our efficiency programmes this is not the highest priority. Having personally examined the Windsor and Maidenhead spreadsheet I am confident that disclosure in this form in Haringey will also produce large numbers of further enquiries asking for further detail. Whilst this may be the intention many of these can be avoided by greater detail being provided on the website. I also note that the Windsor and maidenhead approach relates to supplier transactions whereas my interpretation of the recent request is 'all transactions'.

There are also other concerns:

- **What is meant by "new"?** Does it mean a new spending commitment or just making a payment in respect of an invoice issued under a contract that has been running for years? Obviously, the latter would impose a more significant burden.
- **How is this information going to be disclosed?** The section of the letter referring to central government talks of a single website that will make details of all central government tenders available free of charge. However, we assume that it will be left to individual local authorities to make all of their own information available themselves. Making this level of information available in a relatively short timescale will not be straightforward for many authorities and may require investment in IT infrastructure. It seems strange that, at a time where the value of sharing services is being extolled, at first glance every single local authority in the country appears to be left to their own devices to deliver part of what is clearly a key aspect of the government's transparency programme.

- **What does this mean for commercial confidentiality?** It is not immediately clear if contracts will have to be published in full, with no regard for any confidential information contained within them and if details of spending will need to be broken down giving details of the make up of suppliers' charges. If the answer to either of these queries is yes, there will be considerable opposition from the private sector and it would have implications for case law on the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), the Environmental Information Regulations and the Audit Commission Act.

Whilst we recognise that transparency is desirable we are concerned that this will require considerable staff time. We already publish comprehensive financial information about how the council spends this money and people have recourse to the FOI to get more detail on areas they are interested in. We feel that the information available from the local authority area identified as having existing good practice is not as accessible as the information we already produce.

This would be best piloted by setting a higher level for disclosure in the first year e.g. £10,000 which could be incrementally reduced over a period of 2 -3 years until we get to a lower level. Overall however we still advise that the £500 threshold is too low.

## **2. That the number of statistical returns to central government is reduced.**

Currently the effort required to collect and analyse data the data needed to produce the dozens of returns required by government departments is onerous. In addition there are thousands of pages of guidance on what is required to deliver statutory services; we suggest that these might be simplified. We endorse the continued collection of data if it satisfies the following criteria it:

- is required by statute
- is essential for financial management purposes
- provides information that would show a change in trend at the national level that would necessitate a change in central government resources or a change in national policy direction.

Where data does not satisfy these requirements we regard it as a burden.

## **3. That there is a review of the number of strategies and plans LAs are required to either produce or respond to by national and sub regional government.**

Our firm conviction is that plans and strategies should be developed from the front line upwards and they should be limited to a few key documents.

## **4. That the GCSx initiative introduced by the previous government is reviewed.**

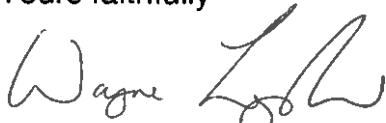
Haringey Council welcomes central government's desire to improve the security accorded to the storage, processing and transport of sensitive data, especially in light of past central government data breaches. However, some aspects of the Government Connect Secure Extranet (GCSX) environment set up to address this desire impose significant extra cost and/or reduction in performance of Council services for what is perceived as limited extra security benefit. In particular, the resulting cost of compliance with the current GCSX approach reduces the ability of the Council to meet other central government policy goals, such as increasing customer engagement through officer field working and reducing fixed costs through flexible (home) working.

5. That there is a relaxing of the rules concerning what can be charged against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and that there is a widening of the scope of measures which can be included.

The DSG should in our view be seen as principally a commissioning budget largely devoted to funding schools but aimed at achieving good outcomes for all children. There is a clear relationship between the activities of schools and Local Authority services aimed at early prevention, intervention and safeguarding. We believe, particularly at this time when efficiency is a key requirement, that the current rules do not allow sufficient flexibility. Greater freedom and flexibility in this area would also contribute to higher achievement by allowing us to commission work across all services aimed at improving children's life chances e.g. better health in children and improved housing and early support services.

We hope you find these suggestions helpful in what is a very worthy quest of reducing the burdens of local government in the current challenging climate.

Yours faithfully



Wayne Longshaw  
Interim Assistant Chief Executive  
Policy, Performance, Partnerships and Communication

Your reference  
Our reference JVDL/DJG  
Date 11 June 2010



Grant Shapps MP  
Minister for Housing and Local Government  
Department for Communities and Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London  
SW1E 5DU

**Chief Executive's Directorate**  
Civic Centre Glebe Street  
Stoke-on-Trent ST4 1RN

John van de Laarschot  
**Chief Executive**

Dear Grant Shapps MP

### **Reducing Burdens on Local Government**

Thank you for your letter asking for views on what other burdens, over and above the ones that you have already committed to tackling, we think should be reduced or removed.

The top five burdens at the City Council are currently:

1. Rescind recent request for invoices over £500.00 which will increase paperwork and process.
2. Reduce the frequency and number of different (but similar) audit commission/external audit visits.
3. Reduce duplication in collating and reporting data by collecting information once and using often.
4. Reduce the regulatory requirements of external funding bodies like RDA (ie. rely on accountable body requirements).
5. Reduce the number of national and local area agreement indicators.

For your information, please see attached a full listing of all burdens that the City Council feel could be reduced.

continued/...

Please tell us if you need this letter in large print, audio tape, computer disk or Braille



**contacting the council**  
telephone 01782 234567  
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[www.stoke.gov.uk](http://www.stoke.gov.uk)



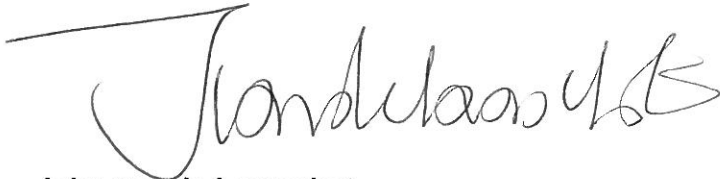


-2-

Grant Shapps MP  
Minister for Housing and Local Government  
Department for Communities and Local Government

You mention in your letter that you would like to bring a small group of local authority representatives together. The City Council would like to be part of this group and therefore I would be grateful if you would consider including a representative from Stoke-on-Trent

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John van de Laarschot'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

**John van de Laarschot**  
**Chief Executive**  
deborah.griffiths@stoke.gov.uk  
telephone 01782 232602



## **Reducing Burdens on Local Government Stoke-on-Trent City Council**

### **Adult Social Care**

- The administrative burden of audit/regulation and enforcement activities. eg. working time directives, data protection needs to be more effectively coordinated/reduced and costed up if new.
- Regulations and information collection should be more sector specific and sensitive.
- Reduce duplication in collating and reporting data by collecting information once and using often.
- Enforcement of Health and safety statutory instruments/legislation - should be less risk averse and managed on exemption basis.
- The plethora of policy initiative/directives from the Centre - curriculum, pay, service strategy etc. greater scrutiny of ministers' decisions.
- Legislate only where enforcement is very obviously practical, sensible and unavoidable.
- Consolidate law; so, for example, there is one law on employment, one law on tax, and so on. Legislate to remove the gold plated ideal of what organisations/business should do etc.
- Simplify industrial tribunal processes. Apply common-sense not legal sense (Clapham omnibus). Make employees more accountable for their actions. Introduce an absolute requirement to mediate.
- Work place inspections (linked to 4) can introduce ever-increasing risk reduction measures, which add to bureaucracy and can contradict guidelines.

### **Children's Services**

- Reducing the range/number of PIs which we are required to measure/monitor/report upon.
- Short term funding though a welcome resource often creates urgent work for process to be complete and its real impact is often limited.
- Reducing the frequency of various CYPS inspections.
- Rescind recent request for invoices over £500 which will increase paperwork and process.

### **Finance**

- Real commitment to review of local government finance:
  - Remove capping
  - Greater control of business rates revenue, particularly where it can be tied to regeneration e.g. Tax Increment Finance (TiF) schemes
  - Allow councils to raise cash in a similar way to registered social landlords to increase resources for capital investment and reduce the reliance on the PFI as the "only game in town".

- We currently have to pool 75% of Housing RTBs (excluding expenses) - helpful if this was removed but may be within the review of HRA.
- Greater flexibility of premium costs applied by PWLB on debt redemption.
- There is a moratorium on the requirement for the partial exemption calculation - this should be made permanent.
- We need to be able to vire capital grant funding streams (should any continue!) to meet revenue costs of delivery.
- Delay the implementation of IFRS.

## **Housing**

- Tenants Services Authority - there is no need for this body to be as prescriptive about how services are delivered. A much smaller body is required simply focusing on financial governance.

## **Regeneration**

- Reduce the frequency and number of different (but similar) audit commission/external audit visits.
- Reduce the regulatory requirements of external funding bodies like RDA (ie. rely on accountable body requirements).
- Reduce number of national and local area agreement indicators.
- Increase flexibility to prioritise resources to support local needs - eg. transport funding to support addressing worklessness.
- Reduce the need to "chase funding" or design interventions to match government targets rather than tailor support to local needs - eg. to support clear local needs such as tackling worklessness.

## **Other**

- Simplification of "Government" generally - myriad of funding agencies/governance arrangements/reporting requirements to different government departments; also reduction in monitoring and auditing of grants - tied to commitment of reducing ring-fencing.
- General power of competence for local authorities clarified, particularly around powers to trade.
- Partnership arrangements - one area where actually strengthening legislation may be beneficial, otherwise potential to continue to only pay lip service to it?
- Procurement - opportunities to increase access for local firms to council contracts to boost local economic growth.
- Review of local authorities having to meet Carbon Reduction commitments in planned timescales.
- Merge the Audit Commission and the National Audit Office so only one body responsible for Public Audit.

From: Tetstall, Roger [RTetstall@testvalley.gov.uk]  
Sent: 11 June 2010 17:00  
To: LG Burdens  
Cc: Cabinet  
Subject: Reducing Burdens on Local Government

Follow Up Flag: Follow up  
Flag Status: Completed

Thank you for the letters to the Leader and Chief Executive of Test Valley Borough Council inviting us to submit our Top 5 most important suggestions for Reducing Burdens on Local Government. They are as follows (not in any order of priority):

1

Remove all top down targets / measures / national performance indicators (including the expensive Place Survey). Why, for example, are we being required to make a formal return about violent extremism in Test Valley?

2

Return to Local Plans without the need for inspection and eliminate national housing targets; ensure that the requirements as to the evidence base for strategic planning documents are proportionate.

3

Reduce centrally imposed initiatives which generate work at a local level  
eg

a.. the requirement to publish "items of spend over £500" will result in significant amounts of staff time being wasted on dealing with frivolous, vexatious and idiosyncratic enquires and Freedom of Information requests

b.. plans to require Councils to "chip" bins and incur administrative overheads in rewarding householders for re-cycling will result in additional expense. Local authorities should be incentivised to increase recycling and 'empowered' to make their own decisions about how to achieve improvement.

4

Ensure that the activities of the Audit Commission (or any replacement body) are curtailed by

a.. confining it to a pure audit role which is necessary for the protection of public funds

b.. reducing all other inspection to a risk-based minimum

c.. adopting a risk based approach to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit subsidy and other claims. Last year the Audit Commission charged this Council £24,404 for their grant certification work covering Non-Domestic Rates, Housing & Council Tax Benefits and Disabled Facilities. They spent weeks checking individual cases and trying to find errors and eventually made small changes to several figures on the Housing & Council Tax Benefit claim which resulted in our receiving an additional £893. Together with the demands on our resources, this is wholly unjustifiable in the context of a benefit subsidy claim of £24.7 million.

5

Cease unnecessary prescription and meddling in Councils' internal procedures and arrangements eg.

- e-Petitions
- compulsory consultations about elected mayors

We look forward to hearing the outcomes of this exercise.

Roger Tetstall  
Chief Executive  
Test Valley Borough Council  
Tel: 01264 368101  
HPSN: 991 8101  
mailto:rtetstall@testvalley.gov.uk

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Leader of  
West Sussex County Council  
Louise Goldsmith



County Hall Chichester  
West Sussex PO19 1RQ  
01243 753585  
louise.goldsmith@westsussex.gov.uk  
11 June 2010

Dear Mr Shapps

Thank you for your letter in which you ask for feedback on areas, which we believe the burdens on local government could be reduced. In line with your request please consider the following:

- **Inspection**

The abolition of Comprehensive Area Assessment is welcomed but we would like to see the inspection burden further lightened. Our Adult Learning Service will be subject to a 5 day inspection with 6 Inspectors (effectively 30 working days) starting on 28 June for a service which has an annual budget of £5 million. This is a low risk service with previously sound results overseen by a council considered to be performing well. There is also an increasing pressure on staff and limited resources. All inspection regimes must be reasonable and proportionate and we would urge the coalition government to halt this inspection.

The current inspection regime in all services including Ofsted simply measures process not outcomes. The Audit Commission should focus on auditing expenditure and the cost of service delivery as opposed to specifying how local public services should be delivered - this would greatly simplify the inspection regime whilst still giving Councillors and the public the information they need to ensure local services are managed efficiently.

It is also unhelpful to inspect our Fire and Rescue Service as a separate body, which of course it is not, it would be much more efficient for it to be inspected as part of the County Council. Currently the Audit Commission deal with the Fire and Rescue Service separately on a range of assessments and lump it in with Combined Fire Authorities, who are local authorities in their own right. This is not only unnecessary duplication but has a cost to both of us.

- **Targets and Indicators**

We would like to see a real reduction of national targets and indicators and ideally the abolition of the national indicator set as well as the flexibility to prioritise and define meaningful local targets. The LAA approach has allowed local partners to do this but as the experience from our recent Total Place pilot

Continued/2

Grant Shapps MP  
Minister for Housing and Local Government  
Department for Communities and Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU

has evidenced the local flexibility simply means additional targets to those that individual agencies and organisations have to report on. As a consequence the funding follows the target and in the area of our pilot, funding was in some cases being spent on competing priorities. Overall, LAAs have so far operated as an additional burden on local government rather than a rationalisation. Refocusing in this way offers the scope for better and more efficient services through: a clear agreed agenda across all partners; improving the (already good) way partners work together; more local flexibility over the use of funds; and less central government control and reporting requirements. Under the localism agenda local partners should set the priorities and targets to feedback up to Government.

- **Abolition of quangos**

We welcome moves to give local people greater control over how central government funds are spent in their area and support the devolution of power from regional quangos back down to local councils. We believe the natural sub-regions are the upper tier authorities, which have recognised boundaries and working relationships with the District authorities they contain. The many powers and roles that the previous government has given to the regional tier should be returned to Counties.

There are a number of regional bodies which we feel do not serve or support the interests of West Sussex residents. We were one of only a few councils who choose to leave SEERA before it was finally abolished. Since their inception we have questioned the value of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency partnerships and are surprised that they have secured funding for a 3rd year. Their core functions duplicate a number of other bodies such as the IDEA. Whilst the sharing of best practice within the sector is understandable we question the need to have an additional body to replicate that at a regional level. Similarly, the recently formed Skills Funding Agency should not be replaced by another new agency but abolished at once with the powers and funding devolved to the appropriate local level. In the context of the difficult financial climate now is the time to clear about the quangos, which add limited value.

Of course, it will be important to retain the ability to coordinate across the region but we do not need directives from quangos or legislation in order for us to achieve this.

- **EU Procurement Rules**

The New Remedies Directive and recent case law in regard to procurement has brought a considerable amount of additional bureaucracy. Whilst the County Council supports the basic treaty principles around openness and transparency we are concerned about the process being developed around those principles.

Continued/3



Grant Shapps MP - 3

Added to this is the recent announcement that contracts and tenders over £500 should be published in full from January 2011. This will mean councils having to publish data over the EU procurement threshold that may not have been published in the Official Journal of the EU (OJEU). Adhoc purchases may have legitimately not been procured through a full EU procurement procedure but would then be open to legal challenge and costs. Due to the creation of parallel contract registers in order to fulfil the new commitment it would also prevent partners working effectively together on joint contracts and tenders.

- **Early Steps**

There are several areas where the coalition government could take some early steps. For instance, we welcome the important proposals in the Coalition Document, which seek to ensure that patients have a stronger voice through nominating councillors to the board of their local PCT. We would encourage implementation now rather than waiting for legislation. Similarly, it would be helpful to get going now on the new arrangements for police commissioners and to encourage the police to work with us. We would also like to see all departments encouraged to adopt a more open approach to collaborative working locally.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Louise Goldsmith', written in a cursive style.

Louise Goldsmith  
Leader of West Sussex County Council



Reducing Burdens on Local Government  
From: Henderson, Verena  
[VHenderson@wyrebc.gov.uk]  
Sent: 09 June 2010 14:35  
To: LG Burdens  
Cc: Corry, Jim  
Subject: Reducing Burdens on Local Government

Follow Up Flag: Follow up  
Flag Status: Completed

For the attention of Grant Shapps MP.

Dear Mr. Shapps,

Further to your letter dated 2 June 2010 requesting councils to let you have their top five most important suggestions for reducing burdens on local government, the top five from Wyre Borough Council in Lancashire are as follows:  
-

1. To scrap LAA targets and National Indicators in two-tier areas. In a large county with 12 districts they are pointless.

2. Allow Building Control to make a profit and increase local ability to increase income.

3. Insisting on all transactions over £500 are available on line hardly lifts the burdens on a council and is a fraction of the value applicable elsewhere

in the public sector.

4. Ban Freedom of Information requests from commercial companies as they are not in the public interest and waste valuable staff resources.

5. To cease compliance with the International Financial Reporting Standards due to the additional work they place on a council, which adds no value

for the public.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Corry,  
Chief Executive,  
Wyre Borough Council

Verena Henderson  
Personal Secretary to Chief Executive, &  
Leader of The Council,  
Wyre Borough Council,  
Civic Centre,  
Poulton-le-Fylde,  
Lancashire FY6 7PU

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Leader and Chief Executives  
of the Local Authority

**The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP**  
*Minister for Housing and Local Government*

**Department for Communities and Local  
Government**

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Bressenden Place  
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[www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

## **REDUCING THE BURDEN**

Thank you for taking the time to respond to my letter of 28th May in which I asked you to suggest your top five pieces of secondary legislation that cause unnecessary burdens.

Over 240 local authorities responded with a huge array of ideas that were both legislative and non-legislative, and stretch right across Whitehall, for example: Performance Monitoring, including audit, inspection and data; Quangos; Local Area Agreements and Local Strategic Partnerships; and the level of prescription required on Council Tax bills. My officials are looking at all the responses and will be working with the LGA and authorities to explore the suggestions further. To do this, we are talking to the LGA about potentially using their practitioner networks as the basis for holding further discussions over the summer recess. Further details on these arrangements will follow.

Many of you suggested that, given more time, you would have talked with your staff and been able to provide much more detailed suggestions. We are therefore launching today a webpage and email address inviting those who work most closely with our legislation to send their ideas to [Cutredtape@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Cutredtape@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

I would be grateful if you would cascade this request to your staff and ask that ideas (the more specific the better) are sent to the CutRedTape email address by 13th August.

This is part of a broader conversation that Government wants to have. The Deputy Prime Minister launched on 1 July the *YourFreedom* website ([www.hmg.gov.uk/yourfreedom](http://www.hmg.gov.uk/yourfreedom)), asking for ideas on civil liberties, unnecessary laws, and restrictive regulations.

**GRANT SHAPPS MP**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Grant Shapps", with a small flourish at the end.