

VIEW FROM THE RICS Bob Baber**One-stop public sector shop is the best way to save money**

By the end of this month, the government is expected to promote the case for local authorities in England to manage their land and buildings together.

The reasoning is that savings can be made and outcomes improved if public sector assets are managed as a collective resource across local areas. Throughout most of the UK, public sector property is managed within silos behind organisational, service and administrative boundaries that have little relevance to the public.

The legacy of these artificial lines is visible across our communities. We see public buildings designed for a single purpose and in part-time use but with the ongoing cost of their upkeep a constant drain on the public purse.

The permanency of bricks and mortar makes it difficult to break away from this model of public service provision. It confronts a basic human instinct to defend and expand the places that we occupy, even if the space is not strictly needed or fit for purpose. This is as true for communities and workplaces as it is in our own homes.

There is a persuasive body of evidence to show that managing public buildings across a local area,

as opposed to within public service silos, provides better value for money. A place-based approach to asset management starts with local places and communities. It encompasses all public services and means that the strategic management of public land and buildings spans across the local public service providers.

When the previous government's Total Place programme examined a "whole area" approach to providing public services, it found that if place-based asset management were adopted more widely, it could raise £35bn in capital receipts over 10 years and save £1.5bn in running costs.

Led by example

There are many examples of public bodies working together on one-off building projects, but few that do it across the whole of their collective property holdings.

One of the exceptions is Kent, where people can visit one-stop shops in central locations that provide a "gateway" to both county and district council services under one roof. Other counties are also setting out on this path, including Worcestershire, Hampshire, Kingston-upon-Hull and Cambridgeshire. The government will use the lessons from these to demonstrate the benefits of this approach to the wider sector.

Fundamental to this "one public estate" model is a collective understanding of the needs of local communities and how users want to access public services.

A place-based approach to public assets requires all local public service providers to work together with a shared ambition. For example, they could seek collectively to have fewer but higher-quality buildings, which are more intensively used, at less cost and with lower carbon emissions.

Different services sharing buildings could be a catalyst for sharing other resources and costs, such as IT and staff, leading to other savings.

The anticipated prompt from the government in the direction of a place-based approach to managing the public estate is timely for public bodies tempted by quick-fix property disposals to gain immediate savings. It will show that there is another way that offers greater savings and better outcomes over the longer term.

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Local government mayors will only be able to encourage economic growth in England's cities if they are given the right powers, a report says.

Local government mayors in the UK's 11 biggest cities in London are due to vote next year to appoint an elected mayor. The first city outside London to adopt the new model was Leicester, which made its mayor on 5 May. Last month, Centre for Cities and the Institute for Government published a 30-page report, "Big Shot Or Long Shot," about the powers mayors need to promote growth. The Localism Bill has proposed giving elected mayors the following:

Four-year terms During this period a council would not be able to remove a mayor. This is intended to give mayors the authority they need to take long-term decisions, and would also bring stability to cities such as Bristol that have changed mayors often over the last 10 years.

Power to gain approval Mayors would be able to recommend one-third of councillors to agree a budget and local policy frameworks, in contrast to the majority support that councillors need now.

Administrative powers The report says mayors should have more power over the role of the chief executive.

The report said there would be resistance to change from local government, and that powers would need to be put in place to ensure how mayors use their powers. However, Centre for Cities and the Institute for Government say cities need to be able to tailor policies to take account of local circumstances, even private sector investment across the city, and that cities should focus on transport, planning and skills.

To read their full recommendations visit: propertyweek.com/professional

