

South Staffordshire Council district stretches from the boundary with Stafford in the north to Worcestershire in the south, and contains within its area of responsibility a large part of the West Midlands Green Belt. With an average population density of less than 2.6 people per hectare the need for effective communications between council officers and members of the public is of paramount importance.

During the first few months of 2000, independent cost management analysts Smith Bellerby were engaged to conduct an audit of telecommunications at the Council's main offices, and at five leisure centres in Codsall, Cheslyn Hay, Wombourne, Kinver and Penkridge, and an engineering depot in Codsall.

The audit and subsequent analysis revealed that substantial savings were achievable. There was a staggering 87% annual saving on mobile telecommunication spend. The cost reduction measures, which included streamlining the number of service providers and tariffs, were implemented by Smith Bellerby within three months. Staff immediately benefited from a significant reduction in the number of invoices that needed to be processed each month, thereby generating additional internal savings, not included in the original report.

During the past two years, Smith Bellerby have continued to monitor expenditure on telecoms, providing regular management trend reports to the Council staff.

Recently, their service has been further enhanced by the introduction of electronic billing for mobiles. Each month, Smith Bellerby analyses the invoices provided by the supplier and generates a data file, which is used by the Council as part of their internal cost management processes. Other projects undertaken by Smith Bellerby include research into "Lone-worker" communications systems for the protection of some council officers plus, during 2002, Stephen Bellerby was asked by the Council to participate as the "external expert" in their Best Value review of administrative services.

David Hughes, Head of Internal Audit for the Council commented "We are absolutely delighted with the service we receive from Smith Bellerby. We

have realised some impressive savings on our external spend, but in several instances, these have been overshadowed by the internal savings resulting from more streamlined administration. We can rely on Smith Bellerby to provide independent advice on all matters relating to our telecommunications. We have been especially struck with the additional value-added services which Smith Bellerby's provide at no extra cost to the Council.

