
RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08

I am pleased to present the Annual report of the Resources Scrutiny Committee to Council on behalf of the Members of that Committee. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the Officers for their support over the last year and to convey thanks to Councillor Stephen Harker, Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio, who has attended and contributed to our meetings. Our Work Programme for this year has been subject to continual review and amendment and has been very challenging.

As in previous years, the majority of the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee, both at ordinary and special meetings has surrounded the Council's Revenue and Capital Medium-Term Financial Plans and detailed discussions and questioning of Officers has taken place on these plans. As part of our monitoring role in relation to the Revenue and medium-Term Financial Plans, we have also been updated regularly on the out-turn positions of those plans and on the financial position in relation to capital schemes, particularly in relation to the Dolphin Centre, Arts Centre and the Pedestrian Heart.

Linked to the work we have previously undertaken in relation to the Pedestrian Heart and our recommendations following our two reviews, we have been working with Officers on a high-level review which is being undertaken to ensure that, in future, there is a consistent approach to Project Management within the Authority, that there is accountability and transparency in all stages of the decision-making process, that risk management arrangements are in place and that various roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.

We also regularly receive combined financial and service planning reports so that we can compare the Council's financial performance against budget and, for the same budget headings, the service against target, and we have continued to monitor and review the Council's progress in meeting the requirements of the Gershon Review. We have had some interesting discussions on the allocation of the savings and a further training session for Members in relation to this will be arranged.

In relation to the Council's Human Resource function, we have continued to monitor the Authority's sickness absence statistics and we have ensured that Directors and Senior Managers are adhering to the Sickness Absence Policies and Procedures and that proactive work on both the management of sickness cases and health care promotion continues. In addition to this six-monthly monitoring, the Vice-Chair and I also now receive the sickness absence figures on a monthly basis, and, if the level of absence goes ten per cent over target, we have the authority to investigate this as a matter of urgency. We have also considered the work of the Council's Health and Safety Unit and progress within the Authority against health and safety related performance indicators and detailed information in relation to departmental structures to third-tier level and details of the number of employees within each department have been presented to

us. We found this information particularly useful and it is now available on the Council's Intranet for all Members.

We have been particularly innovative in our approach to scrutinising the Darlington and Stockton Partnership, in that a joint review with Members of Stockton Borough Council has been undertaken. We have held meetings both in Darlington and Stockton and have closely monitored the project and its potential. The Partnership will go live on the 1st May, 2008, and we will continue to receive periodic reports on this.

At the request of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee, we have, through a task and finish review investigated CCTV in Bus Shelters following the receipt of funding from the Rural Bus Challenge Fund. Following detailed investigation and questioning of the Officers, we were satisfied with the information we received and advised the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee accordingly.

As have all Scrutiny Committees, we have undertaken a piece of work to inform the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Darlington and Tees Valley Climate Change Strategies. The work we have done relates to energy efficiency in Procurement and considerations being given to the inclusion of eco-design in relation to new-build on Council-owned sites. Further work will be undertaken by us on the sustainable School New Build at North Road Primary School.

In addition, the Assistant Chief Executive has also attended one of our meetings to answer Members' questions following a call-in of Cabinet's decision in relation to proposals for complaints handling within the Authority.

Following agreement by Council to commit to the North East Charter for Elected Member Development, we will be undertaking a monitoring role of Members Training and Development. An Action Plan to achieve the Charter is being prepared and we will be monitoring progress against this Action Plan.

Other issues we have looked at are the Council's ICT Strategy; progress following the review we undertook in relation to Girobanking; the draft Sustainable Community Strategy; the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan; relevant departmental service plans for which we have responsibility; the Third-Sector Strategy; the progress on the review of administration which is currently being undertaken; the management and conservation of the Borough Art Collection; and the progress made on the Action Plan in relation to the future management of the Council's allotment service.

We have also received information from Officers on PerformancePlus, the Council's computerised performance management system. This system allows Officers to record and analyse information, and produce reports, to create an effective management of corporate and service performance, based on objectives and performance indicators contained within the Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and Service Plans, which can be monitored by us.

In addition, numerous meetings and discussions have been held with leading Officers outside the formal scrutiny process and have been reported back to Members on the outcome of those meetings.

Chair
Resources Scrutiny Committee