
RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09

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 again been very challenging.

As in previous years, the majority of the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee has surrounded the Council's Revenue and Capital Medium-Term Financial Plans. To enable us to have a greater understanding of this subject area, one of our meetings was specifically focussed on this and our responsibility to scrutinise Cabinet's proposals in relation to the Council's budget. David Hall, Assistant Director, Accounting Services and Local Taxation gave a presentation on this and I would like to record my thanks to David for his assistance and support as Lead Officer for our Scrutiny Committee.

As Members are aware, the 2009/13 Plan and, in particular, the 2009/10 budget proposals, were very challenging and, to enable us to give full consideration to the Plan and Cabinet's proposals, we established a Task and Finish Review Group which met on a number of occasions to question Directors on their individual budgets and spend. One of the outcomes from this piece of work was to set up a Budget Monitoring and Efficiency Review Group which will meet every two months in between regular meetings of our Scrutiny Committee to monitor the 2009/10 budget and to assist in developing efficiency projects to try to identify further savings 2009/10 and future years.

Linked to this, over the last year, we have also regularly received 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.

Following the work we have previously undertaken in relation to project management within the Authority and the input we have given to the Capital Process review which has been undertaken by Officers, we have continued to scrutinise the outcomes of the various work streams to ensure that, in future, there are consistent arrangements for project management within the Council. We have also, through our Capital Process Review Group, received regular updates from the Officers on the projects being managed by the Council, either by its in-house management team, framework partners or by consultants. This is a piece of work which we will continue to be involved with in the next Municipal Year.

We have had one call-in this year, which was in relation to the proposed closure of Post Offices within Darlington. This call-in was dealt with in accordance with the Constitution, and

following consideration of the issue and the options, we agreed to support Cabinet's proposals not to subsidise those Post Officers being closed by Post Offices Limited.

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. We have also received considered the work of the Council's Health and Safety Unit and progress within the Authority against health and safety related performance indicators and information on the Council's workforce data.

We have also looked at the management and conservation of the Borough Art Collection and one of the Members of our Scrutiny Committee has been nominated to serve on a Steering Group to develop future policies and procedures to manage, develop, protect and conserve the collection.

Other issues we have looked at are the progress made since the implementation of Xentrall Shared Services; 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 the progress made on the Action Plan in relation to the future management of the Council's allotment service and the revised Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments procedure.

As Members will be aware, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 has strengthened the role of Overview and Scrutiny by enabling the scrutinising of certain public bodies and requiring them to provide information, or appear before them. It refers specifically to those 'duty to co-operate' partners specifically in relation to the Local Area Agreement. Over the next year we will be monitoring and challenging performance of the agreed targets for the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement in our Work Programme.

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

Ian Haszeldine
Chair