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**RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10**

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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 Chris McEwan, Cabinet Member with Efficiency and 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. The budget proposals this year were again very challenging and we have spent a lot of time over the last Municipal Year, both at meetings of the Resources Scrutiny Committee and at the Budget Monitoring and Efficiency Review Group looking at the Medium Term Financial Plan and the Council's financial and service performance. We have also interviewed individual Directors and questioned them on the management of their individual departmental budgets.

The Budget Monitoring and Efficiency Review Group was established in 2009 following the budget process, and the formulation of this Group has allowed us to undertake frequent and timely monitoring of the Medium Term Financial Plan on a monthly basis. In addition to regular monitoring of the budget, some of the specific areas of work we have done at meetings of this Group have been in relation to Chief Officers' terms and conditions, the scope of work undertaken by the Communications Unit and the costs associated with the publication of the Town Crier, planned savings within the Connecting with Communities Section, income from car parking and the use of consultants within the Authority.

Cabinet, at its meeting held in January, 2010, approved the draft Medium-Term Financial Plan 2010-14 as a basis for public consultation and, following all the work we have done over the last year and the information and knowledge we have gained, we understood the objectives of that Plan and supported the recommendations therein.

The Budget Monitoring and Efficiency Review Group will continue to meet during the next Municipal Year and we will be looking to evidence and monitor how the proposed savings are being achieved throughout the year and we will be looking to use the regular monthly budget monitoring reports to ensure that the budget is 'on track' and being delivered. We will also be reviewing and challenging the implementation and outcomes of the Business Model.

Following work we have done previously in relation to project management within the Authority, we have 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, with

individual projects being looked at in more detail as and when we thought necessary. This again, is an on-going piece of work which we will continue to be involved with in the next Municipal Year, however, we are of the view that good project management arrangements are now well-embedded within the Organisation.

In relation to the Pedestrian Heart, we were asked to look at whether the Officers' advice not to take further action in relation to payments, unless further evidence came to light, was sound. This arose from a recommendation we made to Cabinet in 2007, that a review should be conducted into whether payments made to the contractors were appropriate. In considering this, we also took into account the views of two members of the public, Mr Hume and Mr Smith, who have previously been involved in the work we have undertaken on this subject. Following our investigation and detailed questioning of the Officers, we recommended to Cabinet that the decision was sound but that if any additional evidence was found, it be brought back to our Scrutiny Committee to consider whether to recommend that further legal action should be taken and to consider the financial implications of moving forward with any legal action based on that evidence.

In relation to the Council's Human Resource function, we have continued to monitor the Authority's sickness absence statistics and we have ensured the Directors and Senior Managers are adhering to the Sickness Absence Policies and Procedures and that proactive work on both the management of sickness absence cases and health care promotion continues. 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.

We have also looked at the attendance figures and budget information in relation to the Civic Theatre, and have considered the budgetary information in relation to the food festival 2009 and the Mayor's Ball 2009.

Other issues which we have looked at are the Annual Procurement Plan, relevant service plans for which we have responsibility, progress on the postal review being implemented and the current performance, following its first year of operation, of Xentrall Shared Services, the development of the revised draft Darlington Compact and the draft Allotment Strategy and work of the Allotment service.

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

**Councillor Ian Haszeldine on behalf of the Resources Scrutiny Committee**