

# Contents

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<b>Diary</b>	2
<b>Contents and editorial</b>	3
<b>The ensuring council</b>	
Dr Steven Griggs, De Montfort University	4
<b>Doing more for less</b>	
Valerie Watts, Derry City Council	6
<b>A new generation of council housing</b>	
Nicola Carroll, APSE and ARCH	8
<b>Introduction to the CRC</b>	
Stephen Cirell, Cornwall County Council	10
<b>Strictly performance!</b>	
APSE conference report	12
<b>APSE performance networks awards and photographs</b>	14
<b>Trees and woods are prescription for healthy communities</b>	
Woodland Trust	18
<b>Double dip dangers</b>	
Brendan Barber, TUC	20
<b>All politics is local</b>	
Alan Waters, LGIU	22
<b>Report Back</b>	
APSE news report	24
<b>Pre budget report 2009: Impact on environmental services</b>	
Mo Baines, APSE	26
<b>APSE people pages</b>	27
<b>Briefing notes update</b>	27

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## Here's to 2010!

With all the talk of financial austerity and tough times ahead it would be easy to skip over 2009 and jump instead into the post new year blues of dark nights, no Christmas lights to cheer us and the bills dropping on to the mat. But before we fall into despair we need to reflect on the year past and perhaps allow ourselves a moment of unadulterated self-congratulation.

Merchant bankers disregarded any sense of moral or social responsibility and despite the mess that they created have had the audacity to demand they retain their inflated bonuses. Bank customers have been ripped off with extortionate charges, albeit determined as legal, but it has left many with a sense of frustration and dissatisfaction. Politicians of all political parties have been found wanting 'in the court of public opinion' for claiming anything and everything from duck houses to kit kats.

Within local government however we have managed by and large to navigate our way over the hurdles. Local government has not been tainted to the same degree as MPs by expenses scandals. Our customers, the citizens that we serve, have learned some valuable lessons – which is that the council is there when they need them. The impact of the recession has shown, albeit in very sad circumstances, just how effective and innovative local government can be. We have helped thousands of people - those who have had their homes repossessed have been found new homes. We have supported our local economies through local businesses, by ourselves becoming good customers, by paying on time and being seen to do business locally.

We have continued to support free swimming initiatives, improve our elderly care services, support our young people and provide healthy school meals to our children. We have continued to clean the streets, mend the street lights, grit the roads and empty bins. Our parks have still bloomed and our buildings are still clean. In the grand scheme of global economic finance these achievements may be seen as small beer but the reality is that these are the measures by which we are judged by our citizens, and they are services we should be proud of.

Ask anyone of your local citizens who they would prefer to keep in a job. A banker or a bin man? I think we can all guess what the answer would be.

I wish you all the very best for 2010 and thank you from the bottom of my heart for the things that you do and the things I hope we can continue to do in 2010.

Best wishes

*Clr Shaun Gallagher, APSE National Chair*