



### **Budget comment**

Overall, for one of the most anticipated Budgets in decades, Mr Darling's pronouncements appear decidedly underwhelming.

The increase in public sector efficiency savings next year to £15b equates to a 12% rise from the target of £4.9b to £5.5b for local government, which will be challenging in the face of increasing pressure the recession places on services. But councils will be relieved, in the short-term, that the three-year grant settlement remains unchanged.

Giving local authorities access to job creation schemes recognises their key employment and training role. Likewise, the £100m for local authority building is welcome recognition of local government's important housing role. But this is relatively small sum considering the length of waiting lists and must be looked at in the context of wider reform of housing finance that needs to take place urgently.

The car scrappage initiative offers some relief to councils having to deal with abandoned vehicles. And the emphasis on green technology and energy efficiency should reinforce public sector carbon reduction commitments.

**Paul O'Brien, chief executive of the Association for Public Service Excellence**