



## BASHING THE BUDGET

**A**t this time of year literally thousands of clerks in England and Wales are trying to meet the impossible by relying on the inconceivable, to balance a draft budget.

It is not helped by the phenomenon of devolution through localism, where the DCLG are under the misapprehension that local services can be run by a sort of Dads' Army, who will clean streets, cultivate gardens and mend roads all for a slap on the back and a hearty well done! According to this vision we will see local worthies, patching potholes and providing basic services.

If we suspend disbelief for a minute and accept that it might be possible to include an element of 'volunteerism' in a transfer of services to a local level, we should also consider how far it should go for public safety's sake and in the interests of the local economy?

In trying to bring down the costs are we not looking at the wrong end of the telescope? The people wielding the shovels and brooms for society are not well or over paid, but some believe the managerialist infrastructure that oversees and instructs them is highly paid and often is remote from the people it

purports to serve, with a covert agenda of self preservation in the face of reform. Volunteers may be a valuable resource, but they are not donkeys to be used as alternatives to the backbone of well paid, well motivated professional staff. We have to create a new structure where local councils are well run both professionally and empathetically; with good, reasonably well paid staff, who manage and run local services. Every town or village should be able to decide what type of basic services it wants and how it wants them, replacing the centralism that even dictates the colour of lampposts and litter bins.