



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

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**Department for Levelling Up, Housing and
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2 Marsham Street
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Shokat Lal
By email

www.gov.uk/dluhc

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Dear Mr. Lal,

I am writing to you following the Commissioners' letter to the Secretary of State of 20 December 2023 which provided their fourth report on the progress on the best value intervention in Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

The Secretary of State has carefully considered the findings and evidence presented in the Commissioners' report, together with other relevant information. Ministers welcome the Council's progress and the confidence in the Chief Executive and the leadership team that Commissioners highlighted in their report. It is clear the Council have continued to make significant changes, and that there has been considerable progress since their third report.

The fourth report notes that you have continued "to drive the improvement agenda forward, ensuring the Council focuses on getting the basics right and developing an approach which aspires to excellence." Ministers were very pleased that Commissioners' view the Council now as more resilient, with improvement more embedded in the culture and continuous improvement now sustainable.

The report also notes that "the Council we see now is a far cry from the organisation we first encountered: the staff, the elected members, and most importantly, the residents, have all noted the changes. The improvement work which was once seen as a standalone priority has now been interwoven with the 'business as usual' strategic planning of the Council. In short, we believe the Council is now meeting its Best Value duty and is capable of taking forward its improvement independently."

Having considered the evidence provided, the Secretary of State agrees with the Commissioners' assessment that the Council is now meeting its Best Value Duty; as such the intervention will formally end on 22 March 2024.

The Council will need to sustain the rate of improvement, build further resilience and continue to improve outcomes for residents. Ministers consider that the Council is well placed over the next year and beyond to continue to improve independently, and are pleased that your Council will be supported by the LGA to ensure they build on the improvement post-intervention. I would like to further extend an offer of support from DLUHC, our door is always open, and please do not hesitate to get in touch if there is anything you wish to discuss.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your colleagues at Sandwell for all your hard work and dedication, as well as your unwavering cooperation with Commissioners and the department throughout this process.

Max Soule