



Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

Simon Hoare MP
Minister for Local Government

**Department for Levelling Up, Housing
and Communities**
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Cllr Kerrie Carmichael
By email

www.gov.uk/dluhc

7 March 2024

Dear Cllr Carmichael,

I wish to thank you for submitting your Council's fourth report on improvement progress, and to let you know that we have, today, published the Commissioners' fourth report to the Secretary of State on the Best Value intervention in Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, together with my response, and made a Written Ministerial Statement.

The Secretary of State has considered carefully the findings and evidence presented in the Commissioners' report, in your letter, and in other reports such as that from Grant Thornton.

We very much welcome the progress your Council has made over the duration of the intervention. The Commissioners' report to the Secretary of State outlines many positive developments; it is clear they have considerable confidence in the Chief Executive and the leadership team and welcome the "continued and significant political stability" and the increased support to members. It is clear the Council has continued to make significant changes, and that there has been considerable progress since the third report.

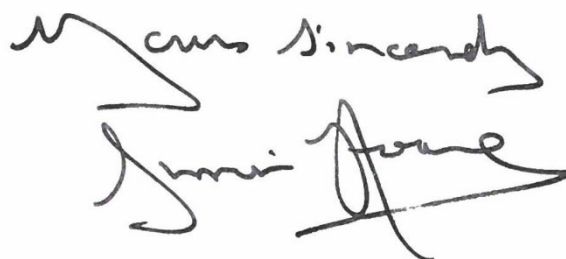
The fourth report notes that, "Shokat Lal, the new Chief Executive, continues to drive the improvement agenda forward, ensuring the Council focuses on getting the basics right and developing an approach which aspires to excellence." I am pleased to see that Commissioners consider that the Council is more resilient; that improvement is more embedded in the culture; and that continuous improvement is 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 there is now no evidence to suggest the Council is failing its Best Value Duty; as such the Secretary of State is content to let the Directions expire on 22 March and for the statutory intervention to end. The Commissioners' appointments will also come to an end.

The Council knows it needs to sustain the rate of improvement, build further resilience, and continue to improve outcomes for residents. I understand the Council is committed to driving the improvements independently and that you have agreed with the LGA that they will continue to provide support and challenge to the Council over the next 12 to 18 months. I would also like to add that, although there will no longer be formal reports to the Secretary of State, my door is always open should you wish to contact me. The department will continue to engage with your Council at official level, in the normal course of business, whereby Shokat and the senior leadership team will be able to meet, and seek support from, a dedicated single point of contact.

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. The Secretary of State and I share your commitment in ensuring the best possible Council and services for the people of Sandwell.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Hoare', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the name.

SIMON HOARE MP
Minister for Local Government