

Slough Borough Council Best Value Commissioners

Dear Minister,

Slow and inconsistent progress at Slough Borough Council continues to be of significant concern. While there have been important areas of improvement, the “step change” called for in Commissioners’ Seventh Report has not been achieved. Recovery remains uneven and fragile, and the Council has yet to demonstrate that improvement can be sustained consistently across the organisation. It is clear that the Council is not achieving its Best Value duty.

There has been progress in financial leadership and financial planning. Historic accounting issues have been substantially reduced, and the Council has established a more realistic Medium Term Financial Strategy, providing greater clarity over the path towards financial balance and debt reduction. These are important achievements given the volatility of the Council’s financial position throughout the intervention.

However, the financial position remains vulnerable. A further significant in-year overspend, driven principally by increased expenditure in Children’s Services, together with continuing pressures from temporary accommodation, will require further adjustment to the MTFS. The Council must address these pressures without adding materially to its debt burden. Repeated financial shocks also consume organisational capacity, affect staff and Member morale and divert attention from broader recovery towards short-term financial containment.

Previous Commissioner reports have highlighted the need for a credible and properly resourced transformation programme capable of improving services and delivering substantial financial savings. The Council has made progress, including the appointment of strategic partners to strengthen programme management, digital capability and data management. This provides an important opportunity to accelerate improvement.

However, Slough has historically found it easier to develop plans than to deliver them consistently. The value of this significant external investment will therefore depend upon the Council’s leadership working collectively, setting clear priorities and ensuring disciplined delivery across the organisation. Without this, transformation itself becomes a further organisational risk rather than an enabler of recovery.

Ultimately, residents will judge recovery through the quality and value of the services they receive. In too many areas these remain unacceptable. The recent Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services judged services to be "Inadequate" across all four main measures. Although the Council had anticipated weaknesses and changed the leadership of the service prior to inspection, there had been insufficient time to address the deep-rooted problems identified. The consequences for the organisation are significant, not least the level of financial investment and organisational resource that will be needed to address the issues, but most importantly the impact upon vulnerable children and families is extremely serious.

There are similarly significant challenges in Housing, SEND and Youth Justice. In summer 2025 the Regulator of Social Housing awarded the Council a C3 consumer grading, reflecting serious failings in its landlord responsibilities. The Council has strengthened leadership and capacity in response, but progress remains slower and less consistent than required.

A recent review of delivery against the SEND Priority Action and Impact Plan indicates growing commitment from leaders across education, health and social care, supported by strengthened governance arrangements. However, progress remains at an early stage and has yet to demonstrate sustained impact for children and young people.

The Youth Justice Service was rated inadequate in January 2025. Progress against the improvement plan has been uneven and, for much of the past 18 months, too slow. Momentum has increased over the last five months following additional staffing investment, but improvement remains fragile and subject to close Youth Justice Board scrutiny. With the next HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection due in the autumn, the priority is to accelerate delivery and demonstrate sustained improvement.

These service failures reinforce a recurring finding of Commissioner reports: improvement at Slough remains inconsistent and insufficiently embedded. Much has been done to address historic weaknesses in governance, systems and processes, but significant gaps remain and improvement has too often lacked sustainability.

A major constraint has been instability in senior leadership. The Council currently has a degree of capable and experienced leaders but has not yet secured sufficient continuity and tenure across its senior leadership team to provide sustained organisational direction. This reflects both wider market conditions, and the difficulty Slough has experienced in attracting and retaining senior leaders. High turnover among permanent staff remains a concern and contributes to a wider organisational perception that it can be unusually difficult to get things done.

The culture of the organisation remains inconsistent and fragile. There are strong pockets of capability, and the recent staff survey provides some grounds for optimism, but trust, confidence, coherence and collective discipline have not yet been sufficiently rebuilt. Staff need to feel both valued and able to deliver. Inconsistent leadership, cumbersome processes and systems, and at times an overly blame-oriented relationship between Members and officers continue to undermine that environment.

Culture is not a peripheral issue. It is the operating environment within which recovery must take place. If it does not support collaboration, accountability, learning and delivery, it becomes a significant inhibitor of improvement.

Many officers and Members are working extremely hard, and progress is visible in a number of areas. The finance function is providing strong organisational leadership, and improvements in technology and data capability are beginning to establish better foundations. Nevertheless, serious weaknesses in Children's Services, SEND and housing will require substantial attention and resource and poses a risk to the wider pace of recovery.

Most councils experience significant challenges from time to time. Mature organisations can identify their weaknesses, learn from them and take corrective action without sustained external intervention. Slough is not yet at that point. For much of the intervention it has operated between organisational "survival" and "compliance", rather than as a confident, learning and continuously improving organisation. In part this can be attributed to the high level of foundational systems and processes which are still not robust enough to provide a stable base from which the Council can build.

The essence of Best Value is not simply compliance with individual requirements. It is the organisational capability, capacity and culture to identify problems, learn, adapt and continuously improve. Slough remains some distance from demonstrating this consistently and it is Commissioners' view that the Council will require significant external support for some time.

The immediate priorities must be to continue to address the serious weaknesses in Children's Services, SEND and housing while protecting the Council's fragile financial recovery. This will require disciplined financial planning and demonstrable delivery alongside continued investment in the core organisational foundations — leadership, governance, systems, processes, technology, data and culture — upon which sustainable improvement depends.

Creating the conditions for success will require committed and collegiate leadership at both political and officer level. The arrival of the new Managing Director Commissioner provides an important opportunity to reset organisational priorities and establish greater coherence and discipline.

From the wider Commissioner perspective, five priorities should now underpin the next phase of recovery:

- **Address the most serious service weaknesses through a whole-Council approach**, particularly in Children's Services, SEND and housing.
- **Protect and strengthen financial resilience and sustainability**, ensuring that the Council can fund essential service recovery, organisational improvement and transformation while maintaining a credible route towards financial stability and debt reduction.
- **Secure a stable, committed and collegiate senior leadership team**, with sufficient continuity of tenure and the right mindset to lead sustained recovery.
- **Translate transformation investment into disciplined delivery**, ensuring that transformation partners, Members and officers work collectively behind a realistic, firmly managed and properly resourced programme, underpinned by stronger organisational systems, processes, technology and data.
- **Build a supportive, accountable and learning culture**, in which Members and officers work together to create the conditions for staff to perform, learn, thrive and continuously improve.

Progress against these priorities should increasingly be judged not simply by the completion of plans or individual improvement actions, but by whether the Council is developing consistent capability to identify problems, respond to them through the implementation of achievable solutions, learn from them and sustain improvement without external intervention.

Financial Sustainability

The Corporate Resources senior management team has demonstrated strong leadership and effective collaboration across finance and other core functions. They have shown a continuous improvement mindset by seeking independent assurance and developing plans to strengthen the Council's governance, processes and services. While progress remains incremental, it builds on previous achievements and should provide a sense of momentum that is important for staff motivation and sustained improvement.

Regulatory Compliance and Assurance

Good progress is being made towards compliance with professional codes, including the Global Internal Audit Standards and the CIPFA Financial Management Code. The Council has cleared its historic backlogs of accounts, largely through disclaimed opinions. At the time of writing one of its subsidiary company's 2024/25 accounts is also overdue and is in the final stage of their external audit. The Council's 2025/26 accounts were published within the statutory timeline and are now subject to external audit with good engagement with officers during the audit process and VFM review noted. However, due to the number of disclaimed opinions, and the depth of the challenges first cited in the 2018/19 disclaimed opinion (considered unprecedented for a local authority at that time), restoring full audit assurance is still expected to take multiple audit cycles.

Between May 2021 and February 2023, the Council's external auditors issued several statutory and key recommendations, reflecting significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements. A September 2024 escalation letter recorded serious concerns, including limited progress against earlier recommendations and several significant ongoing challenges. The letter was an informal step before formal consideration of further powers, including a Public Interest Report under Schedule 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, if the Council did not respond appropriately. Much of the progress has only been made in recent years and some of the issues remain relevant today. The use of auditors' powers is a serious issue, and it is important that the Council learns from this and acts promptly when statutory directions or recommendations are issued. The auditor's independent assessment of progress is expected to conclude and report during this audit cycle.

Procurement & Contract Management

Concerns that the pace of improvement in procurement and contract management had fallen back following changes to key personnel were outlined in a previous Commissioner's report. A procurement service review has been completed, appointment of a new permanent head of procurement undertaken, and a refreshed improvement programme developed. The plan aims to address

weaknesses in Procurement Act 2023 compliance, procurement effectiveness in driving value, and contract management. Close monitoring and oversight will be required by the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee or Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee to ensure key performance indicators are achieved and delivery momentum maintained.

Risk Management

The Council has developed a framework and approach for monitoring, tracking, and reporting corporate risk. A risk management board has been established with some Members of the corporate leadership team in attendance. A risk maturity self-assessment was undertaken, followed by an independent external review. In embedding risk management particular focus is needed on the risk management resource. This is led by a single risk management consultant and therefore capacity and resilience need to be built into the structure to prevent any setbacks to the good progress made. A strengthened risk management system is required to maintain both short- and long-term data integrity, analyse trends and strengthen management oversight.

Finance Improvement Oversight

A robust framework is in place to monitor improvement workstreams, audit recommendations, annual governance statement actions and savings plans. The Council has a clearer understanding of its risks and the actions needed to address or mitigate them. New or refreshed governance arrangements are in place, including procurement, capital and risk oversight boards and asset panels. Officer financial training has been strengthened and training for Members has been made available. However, take up is inconsistent. Regular progress updates in relation to the improvement programme are presented to the Finance Improvement Board and Audit and Corporate Governance Committee to help maintain focus and support sustained improvement.

Capacity and financial pressures have in the past disrupted the delivery of this programme, and this must be avoided. The Finance Improvement Programme should remain a priority.

Audit Committee

The Audit and Corporate Governance Committee faced initial challenges after the 2023 election but has made clear progress over the past year. Following recent membership changes, the new committee should build on this progress. Members should engage fully with internal and external training, including targeted updates on complex areas such as treasury management, accounts and risk management. Private sessions with the external audit lead and Head of Internal Audit should continue, to support independence, candid discussion and early identification of sensitive risks or cultural issues. Effective work and agenda planning, supported by concise officer reports, will help the

committee focus on emerging risks and significant weaknesses. An engaged and informed committee is essential to effective governance.

Financial Health and Resilience

Following a collaborative cross-directorate approach, due diligence, and proposition testing with an external partner, the Council established medium-term financial plans across all funds. To achieve a balanced budget, the Council required Exceptional Financial Support to address the funding gaps in 2026/27 and 2027/28. This support was essential, not only for immediate solvency but also to facilitate the restoration of reserves depleted by prior year overspends and to provide the necessary transformation funding to reform service outcomes and support financial sustainability.

The strategies are living documents that change with economic, political and social reality. As such the key challenge for the Council is not the establishment of the strategies but the delivery, which requires collective ownership and the ability to take fast corrective action when a financial shock occurs or a gap opens.

Rising Demand and Future Pressures

Population growth is a useful indicator of demand for universal services such as waste collection and road maintenance, but it does not reflect demand for more complex, high-cost statutory services that require improvement.

Costs and demand continue to increase, particularly in temporary accommodation, SEND, and children's social care. The most significant pressure is the increase in the number of children and young people looked after with greater complexity of needs, limited placement availability and provider market pressures. These challenges are likely to continue in the short to medium term as the Council delivers required service improvements and responds to local and national reforms.

The pressures are affecting the Council's finances, with an indicative quarter 1 overspend forecast of around £20m for 2026/27. Total general fund reserves at the end of March 2026 were £27m, including £11m in unallocated reserves. The MTFS includes a £15m plan to replenish unallocated reserves, with £11m allocated to 2026/27 to rebuild resilience; however, this contribution may not be achievable in the current climate which is a key risk to the Council.

Gaps in operational data and performance information mean the Council must carry out significant reconciliation work to establish a single, reliable view. In some areas, forecasts are being driven predominantly by financial spend data rather than strong operational intelligence and as such decisions are not fully reflecting outcomes and community impact.

Corporate centre and resource utilisation

Across the Council they have not yet embedded a culture of financial ownership and accountability. There is a tendency for some areas to depend too heavily on the corporate centre to drive strategic transformation and to enforce financial discipline. This is a significant weakness; while a strong corporate centre can impose discipline, it cannot single-handedly resolve systemic issues or reduce service spending.

The Council's financial culture still depends too much on short-term corporate fixes, reserves and in-year spending controls. If sustained for too long, these measures can constrain innovation, weaken service delivery and increase longer-term costs. Financial health must be owned across the organisation, with greater focus on the identification of recurring efficiencies and sustainable savings to address deficits in a timely manner. This is key to any organisation achieving Best Value.

The Council's overall financial position remains extremely challenging in the short and medium term. It continues to rely on Exceptional Financial Support, with cumulative support expected to reach £417m by March 2028; without specific significant actions Commissioners anticipate that this figure will increase.

The asset disposal programme and remaining pipeline include investment and operational portfolios with estimated actual and forecast net capital receipts of £307m. Due diligence indicates that limited additional income can be assumed from this source, so the focus must now be on delivering the target, aligning retained assets with the new target operating model and optimising their use.

External debt stood at £470m in March 2026, around £5m below the 2026/27 planning assumption of £475m, mainly due to slippage in the capital programme. The Council has a 10-year debt repayment strategy aimed at reducing debt to a manageable level while maintaining core services and a capital programme that supports the borough's longer-term needs. However, given the lack of infrastructure investment over many years, this will need to be kept under close review.

The rolling MTFS refresh has begun for the 2027/28 budget cycle. Services, supported by the strategic transformation partner and specialist advisers, will need a timely and strategic approach to addressing the widening in-year and medium-term budget gaps. The Council must also prioritise investment in enabling infrastructure, organisational capacity, early intervention and prevention to reduce acute demand over the medium term.

Achieving financial stability and building resilience will require clear medium-term strategies, that fully encompass the investment required to deliver enabling infrastructure, service improvements and

transformation supported by robust delivery plans. Navigating this path will require effective political leadership, with Members prepared to make difficult decisions and take a longer-term view.

Transformation

In response to concerns raised in the Commissioners' Seventh Report, it is pleasing to report that the Council has made progress in developing its approach to transformation. It has adopted a "hub and spoke" model in which the corporate centre will provide oversight, programme management, challenge and access to best practice, working in partnership with service areas which will progressively build their own transformation capability.

As an important precursor to this work, the Council commissioned an external partner to develop a revised Target Operating Model (TOM). The purpose of the TOM is to describe how the Council needs to organise, govern and operate in the future so that it can consistently discharge its statutory responsibilities, deliver its priorities and achieve financial sustainability within the resources available. It should therefore provide an important design framework for transformation across the organisation.

Although a TOM has been developed, the Council has not yet fully translated it into a shared understanding of what it means in practice or how it should shape organisational change. This is materially important. The Council will need to refine, adapt and, critically, secure collective ownership of the TOM before embarking on significant transformational change. Without this, there is a risk that individual programmes and business cases develop in isolation rather than contributing coherently to the future organisation the Council is seeking to create.

The Council has also recognised, with Commissioner support, that it requires additional capacity and capability to pursue a meaningful transformation agenda. It has therefore undertaken a procurement exercise across three Lots, two of which have now been completed. Lot 1 will support the development of programme management and transformation delivery capability, while Lot 2 will provide additional expertise in technology and data. Lot 3 is intended to secure specialist expertise to support transformation within individual service areas.

This represents positive progress. The greater challenge, however, will be ensuring that the Council is able to act as a strong and intelligent client and derive maximum value from these commercial relationships. This will require the Council's leadership to operate with common purpose, establish a clear hierarchy of priorities and maintain discipline about the sequencing and pace of change.

In the Commissioners' view, a component of the transformation programme should be on strengthening the organisational foundations upon which more fundamental service change can subsequently be built. In any organisation with limited resources and significant challenges,

transformation cannot simply become a collection of individual initiatives or savings projects. It must contribute to the creation of a simpler, more integrated and sustainable organisation in effect this is the purpose of the TOM.

There could be a tension between this approach and the Council's immediate financial position. Current financial pressures are likely to absorb significant leadership and organisational capacity if the mitigating proposals are not developed at pace, as occurred during the financial pressures that emerged in the summer of 2025.

The Council will therefore need to manage carefully the balance between the requirement to deliver financial savings over the medium term and the need to invest in the foundations of longer-term transformation. This may require a resetting of expectations with Members and services about the level of financial benefit that can realistically be delivered in the short to medium term. A more disciplined and sequenced approach may produce fewer immediate benefits, but it is more likely to create the conditions for sustainable improvement and more fundamental transformation thereafter.

Leadership

The test for Slough's leadership has been, and remains, whether it can:

- **Face reality** – understand and acknowledge the Council's true position.
- **Prioritise** – concentrate limited capacity on the few things that matter most.
- **Lead collectively** – take responsibility for the whole Council, not individual portfolios.
- **Execute** – translate decisions reliably into measurable change.
- **Build followership** – secure the trust and commitment of staff.
- **Build capability** – create an organisation able to succeed without intervention.
- **Learn and adapt** – change behaviour in response to evidence, challenge and failure.

Against these tests, the picture remains mixed. The most significant constraint has been the continuing lack of leadership continuity. High turnover at senior level has made it harder to build a cohesive leadership team, sustain a common organisational purpose and maintain momentum. Work to strengthen collaboration within CLT has been positive, but repeated changes in membership have inevitably limited its impact. Securing and retaining senior leaders with the capability and commitment to remain for a sustained period must therefore remain a priority.

Leadership capacity has also been consumed by serious weaknesses in individual services. The need to stabilise areas such as Children's Services and Housing has understandably demanded significant

attention, but this has reduced the capacity available for collective leadership of the organisation. Combined with insufficient prioritisation, this has too often resulted in effort being spread too thinly.

Relationships between senior Members and CLT remain variable. The new Leader and revised Cabinet are operating in an exceptionally demanding environment, but there remain occasions when difficulties have led too quickly to blame rather than joint problem-solving. This must not become an accepted behavioural norm. Stronger member–officer relationships will require greater openness, earlier and clearer briefing, and a shared focus on resolving problems rather than attributing responsibility.

There are, however, encouraging signs. The 2026 staff survey shows improvement across all nine areas, with the Employee Net Promoter Score increasing by more than 10%. This suggests that organisational confidence and trust are beginning to rebuild.

That progress remains fragile. Leadership visibility, listening, staff development and collaborative working all require further improvement. The Council also remains too dependent on contractors and interims, who account for around 23% of the workforce, adding cost and reinforcing organisational fragility.

The priority now is to build greater leadership stability, sharper organisational focus and stronger collective accountability, while converting improving staff confidence into a more permanent, capable and collaborative workforce. These are essential conditions if Slough is to sustain recovery without continued intervention.

Service Delivery

Slough Borough Council remains subject to Department for Education intervention in both Children's Services and SEND.

SEND

SEND remains a significant area of weakness and a continuing focus of DfE intervention. The underlying causes mirror the wider organisational issues identified in this report: unstable leadership, weak governance and accountability, poor data, workforce instability, strained partnerships and significant financial pressure.

There are early signs of improvement, including stronger system leadership and governance, but progress is not yet sufficiently mature or sustained to demonstrate better outcomes for children and young people. Continued intervention and close oversight therefore remain necessary.

The immediate priority is to turn stronger governance into consistent delivery: improving financial control, data and workforce stability; clarifying accountability and decision-making; and rebuilding trust through meaningful co-production and transparent engagement with children, families and partners.

Children's Services

Slough's standard ILACS inspection report was published in August 2026. Inspectors graded all four elements as 'inadequate' and found that, since the last ILACS inspection in 2023, the service provided to children has further deteriorated. Widespread and serious weaknesses in Slough's help and protection services were found, resulting in children being left in unsafe situations for too long, with some being seriously harmed. The Area for Priority Action arising from the Focused Visit in November 2025 had not been adequately addressed. Inspectors did find that the virtual school, fostering and adoption services and support to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people were strong. They also acknowledged the new senior leadership team's transparency over the extent of the failings and their approach to tackling the challenges but recognised that it is too early to see impact yet.

The ILACS inspection has followed a further period of turbulence with significant change at leadership level. A series of new, interim appointments were made in March 2026, including the DCS-CEX of Slough Children First and Director of Operations (seconded from another LA). The new team have been honest in their appraisal of current services and are heavily focused on improving the quality of practice; but progress against Slough's improvement plan has been limited, despite efforts to prioritise actions. Work has been taking place to align governance and streamline reporting to minimise the demand on service leaders, and give the space required to drive improvement; it is critical this work continues in the next reporting period, led in partnership by DfE and MHCLG Commissioners and SCF/SBC leaders.

Housing

Housing remains a significant risk despite stronger leadership, governance and early signs of improved operational control. Homelessness cases and B&B use have reduced, Housing Benefit recovery has improved, temporary accommodation arrears have fallen and growth in temporary accommodation has stabilised. However, more than 1,500 households remain in temporary accommodation against a forecast of 1,300, with no sustained reduction yet achieved.

The landlord service is progressing its Voluntary Undertaking following the Regulator of Social Housing's C3 judgement, and tenant satisfaction has improved in some areas, including overall

satisfaction, which rose from 53.1% in 2025/26 to 58.7% in Q1 2026/27. Nevertheless, performance remains uneven: satisfaction with anti-social behaviour handling has declined, the tenancy audit programme is significantly delayed, and delivery depends on major improvements to repairs, systems, data and procurement.

The immediate priority is a clear, quantified recovery trajectory covering homelessness prevention, move-on, debt, complaints, workforce capacity and temporary accommodation, with sustained reductions in demand and cost and demonstrably better outcomes for tenants and residents.

Customer services

Complaint volumes remain high, particularly at Stage 2, although response times have improved significantly, from 22.7 working days in July 2025 to 10 days in July 2026. The principal pressures remain in Revenues and Benefits, Housing, Environmental Services and SEND, with recurring concerns about delays, poor communication and the quality-of-service delivery. The high proportion of upheld escalated complaints indicates that these are not simply issues of complaint handling, but evidence of continuing service failure.

The Council has strengthened its complaints framework through a new policy, training and digital improvements. However, better process and faster responses have not yet translated consistently into a better experience for residents.

The priority now is to shift the focus from managing complaints to preventing them. Services must own the failure demand they create, use complaints systematically to identify and address recurring weaknesses, and demonstrate that learning leads to changes in practice. Success should ultimately be measured through fewer avoidable complaints and repeat contacts, earlier resolution and, most importantly, improved outcomes for residents.

Governance

Previous Commissioner reports concluded that governance arrangements were improving but had not yet matured into a consistently effective system. Member participation remained uneven, capability and development needed strengthening, and scrutiny needed to become more purposeful, strategic and sustainable. The position at the time of this report remains broadly similar, although following the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) review there are some important messages for the Council to heed.

In early 2026, CfGS undertook a further review of scrutiny arrangements at Slough. The review found that improvements evident during 2023 and 2024 had proved fragile and difficult to sustain, reflecting

wider organisational weaknesses in capacity and capability. It identified insufficient corporate focus and consistent resourcing for scrutiny, together with continuing limitations in Member capability.

The review also concluded that scrutiny's work programme lacked sufficient strategic discipline and prioritisation and did not consistently focus on the Council's most significant risks, improvement priorities and financial challenges. Discussions could become overly focused on operational or ward-level matters rather than strategic leadership and corporate improvement. Member-officer relationships were at times challenging, and the review highlighted the need to maintain a clear distinction between robust and appropriate challenge and unacceptable behaviour.

CfGS also noted the limited involvement of Cabinet Members in scrutiny meetings, with officers too often left to account for matters where political accountability should be more prominent. Importantly, the review concluded that further changes to committee structures alone would not address these weaknesses. Sustainable improvement will depend upon behaviours and relationships, greater clarity of purpose, stronger Member and officer capability, disciplined work programming and a clearer focus on the Council's major strategic and financial priorities.

The review also highlighted instability in the officer support available to scrutiny. There has been considerable turnover within the team supporting the function and the Council should understand the reasons for this churn and ensure that scrutiny has sufficiently stable and capable support.

The recent Ofsted inspection of Children's Services recommended the establishment of dedicated scrutiny arrangements for children's services. In implementing this recommendation, it will be important that the Council applies the lessons from the CfGS review. Simply establishing an additional committee will not, of itself, strengthen scrutiny. Members will require appropriate training and support to understand the particular challenges facing children's services and to provide effective strategic challenge and oversight.

There have also been important changes in political leadership. At the first Council meeting of the 2026/27 municipal year, Councillor Smith stood down as Leader and Councillor Chahal, previously Deputy Leader, was elected to succeed him. The new Leader has made a number of changes to his Cabinet and offered the chair of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee to the opposition. Councillor Mann, the former Leader of the Labour Group, was subsequently appointed.

This represents an encouraging development. Feedback to Commissioners from Members across the political groups and officers about the chairing of the first scrutiny meeting has been positive. It is too early to judge the longer-term impact, but if this approach is sustained it has the potential to strengthen

both the effectiveness and independence of scrutiny and contribute to the wider improvement in the Council's governance arrangements.

Economic Growth

Slough is one of the UK's strongest local economies. Its location on the western edge of London, Elizabeth Line connectivity, proximity to Heathrow and the strategic motorway network, Europe's largest single-ownership trading estate and a globally significant data centre cluster give it an economic importance far beyond its size. The borough makes a major contribution to UK productivity, digital infrastructure, aviation, logistics and inward investment.

Yet too little of that economic strength is translating into local fiscal resilience or better outcomes for residents. High productivity sits alongside acute housing pressures, land constraints, skills gaps, rising demand for statutory services and limited capacity to drive regeneration and economic development.

This creates a significant opportunity. With a stronger delivery framework and targeted support and flexibilities from Government, Slough could convert more of its economic strength into local growth, infrastructure investment, stronger public finances and improved outcomes for residents. Slough Council should seek to work with Government and its partners to develop a shared proposition that recognises Slough not simply as a place requiring recovery, but as a national economic asset.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Slough Council has made progress during the intervention and there are areas where organisational capability is demonstrably stronger. Financial leadership has improved, elements of governance and infrastructure have been strengthened, and there are capable people across the Council working hard to secure improvement.

However, progress remains too slow, uneven and fragile. Serious weaknesses in Children's Services, SEND and housing, continuing financial pressures, instability in senior leadership and the inconsistent translation of plans into delivery demonstrate that the Council is not yet able to sustain recovery without significant external support. Commissioners therefore consider that further intervention remains necessary and that the Council is still some way from securing Best Value.

If the Minister is minded to continue intervention, the next phase should focus less on the completion of individual actions and more on whether the Council is developing the capability, capacity and culture to identify problems, respond effectively and sustain improvement for itself.

The next phase should therefore be more focused and disciplined, concentrating on a limited number of priorities:

- **Recover failing services** – urgently address weaknesses in Children’s Services, SEND and housing through clear plans, accountable leadership and measurable improvements in outcomes.
- **Secure financial sustainability** – maintain financial control while establishing credible medium-term plans for service improvement, infrastructure, transformation and debt reduction.
- **Stabilise leadership** – build a permanent, collegiate senior leadership team capable of providing consistent direction, making difficult decisions and sustaining delivery.
- **Turn plans into delivery** – establish a single, prioritised and properly resourced transformation programme with clear benefits, savings, milestones and accountability.
- **Strengthen organisational foundations** – improve governance, systems, processes, technology, data and programme management so that the Council can deliver consistently and at pace.
- **Build the right culture** – strengthen member–officer relationships, collective accountability, openness, constructive challenge and organisational learning.
- **Develop self-improvement capability** – use evidence, performance, risk and learning more effectively so that problems are identified and addressed before they become crises.

These priorities should form a single recovery framework, supported by a small number of measurable milestones that demonstrate not simply activity, but increasing organisational capability and improved outcomes.

Slough is currently subject to intervention from both MHCLG and DfE. From the Council’s perspective, this must operate as a coherent system rather than as separate interventions. If intervention continues, MHCLG and DfE Commissioners and Advisers should therefore work as **one team**, providing a consistent diagnosis, clear priorities and aligned messages to the Council, while retaining clear individual accountabilities and meeting departmental objectives.

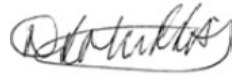
The objective must remain to end intervention. Exit, however, should be determined by demonstrated capability rather than the passage of time. Slough must be able to show that it can maintain financial control, provide acceptable services, sustain effective leadership, manage risk, learn from failure and improve without the level of external oversight currently required.

Until that position is reached, continued external support and challenge remain necessary. The purpose of the next phase should increasingly be to build the Council's capacity to take full responsibility for its own recovery and ultimately to secure and sustain Best Value without intervention.

Yours sincerely,



Gavin Jones, CBE, Lead Commissioner



Denise Murray, Finance Commissioner



Kim Wright, Commissioner



Dr Dave Smith, Managing Director Commissioner