

**Slough Borough Council: Improvement and Recovery Board**  
**First meeting: Wednesday 15 December 2021 at 1500**

**Minutes**

**Attendees:**

Max Caller CBE – Lead Commissioner (Chair)

Margaret Lee – Finance Commissioner

Cllr James Swindlehurst – Leader of Slough Borough Council

Cllr Martin Carter – Cabinet lead for performance management

Cllr Wayne Strutton – Leader, Opposition

Steven Mair – Section 151 Officer

Claire Willerton – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners (Secretary)

**1. Welcome and introductions**

1.1 Max Caller opened the meeting and attendees introduced themselves. There were no apologies.

**2. Declarations of interest**

2.1 None.

**3. Terms of reference and Commissioner approach and monitoring**

3.1 These items were taken together. Mr Caller explained all interventions required an improvement and recovery plan to be in place that addressed all Council activity. Once in place, delivery should be monitored against that plan. This Board would provide advice and challenge to the Council and hold Members and Officers to account for delivery at monthly meetings. Mr Caller wanted the Board to review the whole plan once a quarter. Each work-stream in the plan would be reviewed on rotation at the monthly meetings. The Board would not meet in public, but its agendas, papers and minutes would be published on the Commissioners webpage on [slough.gov.uk](http://slough.gov.uk).

3.2 Cllr Swindlehurst was concerned about capacity and the challenge would be to find Officers with the required competence to resource the plan's work-streams. Steven Mair wanted to build greater capacity and resilience at the centre to enable improvement. Mr Caller noted that neighbouring councils, the Local Government Association (LGA), and the whole local government sector stood by to provide support to Slough Borough Council

3.3 Cllr Carter said that improvements in financial management and governance control were clearly required and that he would support activity to achieve those

improvements. He was content with the membership and terms of reference for this Board.

3.4 Cllr Strutton said it was clear what was needed at the Council, and he wanted to keep on top of delivery. He saw training and development and getting the right skills in place as a priority. Mr Caller agreed. The Directions required the improvement and recovery plan to look ahead at how to close the gap in the Council's capacity and capability by getting the right people, with the right skills, in the right places to succeed.

3.5 A discussion of children's services followed. Mr Caller confirmed that Tony Hunter, chair of the Children First Company, had already agreed that children's services should be scrutinised by this Board. Cllrs Swindlehurst and Carter both expressed some concern about the arrangements between the Council and the Company and liaison between the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Department for Education (DfE). Cllr Strutton said that previous issues should be put aside and the focus should be on improvement from here on. Mr Caller reassured the Board that he was in close contact with DLUHC and DfE and would make sure there was appropriate visibility and liaison on the issues facing the Council.

3.6 The Council's response to the Ofsted report on SEND provision was a priority. Mr Caller suggested that education should be the first work-stream to be reviewed by the Board at its next meeting in January. Margaret Lee reminded the Board that the selection process for an interim Director of Children's Services (DCS) would be completed before Christmas. She had attended the preferred candidate's first interview and was content to approve his appointment. Mr Caller would be at the final interview on 22 December. If his appointment was confirmed, the new interim DCS should be invited to the Board's January meeting with the Cabinet lead for education and Tony Hunter.

3.8 The terms of reference and membership of the Board were agreed.

#### **4. Commissioner approach and monitoring**

4.1 This was covered with item three above.

#### **5. Forward plan and future meeting dates**

5.1 Mr Caller asked that a timetable for the rotating work-stream reviews be agreed, with an indication of which was best placed to provide a meaningful report to the Board and which was worst placed. The Board would help to set the direction and provide constructive challenge for all work-streams. Ms Lee emphasised that the Board should structure its approach appropriately depending on where work-streams were on their recovery journey. Questions to those least well placed would be different from those for areas who were further ahead. Mr Caller agreed and said the Board should receive papers well in advance of its meetings so members could prepare their questions beforehand and set them out in the agenda.

5.2 Ms Lee would chair a Finance Board that would meet the week before the Improvement and Recovery Board. The Cabinet lead for finance would attend. The first meeting of the Finance Board had been arranged for 12 January at 1500. The Finance Board would send strong signals about the way financial issues and decisions would be managed and the rigour Ms Lee expected to be applied from here on.

5.3 Claire Willerton would arrange the next meeting of the Improvement and Recovery Board for January and invite children's services colleagues to attend. Mr Mair would ensure Officers' attendance

5.4 The meeting closed at 1600.

Date: 24 December 2021

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