

**Best Value Board Minutes  
Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> July 2025**

**Minutes of the Best Value Board**

**Wednesday 30 July 2025**

**2:30pm to 4pm**

**1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Transformation Room, Observatory House**

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**Attendees:**

Gavin Jones, Chair and Lead Commissioner  
Ged Curran, Commissioner  
Will Tuckley, Managing Director Commissioner and Head of Paid Services  
Denise Murray, Finance Commissioner

**Officers:**

Annabel Scholes, Executive Director Corporate Resources (s151)  
Bal Toor, Director of Human Resources Workforce and Transformation  
Tessa Lindfield, Director of Public Health & Health Protection  
Sonia Khan, Director of Strategy, Change and Resident Engagement

**Secretariat**

Nasreen Brittain (minutes)  
Mahria Arshad

**Also present**

Helen Barugh, Chief of Staff to Commissioners  
Jane Senior, Director Commissioning  
Lisa Keating, Director of Housing  
Sarah Wilson, Assistant Director of Legal and Governance (HB Law)  
David Mead, Head of Programmes and Change  
Neil Hoskinson, Director of Education, representing Sue Butcher

**Apologies for absence**

Cllr Dexter Smith, Leader, with responsibility for Improvement and Recovery  
Wal Chahal (Cllr) Deputy Leader and Lead for Financial Oversight & Council Assets  
Martin Chalmers, Director Digital, Data & Technology  
Sue Butcher, Chief Executive of Children's Services

### Minutes

#### 1. Introductions and apologies for absence

- 1.1 Actions from previous meeting not covered. Approved minutes from previous meeting.

#### 2. Commissioners' 6<sup>th</sup> report reflections (Gavin Jones)

- 2.1 The report has now been published. Corporate Leadership Team (CLT)/Commissioner workshop took place earlier in the day to look at the recovery over the next 12 months as the intervention end date is November 2026. Commissioners will want to do a similar event with Cabinet as well. At this stage, the final detail remains a work in progress, however.

Sarah Wilson reflected on focus going forward, e.g. Services and Target Operating Model. There was a view that more impactful corporate and collective support was required to be put around the Housing service. This was part of a broader point that was made as Housing was not the only area requiring it, there were others. How the Council operates when services are not where they need to be, was going to be very important. SG reflected that the need for calibration and re-prioritisation was important. What we can deliver and recalibrate over the next 12 months would be key.

Sonia Khan updated on the CLT workshop which focused on how CLT works and how CLT can organise themselves differently. How CLT can collaborate dynamically to deliver the improvement and recovery better and join the dots across the team/Directorates and Cabinet was important to future success. Tessa Lindfield reflected that there were a number of things that still needed to be refined to get to the next stage. AS felt that the priority was to agree the priorities collectively which would lead to any success. Will Tuckey felt that CLT working as a team came across very strongly, as well as CLT with Members and Commissioners, and they now need to translate that into action and recognise the milestones along the journey.

#### 2.2 Reflections from CLT/Commissioner Workshop (30/7):

Gavin Jones reflected that there was good presenteeism at the CLT/Commissioner workshop. There now needs to be a step change to the transformation by November 2026. CLT time will need to be freed up to do this work, and that was something that was recognised at today's session. How to turn the complexity into a simple narrative to achieve overall followship was a key challenge. The focus was that this work is being done for the residents of Slough.

DM welcomed the session, and it was clear that everyone was honest in the discussions, with real reflection on being a best value Council

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by November 2026. Attendees thought carefully about what the best achievable position will be and there was a recognition that the deadline was very challenging. There is a need to start thinking about the milestones that can realistically be delivered.

Gerard Curran reflected that the meeting was positive in its engagement. Cllr Bedi felt that from the administration's perspective, open dialogue would need to improve as it remained a challenge. There was not consistency across Officers with engagement with Cabinet and Councillors. Cllr Bedi spoke about recruitment that had taken place which the political administration did not feel was providing best value. Those kinds of discussions needed to be happening collectively and in advance of decisions being made. Residents are also watching the Council closely, which is a key component that the organisation and the political administration will need to keep in mind.

- 2.3 Gavin Jones summarised that a clear set of priorities with resource both financial and capability will need to be clarified quickly given the November 2026 deadline. Commissioners are happy to play whatever role is required to facilitate progress and ultimately success for November 2026.

### 3. Update from the Finance Improvement Board (Annabel Scholes)

- 3.1 Update going to finance board Thursday 31 July. Three areas reported as improving. Internal Audit recommendations remain as 'requiring improvement'. While a lot of work has gone on, haven't got things over line at this stage. Procurement continues to work to refresh the register, however, still not quite where it needs to be. Purchase Order (PO) compliance remains a challenge.
- 3.2 Internal Audit had completed 25 recommendations. 22 were not completed by the end of June deadline, However, 19 of those 22 were subsequently closed by the end of July. Will need to look at what can be achieved with the resources we currently have, however. Will also need to look at future resources. Denise Murray said the progress to date has been reflected but also points to the journey remaining. In the discovery, the organisation will need to focus on what will need to be done in the coming year. The workstreams will need to be streamlined; looking at what the impact will be and what resources will need to be provided. Risk Management was another area that would need to be monitored closely going forward.
- 3.3 Helen Barugh asked whether the Finance Board was providing the right governance structure. Annabel Scholes responded that they are still developing the agenda items and engaged in co-development as well as the reporting to Commissioners. Any feedback from Commissioners would be welcomed. The work plan is still being developed.

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- 3.4 On member training seeing good engagement as well as keenness to learn. Officers were engaging with Group Leaders to enable good discussion with their members and looking at training for those members as well. That said, members need to attend regularly scheduled meetings. Gavin Jones reflected that Officers should be holding the Councillors to account for any drop in engagement/attendance to training.

Denise Murray said it was timely to review the governance and attendance of Officers and Members at the Boards as only very few actively participated. That time could be better used elsewhere. Gavin Jones and Gerard Curran agreed and reflected that at one of the recent Boards Officers and Members did not contribute, and that Commissioners had done most of the talking. Revisiting the governance would address this going forward.

### 4. Update from Corporate Service and Improvement Board (Sonia Khan)

- 4.1 A more coherent transformation plan is being developed. How the Board helped develop an integrated approach was also covered. Cllr Sheikh in the role as Lead for Corporate Performance is keen to be actively involved in shaping things.
- 4.2 Sonia Khan updated that there is more of a grip of the workstreams, and highlight reports have improved, however, acknowledged there was more work to be done still. Was not sure whether CLT and Directors were being overly cautious at the Boards, and welcomed a different format, looking at the Commissioner slot at the end of the agenda for example. The updates for the Target Operating Model to Commissioners could also be looked at. Questions about viability and sustainability also need to be looked at collectively.

Member and Group Leaders' engagement also remains an issue. Sonia Khan suggested a workshop format for the deep dive to come. Resident engagement and insight were being worked on. Gavin Jones responded that the level at which some of the presentations were pitched at did not create the right environment to have a meaningful discussion. There were a lot of people attending the Boards who simply were not contributing either at all, or in any meaningful way. Gerard Curran shared this view and reflected that there are problems with the transformation programme. Feedback was received, which was then not reflected in the Transformation Board itself.

Gavin Jones summarised that there are a lot of talented people within the teams, however, it was having the confidence to challenge when things were not working which would lead to help working through the knotty issues. Strongly suggested using a different format for the next Corporate and Services Improvement Board. Cllr Bedi said that

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Members want to be spoken to in layman terms as too many presentations and information were being provided which were complex in nature and language. Annabel Scholes agreed, and talked about a recent peer review she had read which had concluded that too many presentations had the opposite intended effect.

Gerard Curran felt that the organisation was taking simplicity and turning it into complexity, and this was something which needed to stop. Sarah Wilson agreed and responded that time to attend and engage was important, and therefore, the formats needed to be revisited. Needed to think about how people can be given 'permission' to speak up and contribute. Gavin Jones agreed and reiterated that this was in the Officers' gift.

### 5. Children's Services – Mutual Ventures Report (Will Tuckley)

- 5.1 The first report was completed three years ago. Will Tuckley reflected on the recent second report that was commissioned by the organisation. Mutual Ventures were commissioned to report on how things had gone. Their report concluded that the Company had done better than anticipated and this was down to leadership. They also said the relationship with the Council had improved, as opposed to the negative dynamic which had been present in 2022. Also, there is clearly potential to slim down the duplication in the arrangements that still exist. Social care reforms are affecting the sector. They suggested a phased transition, and March 2027 as the date for full integration of SCF into the Council.
- 5.2 Milestones will need to be worked through. There is a series of further communications with the Department of Education as well. They want to see their investment safeguarded and the organisation will need to reassure them on this point. Will need to convince the Department of Education that the council will 'own' the children's improvement going forwards. Therefore, whatever Board structure is in place, it will need to include the interests of Slough Children First (SCF) and children's services. The interests of children's services will also need to be at the heart of any future Board structure.
- 5.3 Cllr Bedi said she would like to see a Children's Scrutiny Board going forward. She appreciated that this would be dependent on resources but felt it would be beneficial in the long term. She has spoken with the Leader and Sue Butcher who agreed with this proposal. Sukdave Ghuman responded that he is looking at resources in Democratic Services and reflected this was under consideration. Will Tuckley said this would be in line with the overall timeline for the integration of SCF into the Council. The Mutual Ventures report and the Annual report will be formally tabled at September's Cabinet. This will also inform the development of the business plan, which is scheduled to go to Cabinet in December.

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- 5.4 Denise Murray felt that the convergence was a key part of the report, Mutual Ventures had a different timeline to the Council, however. The Board were to take that away and think about the planned approach of the phasing. It would also be good to know where those discussions have got to. There was a concern around doing the convergence too quickly. Sarah Wilson responded that there is a meeting with the DfE next week to see where things are. The Department of Education needs to formally consent so need to see where they are on this as well. It is linked to the recent Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) inspection, to the view of the new advisor and the new Non-Executive Director appointment. It has been quite clear that we need to have slimmed down the Board governance structure. Annabel Scholes said that it was important to acknowledge the financial implications and impact to residents. Need to think about the implications of the loss of income from Department of Education going forward. Cllr Bedi said how the resources are managed to achieve this move is key. The Leader's Office will continue to need the right support, for example, regardless of the restructuring in Democratic Services. Will Tuckley said it was key to say there is dual management at the moment. Tough decisions will need to be taken going forward to achieve the right convergence. Gerard Curran said it was good that the Mutual Ventures report was as positive as it was.

## 6. Transformation partner update (Sonia Khan)

- 6.1 Two and a half weeks remain of BCG's contract. Good progress has been made to date. They have played back several areas that are wider than the original remit. Overall, they have focused on the issues that are key now and need to be focused on in the operating model. They have highlighted the role and importance of culture as well. An interesting picture of residents still showing goodwill, despite being very frustrated with the organisation at the same time has emerged from the data.
- 6.2 Whole Target Operating Model blueprint work being done, especially contracts and estates and overall viability data. Overall design picture and advice on how to implement that is the aim by the end of their contract. Recognised that BCG are not here to find the savings, however. Based on their evidence and advice, the organisation can then focus its efforts to achieve the savings required.
- 6.3 Daily clienting as well as overall CLT oversight was happening. The Cabinet met with BCG and asked a range of things. Next step was Cabinet wanted to understand where the Council is going. Denise welcomed views on what output Sonia Khan is anticipating receiving at the end of the period. Will Tuckley responded that one of the outcomes was the vision of the new operating model. Currently there have been different approaches, however, no actual operating model has been produced. That is one outcome that needs to be produced, not describe things back to the organisation which it is already aware



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of. Then the organisation needs to think about how to implement the new operating model and what resources need to be invested and where, as well as where digital investment might help achieve this as well.

6.4 Sonia Khan confirmed that we should see the first iteration of the new Target Operating Model on Thursday 31 July. WT said that all the stakeholders need to agree on what BCG produces and ensure everyone is on the same page in terms of the new target operating model that is produced. Denise Murray was looking for confidence in reaching the desired outcome in the two and a half weeks remaining and that what is produced will allow the organisation to then deliver the savings and the operating model required.

6.5 Gerard Curran reflected that 6 weeks was an incredibly short time to produce the amount of work desired. The organisation should resist the temptation at the end of the process that its organisational prejudice around consultants is realised. The most likely takeaway in that instance will be that the organisation will have failed to manage the consultancy effectively and appropriately. That will not be the message that will be played out in the real world.

### 7. Councillor Priorities – to note (Cllr Bedi)

7.1 Cllr Bedi gave an overview of where things had started from the previous elections. The progress made on reducing debt and reducing the deficit by selling assets was covered. Both opposition groups have full time administrative support which needs to be addressed as it was felt that this was not necessary given the size of the opposition Groups. Residents also faced 9.99% council tax increase in 2019.

7.2 Financial control and targeted investment priorities:

- antisocial behaviour
- road design and condition
- litter, fly tipping and graffiti
- maintenance of grass verges, roundabouts, and street furniture
- customer service improvement
- town centre regeneration.

7.3 Cllr Bedi discussed bringing universities back into Slough and stores returning to the high street. She was scheduled to meet with Berkeley Homes to see how a partnership could be developed to achieve these goals.

7.4 Gavin Jones asked where things were with negotiating these priorities with CLT. Cllr Bedi responded that the 'priorities' meetings will be used to discuss these items in the first instance. Denise Murray reflected greater thinking would be needed around each priority. Think about what the milestones will be at the end of this administration, for

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example, and be able to say what is possible in the timeframe. Gerard Curran reflected that adults, housing and children's tend to take up a great deal of the budgets, and there is little left over for this type of thing. So, the administration will need to think about where the resource would be taken or come from. Cllr Bedi said she would be speaking with Annabel Scholes about this.

7.5 Agreed to bring this item back to the next Board.

### **8. AOB**

8.1 None.

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**Meeting closed at 4.03pm**

**Date of next meeting: Thursday 9 October 11am to 12.30pm in the Council Chamber**