

**Best Value Board Minutes
Thursday, 9 October 2025**

Minutes of the Best Value Board

Thursday, 9 October 2025

11am to 12:30pm

Council Chamber, Observatory House

Attendees

Commissioners:

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

Officers:

Ian O'Donnell, Executive Director for Corporate Resources – S151 Officer
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
Martin Chalmers, Director Digital, Data & Technology
Sue Butcher, Chief Executive of Slough Children First
Pat Hayes, Executive Director of Property & Housing

Councillors

Cllr Wal Chahal, Deputy Leader
Cllr Robert Stedmond
Cllr Nadeem Khawar

Secretariat

Nasreen Brittain, Executive Assistant to Chief Executive/Managing Director Commissioner
Mahria Arshad, Executive Assistant to Commissioners (minutes)

Also Present

Helen Barugh, Chief of Staff to Commissioners (outgoing)
Elaine Anderson, Chief of Staff to Commissioners (incoming)
James Blythe, Deputy Director, Local Government Stewardship and Intervention, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Peter Hopkins, Director of Property and Assets
Jane Senior, Director Commissioning
Sarah Wilson, Assistant Director of Legal and Governance (HB Law)

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Jackie Wilson, Department for Education Improvement Advisor
Simon Baker, Chair, Board of Slough Children's Services Trust Ltd

Apologies for Absence

Cllr Dexter Smith, Leader

Cllr Puja Bedi, Deputy Leader and Lead for Financial Oversight & Council Assets

Neil Hoskinson, Director of Education

Minutes

1. Introductions and apologies for absence

1.1 Actions from previous meeting not covered.

1.2 The minutes of the Board meeting held on 30 July 2025 were approved, with the amendment noting Simon Baker's absence.

2. Matters arising from previous meeting

2.1 The Terms of Reference have been updated to reflect the council's desire to start bringing the governance of children's services into the overall governance structure. The Chair invited Jackie Wilson to outline her role.

2.2 Jackie Wilson introduced herself, highlighting her background in children's social care and her previous role as Commissioner. She noted that under Paul Moffat's tenure, children's services in Slough demonstrated significant progress, leading to a shift in the role from Commissioner to Advisor. Jackie Wilson clarified that her current role is supportive rather than directive, aimed at assisting the Board and Simon Baker with improvement efforts.

2.3 Jackie Wilson will contribute to the development of the improvement plan and will work approximately five days per month. She is actively engaging with Sue Butcher and staff and is open to working directly with Leaders on improvement and inspection preparation. The next major inspection is scheduled for 2026, and current efforts are aligned with that timeline. Jackie Wilson explained that the Board's approach has evolved. Over the next three meetings, the focus will be on three enablers from the national children's framework in Leadership and Management, Partnership Working and Integration of the company and council to support staff in delivering children's services. Jackie Wilson confirmed she is still required to submit quarterly reports to the Minister.

2.4 Sue Butcher assured the Board that she is cognisant of the changed dynamics in her working relationship with Jackie Wilson, in contrast to Jackie's prior engagement with Slough Borough Council.

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2.5 The Terms of Reference will be amended to reflect the above updates and were approved by Board Members.

3. Update from the Leader (Cllr Dexter Smith)

3.1 Cllr Chahal provided an update on a recent Cabinet reshuffle. The increasing need to prioritise financial matters has highlighted the importance of driving transformation forward. Discussions have taken place with Cllr Smith and his team to strengthen financial oversight. Cllr Chahal confirmed that input from the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) has been valuable and that the Council is now entering a formal transformation journey. His focus is now firmly on transformation, which he described as the future of Slough Borough Council. He assured the Board that he and Cllr Bedi are committed to leading this work, with the full Cabinet united in driving progress.

3.2 The Chair emphasised the importance of role clarity and a unified approach from Cabinet Members. Cllr Chahal confirmed that Cllr Bedi is the lead for finance and that he will support her in delivering this agenda. The Chair raised the question of how local priorities will be reflected in the broader strategic agenda. Cllr Chahal responded that resident feedback, particularly around council tax is being actively considered. He outlined several internal priorities, including:

- a) Tackling fly-tipping and graffiti, with the use of cameras in Slough as a visible deterrent and reassurance to residents.
- b) Improving customer service, acknowledging that the current offer is not robust and requires refinement.
- c) Town centre regeneration, in partnership with Berkeley, to develop a visual concept of Slough's future that inspires hope among residents.

Cllr Chahal stressed that these priorities are critical and central to the Council's forward agenda.

3.3 Denise Murray highlighted the importance of aligning priorities with the improvement journey and securing assurance from the Department for Education (DfE). Cllr Chahal agreed fully.

3.4 Jackie Wilson asked about the extent of resident engagement (more particularly children and young people in Slough) in initiatives such as town centre regeneration and whether residents feel included in the process. Cllr Chahal confirmed that consultation with residents is part of the development journey. Pat Hayes, Lead Officer for Regeneration, noted that the design phase is still in its early stages and that the challenge lies in securing planning consent. The regeneration is part of a 15-year scheme, with a commitment to designing for the future. The design principles aim to create spaces that encourage community interaction, with input from young people

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shaping the vision for street level design. Architects working with Berkeley are focused on these inclusive principles, including a central park area.

- 3.5 Sue Butcher added that young people are passionate about Slough's future. The Youth Parliament has shown strong interest in how the town will evolve, with initiatives such as a business takeover day generating many questions about Slough's development.
- 3.6 The Chair acknowledged that rebuilding trust with residents takes time and encouraged the Council to increase its visibility in the town. There are many improvements underway that residents should be made aware of to better understand the Council's progress.
- 3.7 Cllr Stedmond noted that youth engagement continues, with the Youth Parliament scheduled to meet next Tuesday, 14 October 2025 at The Curve. Questions around temporary accommodation are expected to be raised.
- 3.8 Will Tuckley added that older residents, particularly those involved in the Older People's Forum, are also deeply interested in the town centre's future. He noted that this interest is shared across all age groups.

4. Transformation Update (Will Tuckley)

- 4.1 Will Tuckley provided an overview of the transformation programme, describing it as a critical component of the Council's recovery and intervention efforts. He acknowledged the Council's historical difficulty in focusing on medium to long-term planning, largely due to financial constraints. Key developments included commissioning work from Boston Consulting Group (BCG) to design a Target Operating Model (TOM), aimed at improving operational effectiveness as well as analysis of high demand service areas such as customer services, adult social care, the front-door and housing.

Will Tuckley emphasised the need to produce a clear, credible and costed transformation programme that outlines the expected benefits. A recent coaching session expanded the scope of transformation, but the next phase will require deeper focus to address budgetary gaps over the medium term. The programme is scheduled for Cabinet approval in November 2025. Will Tuckley stressed that the model must be deliverable within existing resources.

- 4.2 Cllr Chahal expressed his support and interest in seeing the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) work further developed.
- 4.3 The Chair highlighted the importance of staff engagement in the transformation process. Inclusivity and communication were identified as key success factors, with a call for the Corporate Leadership Team

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(CLT) to collectively step up. Accountability must include clarity on how resources will be used to implement change.

- 4.4 Sonia Khan shared observations on the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) work, noting that Slough was assessed as mid-range in terms of quality. She stressed the need to go further in areas of high demand and to explore preventative approaches. A session with the CLT will be held to identify opportunities for deeper transformation. Benchmarking and strong governance will be essential to guide future proposals.
- 4.5 The Chair reiterated the need for clarity and focus, particularly on how transformation will impact the Council's financial position.
- 4.6 Sarah Wilson discussed the alignment of financial service planning with national social care forums, identifying potential savings. She sees significant opportunity in this area. Jackie Wilson responded that while the Slough Borough Council Forum could be impactful, progress will be gradual and a phased approach would be beneficial.
- 4.7 The Chair noted that many savings will not be immediate and emphasised that reducing the number of children entering care is a positive indicator. The ability to hold mature, constructive conversations with Members is essential for effective decision making.
- 4.8 James Blythe asked what the financial outlook for the Council would be if the transformation programme is successful. Will Tuckley responded that while Boston Consulting Group's work has helped define operational models, it does not directly address financial outcomes. The Council must now define what it will look like to customers and residents, including team restructuring and service delivery. Will Tuckley acknowledged that the vision has been too vague and now requires specificity. For example, there is currently no unified data strategy within IT.

5. Financial Update (Ian O'Donnell)

- 5.1 Ian O'Donnell provided an update on the Council's financial position, highlighting a £20.1 million overspend this year and an overall projected gap of £28 million, rising to £30 million over three years. He explained that following instructions from Commissioners in July, spending controls were introduced, and the budget setting process is being reinvigorated to integrate the transformation programme into a credible three-year financial plan. While proposals from Boston Consulting Group (BCG) could potentially close the gap, the challenge lies in how quickly they can be implemented, especially given the front-loaded nature of the deficit. In-year savings have been agreed, and the budget process is being aligned with transformation work, with Member involvement and scrutiny to strengthen next year's position. Ian O'Donnell stressed the urgency of the task, noting that although

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time remains, it requires a proactive response from the organisation. A transformation workshop held by Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) began developing detailed proposals for next year's budget and external support is being sought to accelerate progress, with procurement expected to begin next week. Cabinet and Members have been briefed and updates on spending controls were provided, including approval of some exceptions. A savings template is being issued and further work with Corporate Resources has identified potential savings. Budget papers have been reissued to Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), and a timetable for Member engagement will be released following clearance from Commissioners and Cabinet. Ian O'Donnell asked colleagues to prioritise this work, expressing cautious optimism about bridging the financial gap, though he emphasised the need to sustain reserve levels. He concluded that integrating transformation into the budget must happen quickly and external support will be essential to achieve this.

5.2 Denise Murray reflected on the Council's current position as one of ongoing discovery, which she noted can be destabilising. She emphasised the need for a resilient mindset across the organisation, particularly at the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) level, where strong ownership, accountability and leadership from the top are essential to cascade the right messages throughout the Council. This resilience is crucial to ensure that emerging issues do not derail the delivery of core objectives. Denise Murray stressed the importance of rapidly stabilising the organisation to enable strategic thinking and to drive the transformation programme with a clear roadmap and defined investment. She also highlighted the urgent need for a cultural shift, with Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) leading by example in how that change is shaped and delivered.

5.3 James Blythe asked whether the Council is taking sufficient action to prevent further deterioration of the in-year financial position. In response, Ian O'Donnell acknowledged that the situation is worsening, estimating a deterioration of £2-3 million, but noted that £5 million worth of mitigations have been identified. Once these mitigations are applied, it is hoped that the position will improve in Quarter 2. However, Ian O'Donnell stressed that this remains a significant challenge, with much work still required. He identified temporary accommodation as the primary pressure and confirmed that a plan has now been agreed to address this issue. Delivering on this plan will require a clear strategy, allocated resources and a defined timescale. These elements are essential to stabilising the financial position and managing the pressures effectively.

6. Resident Polling (Will Tuckey)

6.1 Will Tuckley provided background on the circumstances leading up to the current resident engagement strategy. He referenced the events of 2021 in Slough, including the issuance of a Section 114 notice,

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significant increases in council tax, changes to service delivery (notably in waste management), and challenges in organisational implementation within Slough Borough Council. These factors contributed to a notable breakdown in trust between the Council and the community.

- 6.2 In response, a resident survey was conducted in 2022/23, which revealed historically low levels of public trust, approximately one-third of the national average. Will Tuckley emphasised that while delivering Best Value remains a statutory obligation, reconnecting with residents is central to achieving it, as public trust and engagement are foundational to effective service delivery.

The Council's strategic response has focused on the following four areas:

- a) **Financial Integrity**
Acknowledging the complexity and challenges of restoring financial stability.
- b) **Service Experience**
Evaluating whether residents are receiving the services they need and assessing the quality of their interactions with the Council.
- c) **Community Engagement**
Developing a structured engagement programme to rebuild relationships and communicate the Council's journey.
- d) **Communication**
Focusing on clarity and honesty in messaging, not persuasion, but explanation of actions and intentions.

Polling has been a key tool in measuring progress. The 2025 resident polling results, presented in the meeting papers, show a marked improvement. Will Tuckley referred to slides 9-12, which illustrate a positive trajectory, with trust levels now approaching national benchmarks. The direction of travel is encouraging. Benchmarking indicates alignment with national averages in several areas.

- 6.3 However, Will Tuckley cautioned against complacency. While progress is evident, there remains substantial work to be done. The improvements reflect the impact of current initiatives, but sustained effort is required to fully restore public confidence and achieve the desired outcomes.
- 6.4 The Chair stated the Council should take a moment to celebrate recent progress, as this can help build confidence and momentum. However, we must also acknowledge that we are not yet fully effective in communicating our story and engaging stakeholders. This remains

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an area for improvement, and a future meeting should be dedicated to addressing how we enhance our engagement strategy.

- 6.5 Jackie Wilson highlighted the next challenge of understanding the experiences of children and young people who interact with our services. Sonia Khan noted that while the current survey provides statistically reliable insight, it is only one piece of the puzzle. To drive meaningful improvement, we need to complement this with qualitative engagement. The survey should be viewed alongside other planned engagement activities. Sonia Khan proposed publishing the survey and asking Cabinet to consider it in the context of wider resident engagement. This will help shape a framework for how we listen to and include voices that are currently underrepresented.
- 6.6 Cllr Chahal stated the polling results offer some reassurance, but we must remain mindful that this reflects a relatively low baseline. It is important to communicate with humility, helping residents understand that while the journey is challenging, we are committed to doing our best for them.

7. Commissioners' 7th Report (Gavin Jones)

- 7.1 The Chair confirmed the Commissioners' seventh report is due by the end of October 2025. It is essential that the report is clear, accurate and reinforces the importance of building confidence in our progress. A key theme is pace: with the intervention scheduled to end in November 2026, this is a pivotal moment to demonstrate a step-change in delivery and leadership.
- 7.2 The coming weeks are critical for showing our commitment to this transformation and for demonstrating the confidence to take ownership of our agenda and move forward decisively. Establishing a strong track record of improvement will be key to building trust and credibility.
- 7.3 The Chair expressed gratitude for the work the Council has done to date and emphasised the value of self-awareness, being honest about our current position is a strength, and asking for support where needed.

8. AOB

- 8.1 None.

Meeting closed at 12:29pm

Date of next meeting: 8 January 2026 at 10am on 3rd Floor, Mercury Suite 3, Observatory House.