

Government takes further action to protect Slough taxpayers after council falls short

Levelling Up Secretary Greg Clark has confirmed he is “minded to” exercise his intervention powers in Slough Borough Council after the commissioners’ progress report into the borough unveiled continued failure to deliver best value for residents and large-scale challenges facing the council.

Commissioners were sent into Slough Borough Council on 1 December 2021 to address serious financial and management failures at the request of the former Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and their first report was submitted on 9 June 2022.

Whilst Slough Borough Council’s staff have been working hard to enact change under difficult circumstances, the report describes the “unprecedented” scale of challenge facing the council, including financial issues due to piling debt and poor accounting practices, and governance issues that have decimated the council’s capability and capacity.

The report has also made it clear that it will take “substantial time” to achieve far-reaching and positive improvements in Slough.

To ensure that staff have the right support to tackle these challenges, the Secretary of State may provide commissioners with additional powers to oversee the recruitment of the council’s most senior members of staff.

Levelling Up Secretary Greg Clark said:

“The commissioners’ report has assured me that the current intervention measures remain necessary in Slough. Councils must deliver for the people they serve – which is why I am minded to expand these measures to deliver swift and long-lasting improvements.

“Whilst this decision is not taken lightly, difficult decisions must be taken to protect hardworking taxpayers.

“I am confident that Slough Borough Council will continue to work closely with commissioners to address their challenges and I hope to see more progress imminently.”

Lead Commissioner Max Caller CBE said:

“The challenges in Slough are huge and unprecedented. We are working closely with DLUHC and are grateful for the Ministers support in driving change at the Council.

“We welcome the Secretary of State’s decision to expand the directions at

this time.”

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) is working closely with stakeholders and MPs in Slough, and Minister of State Paul Scully has spoken directly to Slough’s Members of Parliament about the proposed new intervention measures.

Slough Borough Council and other interested parties will have until 11 August to provide representations on these proposed intervention measures.

The commissioners play a crucial role in getting to the bottom of the issues facing Slough Borough Council, by utilising their years of experience of working in senior positions at other councils in the UK.

Slough’s Commissioners continue to bring a wealth of experience to the council and many of the improvements to date would not have been possible without their guidance.

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Lead Commissioner, Max Caller CBE, previously led the Best Value Inspections at Northamptonshire and Liverpool and was a Commissioner at Tower Hamlets. Max is a former Chief Executive of the London Boroughs of Hackney and Barnet and former Chair of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Max Caller CBE is being supported by finance commissioner Margaret Lee, former statutory finance officer at Essex County Council and member of the London Borough of Croydon Improvement and Assurance Panel and Commissioner Gavin Jones, current chief executive of Essex County Council.