

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.

On 1 December 2021, Commissioners were sent into Slough Borough Council to address serious financial and management failures at the request of the former Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

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.

[Help protect communities in the south-east of England from flooding](#)

The Environment Agency is looking for a new independent member to join the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) for its Southern region.

Committee members decide on the priorities for the funding and delivery of flood risk management projects across the south-east of England – from Kent and Sussex, to Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Applications are welcome from people actively interested in flood risk management, from different backgrounds and with an interest in, or experience of:

- Local community flood forums or action groups

- Engineering and construction
- Spatial planning
- Finance and accountancy
- Asset management
- Managing resilience and recovery
- Conservation
- Farming and land management
- The business community

Sally Harvey, from the Environment Agency said:

This is an exciting opportunity to make a real difference. As a member of the Southern RFCC you will help create partnerships that fund and deliver projects for local communities at risk of the devastating effects of flooding.

The position is voluntary and members are appointed as impartial individuals in their own right, not as representatives of any particular organisation.

It is important that committees represent the communities they serve. All public appointments are made on merit, following a fair, open and transparent process.

Committee members are expected to attend 4 committee meetings each year and can claim reasonable expenses.

Closing date

The closing date for applications is Friday 2 September 2022. Interviews will take place in the week of 19 September 2022.

For further information or to request an application pack, please email Amy O'Donnell at southernrfcc@environment-agency.gov.uk

Further information

See [additional information on the regional flood and coastal committees \(RFCCs\)](#)

Flooding – be prepared

[Check your flood risk](#) or call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 (24/7 service) to find out if your property is at risk of flooding.

If you are at risk, [sign up for our free Floodline Warnings Service](#) and start preparing for when a flood happens.

Would you know what to do in a flood? Please check the advice on [GOV.UK](#)

To report flooding call the Environment Agency incident hotline on 0800 80 70

15 million households have received £150 cost of living council tax rebate

A total of more than £2 billion has been handed to 15 million households in England under the scheme. Over 90% of households who had direct debits set up with their local council have received their council tax rebate.

The [figures cover the period to the end of June](#), meaning the actual number of households who have received the rebate is likely to be even higher as councils continue to pay it out.

All councils have begun making these payments and almost all councils have payment processes in place for people who do not pay by direct debit. Minister for State Paul Scully has spoken to the 4 councils who do not yet have these processes in place to ensure that they do so as soon as possible.

Households have until the end of September to claim the £150 payment, which does not have to be paid back. Anyone who is yet to receive their rebate is urged to check their local council website for more information and make a claim.

However, recognising the importance of the rebate in helping those most in need with rising costs, the government urges councils to keep pace in supporting the remaining households to claim their rebate.

The rebate is part of £37 billion of government support being targeted at those most in need to help with the cost of living. This includes at least £1,200 of extra support for millions of the most vulnerable households this year, with all domestic electricity customers receiving at least £400 towards their bills. An extra £144 million has also be given to councils to provide discretionary support to any household in financial need due to rising energy bills, including people on low incomes in council tax bands E to H.

Levelling Up Secretary Greg Clark said:

The cost of living is at the forefront of everyone's minds and the support the government has put in place is helping millions of households, especially those most in need, manage these pressures.

We want to make sure everyone who is entitled to this cash receives it, so I urge people to check their bank accounts and speak to their council if they are yet to receive their £150 council tax

rebate.

The rebate is available to most households living in council tax bands A to D on 1 April. This includes those who receive Local Council Tax Support, even if their council tax bill for the year is less than £150.

Anyone who thinks they are eligible but does not have a direct debit and has not received a payment or details of how to make a claim, should visit their local council's website for more information.

Since announcing the rebate in April, the government has provided £28 million for councils to set up software and recruit staff and will top this up as necessary to cover all reasonable delivery costs. Councils have been given a host of options to make payments quickly and securely including bank account transfers, council tax account credits or a voucher-based system.

Local authorities must also make arrangements for those who cannot access the internet.

If households do not know who their local council is, they can find their website through entering their postcode [here](#).

Find more information about [government support on the cost of living](#).

[155 days on, it is clear Russia will fail in Ukraine: UK statement to the OSCE](#)

Thank you, Mr Chair. I want to begin by reflecting on events since 24 February, when Russia invaded its sovereign and democratic neighbour. Since then, Russia has pursued barbaric tactics, once thought consigned to history. Indifferent to International Law, desperate and cowardly, the Russian government has relentlessly targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure. 155 days ago, Ukrainian cities were bustling, prosperous centres. 155 days ago, 20 million now displaced Ukrainian people were living undisturbed in their own homes. 155 days ago, 4-year-old Liza, 7-year-old Maxim, 8-year-old Kirill and 350 other Ukrainian children had their whole lives ahead of them.

But on 24 February, the Russian government did not know that they would come to regret testing the mettle of Ukraine and its partners. President Putin sought to bring Ukraine to its knees, but encountered a country that refused to yield. As Russian forces retreated, defeated, from Kyiv, President Putin must have realised how grossly he underestimated the Ukrainian people's bravery and determination. 155 days on it is clear that President Putin

cannot and will not subjugate Ukraine. 155 days on, the UK and our allies remain steadfast in our commitment to Ukraine and the defence of its sovereignty.

Mr Chair, as Ukraine continues to pay a devastating price for its freedom, the impacts of Russia's invasion are also felt globally. Before 24 February, Ukraine was one of the largest exporters of grains and vegetable oils, feeding hundreds of millions worldwide. Because of President Putin's actions, some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people are at risk of starvation. If Russia's aggression continues, the World Food Programme estimates that up to 47 million more people could face acute food insecurity this year. The UN Secretary General has warned that the war is threatening to unleash "an unprecedented wave of hunger and destitution, leaving social and economic chaos in its wake". The scale of the suffering is truly horrific.

President Putin cannot be allowed to hold the world's food supply to ransom in order to escape the sanctions that are weakening his war machine. [We applaud Turkey and the UN Secretary General for their efforts to broker an agreement to allow millions of tonnes of grain to be exported through safe lanes in Ukrainian waters.](#) But our position is clear, this agreement is only needed to solve a problem caused by Russia.

Russia is responsible for stopping Ukrainian grain exports; Russia holds the keys for them to restart. It is absolutely appalling that only a day after reaching an agreement, Russia launched missile strikes on the port of Odesa. Russia must implement its agreement and allow safe export from Ukraine; the world will be watching. The international community must present a united front and make clear to the Russian government that their actions to worsen world hunger are unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

The UK stands firmly with those who are worst affected by the global food crisis and we will continue to provide humanitarian aid and economic support for those that need it most. Over the next three years, the UK will provide £3 billion in humanitarian funding globally and drive a more effective international response to humanitarian crises.

Mr Chair, 5 months on from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the death and destruction Russia has caused are clear for all to see. We must continue to collectively hold Russia to account for what it has done in Ukraine and across the globe. And we must continue to stand with and support Ukraine in its fight for its homeland. Ukraine deserves peace.

I join our partners in calling again on Russia to secure the immediate release of all national Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) members still in detention. [As the Acting Chief Monitor made clear on Monday,](#) the Mission and its dedicated staff have performed their duties with the utmost professionalism and impartiality for the last 8 years. The unfounded claims and fabricated accusations Russia has levelled against it are shameful.

Finally, as we approach the summer period, the UK will continue to be watching Russia's actions on the ground closely. There is no respite for the people of Ukraine, who continue to lay down their lives in pursuit of peace,

freedom, and integrity of their country. We stand with them.

100,000 Ukrainians welcomed to safety in the UK

- More than 100,000 people from Ukraine have arrived in the UK under the Ukraine Family Scheme and Homes for Ukraine Scheme
- Since March the government has worked with councils and communities to help them build new lives in the UK
- From today new applications from children not travelling with or joining their parent or guardian will be considered, enabling children to apply for a visa provided they have parental consent

The government has thanked the British public for their generosity and goodwill today after more than 100,000 people from Ukraine have now been welcomed into homes across the UK after arriving through the two Ukraine visa schemes.

The figure was reached as the Homes for Ukraine Scheme opens up to allow new applications from children and minors under the age of 18 to come to the UK without a parent or guardian.

After listening to Ukrainian parents and working closely with their national government, government has introduced changes that will enable a child to apply for a visa if they have proof of parental consent.

Since early spring, government has streamlined the visa application system to get people to safety as soon as possible, and worked hand in hand with councils and community groups to ensure people from Ukraine are fully supported as they adjust to life in the UK.

Maria Kartashova, who lives with her host in Surrey said:

I want to send my gratitude to all the British people and my sponsors personally. What you are doing for the Ukrainian people is more than help. You support us at every stage, spend your time and energy, pay attention and give care. I cannot put into words how grateful I am.

Refugees Minister Lord Harrington said:

We would not be able to welcome 100,000 people from Ukraine to our shores without generous people around the country opening their

doors.

It is important that we recognise the selfless work of the public to help Ukrainians integrate into their communities.

We understand families are having to make difficult decisions to leave their homes – which is why it is important we took the time to get this right to ensure we can continue offering safety to as many Ukrainians as possible.

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Greg Clark said:

As 100,000 people have now arrived from Ukraine, I want to extend my thanks to everyone who has offered their homes to people in need.

Behind this milestone however are 100,000 stories of pain – families split apart and forced to leave their fathers, sons and brothers. That is why we want peace and security in Ukraine so that its brave people can be safe at home again.

The Ukraine visa process is now fully digital, enabling applicants to apply online, submit their biometrics, including uploading their photo, through an app and evidence their rights to benefits and services, including Universal Credit, in the UK digitally.

As a result of changes, including simplifying the application form and boosting staff numbers – at its peak, around 500 people were processing visas – with the government processing applications as quickly as possible, aiming for within 48 hours where possible.

From day one, Ukrainians have the right to work and to access benefits and public services, including education and healthcare, on the same-footing as UK nationals. This will continue to be the case for those who wish to remain in the UK.

A combined national effort has driven the schemes forward – with devolved governments, charities, faith groups, businesses, councils and communities all working together to provide much needed support to those arriving from Ukraine. We welcome offers of employment from businesses for those Ukrainians arriving in the UK and who are ready to work and have set up a dedicated team in the Department for Work and Pensions to support employers offering work.

Twenty-nine Welcome Points at primary points of entry including ports, train stations and airports across the country offer meet-and-greet arrangements alongside immediate humanitarian assistance to ensure Ukrainian people arriving through either scheme are welcomed to the UK.

The government is providing £10,500 per person under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme to councils to enable them to provide support to families to rebuild

their lives and fully integrate into communities. Within the £10,500 is a one-off £200 payment that councils will provide to each Ukraine guest upon arrival plus the £350 'thank you' monthly payment for sponsors for costs associated with helping out.

The government continues to work closely with the voluntary and community sector who are supporting the Homes for Ukraine scheme including through matching services being run by Recognised Providers to help more people from Ukraine find safe and sustainable matches with sponsors in the UK.

The government has established three new visa schemes to support those fleeing Putin's war. Already 104,000 Ukrainians have arrived safely in the UK, 31,300 under the Ukraine Family Scheme and 72,700 through the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme.

When the Homes for Ukraine scheme launched in March, children or minors under the age of 18 were not eligible unless they were applying with, or planning to reunite in the UK with, a parent or legal guardian.

Despite this around 1,000 under 18s applied for the scheme. The government carefully worked through the concerns around allowing children to apply for the Homes for Ukraine scheme without a parent or legal guardian and initially opening up the Homes for Ukraine scheme to these existing applications. The scheme has been opened up further to consider new applications from eligible minors.

After working closely with the Ukraine government and councils, the changes will enable a child to apply for a visa if they have proof of parental consent. This must be certified by an authority approved by the Ukraine government, such as the Ukrainian consul abroad.

Extensive sponsor checks will also be carried out by local authorities ahead of any visa being granted, with councils able to veto any sponsor arrangements they deem unsuitable.

People interested in becoming a sponsor can [register their interest](#).