



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Gavin Jones
Via email

Lee Rowley MP

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Thank you for your report of 22 December 2022 on the progress of the intervention at Slough Borough Council. I am grateful for your continued work and the diligence and professionalism you have shown.

In my statement to the Parliament today I acknowledged the recent retirement of Max Caller CBE as Lead Commissioner, and the resignation of Margaret Lee as Finance Commissioner. I am grateful to both Max and Margaret for their instrumental work in Slough. I would also like to thank you for your continued work in Slough, especially given your parallel efforts supporting the ongoing intervention in Thurrock Council. Your report makes for concerning reading. It is clear there has been an unacceptable lack of urgency and focus by the Council to resolve the situation it has placed itself in. This must change. An authority does not arrive at this position without significant cultural issues, so I am troubled to hear there are individuals and leaders within the Council who do not recognise the need for cultural change. I expect the Council's leadership to recognise this and act accordingly to deliver the transformation Slough needs. I am encouraged to hear that since the submission of your report, Commissioners and the Council have worked together to bolster the senior leadership team and I am confident that there is now stronger senior leadership in place in the Council, following the appointment of Stephen Brown as Chief Executive on 26 October 2022, to manage this transitional period. It is vital necessary improvements continue to occur at pace.

Given the scale of the challenges and the pace of progress, I would like to see a metric-based assessment from the Commissioner Team and the Council which includes i) progress against the Directions, ii) long term financial planning and iii) progress on the development of the new operating model and necessary cultural change within the Council. I encourage you to use the full extent of your powers to support the Council to develop robust solutions to these significant challenges and to keep both myself and the department informed of progress.

I take your statement about the viability of the Council as a serious reflection of the circumstances that the authority finds itself in. It is vital residents have an effective and functioning council, and it is important that you continue your work to make Slough a viable authority. With Max's retirement, Margaret's resignation, and the intervention in its second year there is an opportunity to consider the skills and experience required to meet the challenges of the intervention. I will confirm appointments to the Commissioner team in the coming weeks.

I would also like to thank you for your recent letter detailing Grant Thornton's audit of the Council's 2018/19 accounts. Their 'disclaimer of opinion' is disappointing and the

reasons behind it very concerning. I would be grateful for a further update when you have discussed the situation with Chartered Institute of Management Accountants and the auditors who completed the 2017/18 accounts. In the meantime, I will await the formal request from the Council seeking their final capitalisation direction in respect of 2018/19.

Yours sincerely,

**LEE ROWLEY MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT
AND BUILDING SAFETY**