

Slough Borough Council

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| Report To: | Cabinet |
| Date: | 20 April 2026 |
| Subject: | Slough Children First – Ofsted Focused Visit 19 & 20 November 2025 outcome |
| Lead Member: | Cllr. Puja Bedi – Lead Member for Education, Children’s Services and Lifelong Learning |
| Chief Officer: | Debbie Jones – Director of Operations, Slough Children First |
| Contact Officer: | Rhianne Elleston – Head of Children’s Improvement, Slough Children First |
| Ward(s): | All |
| Purpose of report: | For information |
| Key Decision: | NO |
| Exempt: | NO |
| Decision Subject To Call In: | NO |
| Appendices: | Appendix A - Ofsted Children’s services focused visit letter Appendix B - Slough Children First Area of Priority Action plan – Feb 26 |

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out the outcome of Slough Children First’s Ofsted focused visit on the 19 and 20 November 2025, as detailed on Appendix A.
- 1.2 It highlights the key findings, areas requiring improvement and the implications for service delivery and governance.
- 1.3 Appendix B outlines the Area of Priority Action (APA), setting out the immediate and sustained actions to address the identified issues and strengthen assurance.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to note the outcome of the Ofsted Focused Visit and Slough Children’s First’s Area of Priority Action Plan appended at Appendix B.

Reason: To ensure appropriate democratic oversight in respect of the identified strengths, areas for improvement and the Area of Priority Action. Reporting formally to Cabinet increased transparency of the outcome and SCF’s response to it.

DfE Adviser Review

“The issuing of an Area for Priority Action (APA) is a very serious outcome of concern from an inspection, and would result in DfE intervention in any Local Authority where such a finding is made. As SCF/SBC are already subject to intervention, this will continue, with strengthened assurance required as outlined in the ministerial letter on 13 February 2026. The report does not address in detail the further resource demands which arise from the recent Focused Visit, but these are significant. Caseload levels were criticised by inspectors, and additional staffing capacity will be required to address these. In addition to the action plan to visit a large number of young people, it is likely that some cases will need to be re-opened, adding further demand to the service.

Additional capacity is also required to address the shortfall in capacity around quality assurance and performance management, so that going forward, leaders can have timely and accurate assurance around improvements and their impact on outcomes for these young people. It is my understanding that recent discussions between SCF and SBC have resulted additional resources being agreed to address these requirements. This is a positive step in enabling recovery and preparation for the forthcoming full inspection which is likely to occur within the next three months.”

2. Report

Introductory paragraph

- 2.1 Slough Children First was subject to an Ofsted Focused Visit on 19 and 20 November 2026, undertaken in line with Ofsted’s ILACS framework and powers under the Education and Inspections Act 2006.
- 2.2 Focused visits are designed to evaluate a specific aspect of service or the experiences of a defined cohort; on this occasion, the visit examined the effectiveness of our care leavers service, including
 - support into adulthood
 - accommodation
 - education
 - employment and training
 - and arrangements for staying close and in touch
- 2.3 The visit involved proportionate off site evaluation of evidence followed by two days of fieldwork. As is standard for focused visits, inspectors did not make graded judgements but issued findings highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. Where serious weaknesses are identified, Ofsted sets out Areas for Priority Action.
- 2.4 This report presents the focused visit letter and Slough Children First’s response to the APA of which was submitted within 30 days of receiving the draft letter, outlining both immediate remedial steps and the sustained actions required to strengthen practice, oversight and assurance for care experienced young adults.
- 2.5 It also supports the Council’s vision and corporate priorities by strengthening assurance, improving outcomes for care experienced young adults and reinforcing accountability for delivering safe, effective and responsive services.

Options considered

There is no statutory requirement to report the findings of the focused visit to Cabinet, however this is recommended to ensure accountability and transparency.

Background

- 2.6 Appendix A presents the findings from Ofsted's Focused Visit to Slough Borough Council children's services undertaken on 19 and 20 November 2025, which examined arrangements for care leavers aged 18 to 25, with particular attention to those with specific needs
- those at risk of specific types of harm
 - the effectiveness of staying close
 - keeping in touch
- 2.7 Inspectors identified that care leavers in Slough receive an inconsistent level of support. A significant number of young people were not being kept in touch with and did not have an allocated personal adviser, resulting in reduced access to services and for some, welfare not being adequately safeguarded
- 2.8 While inspectors noted areas of stronger practice including the positive impact of the following areas:
- virtual school
 - improvements in participation
 - and effective specialist support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people
- 2.9 They concluded that key aspects of practice remain inconsistent. These include
- pathway planning
 - case recording
 - supervision
 - management oversight
 - performance management
 - and quality assurance
- 2.10 Consequently, Ofsted issued an Area for Priority Action relating to keeping in touch with and supporting care leavers over 18 alongside associated improvement needs concerning management oversight, workforce capacity and caseloads, planning consistency, and quality assurance arrangements
- 2.11 This focused visit took place within the context of the local authority's improvement journey following the last formal ILACS inspection which recognised progress in stabilising services while also highlighting systemic challenges in consistency, oversight, and workforce pressures
- 2.12 The focused visit findings reaffirm that, although there are committed practitioners and examples of relational, strengths based practice, variability in management grip, supervision, and performance infrastructure continues to affect the reliability of the care leavers offer

- 2.13 The report therefore provides Cabinet with a clear line of sight regarding current strengths, identified weaknesses, and the urgency of the remedial and longer term actions set out in Appendix B. Together, the focused visit letter and the Area of Priority Action Plan support robust governance oversight, reinforce accountability, and guide the next phase of improvement to ensure that care experienced young adults are visible, supported, and able to access their full statutory entitlements
- 2.14 Following submission of the Area of Priority Action (APA) Plan, feedback was received from the lead inspector acknowledging the strength of the response while highlighting the need for quality assurance and audit activity to be made more explicit within the plan. This observation has been fully addressed.
- 2.15 Appendix B has since been updated to clearly articulate the role of robust QA and audit arrangements in providing independent oversight, evidencing implementation, and assuring the impact of remedial actions on practice and outcomes for care experienced young adults. The inclusion of these enhancements is reflected in this final version of the APA Plan

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

- 3.1.1 The actions required are currently being met within the current contract sum as agreed by Cabinet on the 16th February 2026 and included within the Council's general fund budget. Whilst there are no immediate financial implications associated with this report as it is presented for noting, SCF are in the process of assessing the extent to which additional funding may be required to fully implement the required actions in light of the imminent Ofsted inspection due in the first quarter of 2026/27. This is under active discussion with Council officers.

3.2 Legal implications

- 3.2.1 The Council has duties under the Children Act 1989 to prepare children for leaving care. These functions are contracted out of Slough Children First. Duties include publishing a local offer setting out support offered to care leavers and responsibilities to consider what assistance care leavers require depending on their specific needs.
- 3.2.2 The Council has general duties in relation to corporate parenting. This includes duties to care leavers. These duties do not just apply to the children's social care directorate. The duties are to:
- act in the young person's best interests, and promote her/his physical and mental health and well-being
 - encourage care leavers to express their views, wishes and feelings, and take them into account
 - help those young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
 - promote high aspirations in, and seek to secure the best outcomes for care leavers

- ensure the safety of care leavers, and stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

3.3 *Risk management implications*

3.3.1 This report does not change any of the known risks currently recorded on the directorate or corporate risk register associated with Slough Children First's ongoing improvement journey post our Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services on 23 January 2023

3.4 *Environmental implications*

3.4.1 There are no known environmental implications arising from this report.

3.5 *Equality implications*

3.5.1 Slough Children First provides statutory social care services to children, young people and families, including some of the most vulnerable residents in the borough, many of whom are from diverse backgrounds. Any failure to deliver timely, effective and appropriate services risks exacerbating existing inequalities and having a detrimental impact on children, young people, families and, in some cases, the wider community. The Area of Priority Action identified that a number of care experienced young people were not in receipt of services to which they were entitled, resulting in an adverse impact on an already vulnerable group. The remedial action set out in response is intended to address these gaps, strengthen practice and reduce the risk of further inequality. It is also recognised that certain ethnic groups and genders are disproportionately represented within the population supported by Slough Children First and may therefore be disproportionately affected by the matters set out in this report. This underlines the importance of maintaining a clear focus on equity of access, quality of service and improved outcomes across all groups.

3.6 *Corporate Parenting Implications*

3.6.1 The findings of the focused visit highlight important considerations for Slough's corporate parenting responsibilities. The identified inconsistency in keeping in touch with care leavers and ensuring access to an allocated personal adviser directly impacts the Council's ability, as corporate parent, to safeguard welfare, promote stability, and uphold statutory entitlements. Where young people are not consistently visible to services, there is a heightened risk that their needs, vulnerabilities, and aspirations are not fully understood or responded to in a timely way.

3.6.2 Corporate Parenting Panel members should note that variability in pathway planning, recording, supervision, and management oversight may limit assurance regarding the quality of support provided to care experienced young adults. Effective corporate parenting requires not only the provision of services, but clear oversight, curiosity, and accountability for outcomes. The findings therefore reinforce the need for strengthened governance, improved performance and quality assurance arrangements, and sustained scrutiny of practice consistency and caseload manageability.

- 3.6.3 The feedback from young people, which reflects positive relationships and experiences where support is in place, provides a constructive platform for improvement. It underlines the importance of ensuring that all care leavers benefit from stable, trusted relationships and a coherent service offer. The Area of Priority Action Plan presents an opportunity for the Council, through its corporate parenting function, to actively monitor progress, champion the voice of care leavers, and ensure that remedial actions translate into measurable improvements in the lived experience for all care experienced young adults known to Slough children's services.
- 3.6.4 In discharging its corporate parenting duties, the Council should maintain oversight of the implementation and impact of the action plan, including the visibility of care leavers, the timeliness and quality of pathway plans, workforce capacity, and the effectiveness of management supervision. Continued focus on these areas will support the Council's wider ambition to act as a strong, aspirational, and accountable corporate parent.
- 3.6.5 It is important that Cabinet is assured that the views of the Corporate Parenting Panel will be an integral part of the Council's ongoing governance and accountability arrangements. The Ofsted outcome will be presented to Corporate Parenting Panel in April, providing a formal opportunity for members to review the findings, reflect on the implications for children in our care and care experienced young people, and capture their views in a structured way. This will help to ensure that effective oversight is maintained from a partnership perspective, and that appropriate challenge and support continues to be provided to the Lead Member in discharging their corporate parenting responsibilities. In doing so, the council will strengthen collective ownership of the improvement journey and maintain clear lines of accountability for driving forward the progress required.

4. Background Papers

None