

Statement made by Jim McMahon, Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution

20th November 2024

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All Honourable Members will recognise the importance of having well-functioning local councils which provide essential statutory services local residents rely upon. Government will continue to work directly with a small number of councils in difficulty, and this should be done in a way that is not punitive and is based on genuine partnership to secure improvements. Today, I would like to update the House on the statutory interventions in Slough and Woking.

Slough Borough Council

On 22 October 2024, I announced to the House that the Secretary of State was minded to issue new Directions to Slough Borough Council, and that I was seeking representations on a proposal. I also announced if I implemented this proposal, I would reappoint the current three Commissioners and also appoint the interim Chief Executive, Will Tuckley, as Managing Director Commissioner.

The proposal was to require the Council to take actions that are consistent with the priorities the Commissioners have set for the Council, provide for Commissioners to continue to be able to exercise council functions relating to governance, finance and appointments and to extend the timeframe of the statutory intervention until 30 November 2026. This followed the publication of the fifth report from Commissioners, which, as I outlined on 22 October, provided evidence that there are still a substantial number of areas which require further improvement at the Council, and there remains volatility in the Council's overall financial position. In my view the report provides considerable evidence that the Authority is not complying with its Best Value Duty, as outlined in the Local Government Act 1999 and Best Value Guidance published in May 2024.

Following consideration of the two representations that were received, noting the support from the Council for the proposal and the concerns raised about the pace and impact of the intervention to date in the other, the Secretary of State and I have decided to implement the proposals announced on 22 October and issue new Directions to the Council, which come into effect immediately and will remain in force up to and including 30 November 2026. The Directions issued on 1 December 2021 (updated on 1 September 2022 and 22 May 2023) are revoked with immediate effect.

I am therefore today confirming the reappointment of the current three Commissioners, Gavin Jones, Denise Murray and Ged Curran. They will continue to work in partnership with the Council to support its recovery. Alongside this I have appointed Will Tuckley, the Interim Chief Executive, as Managing Director Commissioner. This will strengthen the relationship between the Commissioner team and Council and support the Council to lead its recovery.

The three reappointed Commissioners have been nominated for the duration of the intervention and the Managing Director Commissioner has been nominated for eighteen months.

As with other interventions led by my Ministry, the Council will be required to cover the costs associated with the Commissioners. The fees for each individual are detailed in their appointment letters, published on gov.uk. I am assured this provides value for money given the expertise that is being brought, and the scale of the challenge in councils requiring statutory intervention.