

Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2024/25



Committee Members



**Cllr Stedmond
Chair
May 2024-present**



**Cllr Hulme
Vice-Chair
May 2024 -present**



Cllr Ajaib



Cllr Dauti



Cllr Matloob



Cllr O'Kelly



Cllr Rana



Cllr Sabah



Cllr Satti



Cllr Tomar

Contents

1. Chair's Introduction	4
2. Context	5
3. Delivery	6-11
4. Assessing Improvement	12-16
5. Next Steps	17-25
6. Petitions	26

1. Chair's Introduction



Cllr Robert Stedmond
Chair

Since becoming the Chair of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee in May 2024, I have seen the committee embed the improvements started by my predecessors Cllrs Manku and Shaik. We have also delivered a major part of the action plan. The results are public meetings that are more focused and business like, with the majority of the recommendations we make to Cabinet being approved by them.. The topics explored by the committee are also more targeted and beginning to add value to the organisation and the services it delivers. I am particularly pleased that the committee has been more effective in calling the leadership of the Council to account, especially in relation to the draft budget for 2024-25 and with regard to the Commissioners' 4th Best Value Report. The quality of the work of our task groups also has seen considerable improvement, not least because of the way we scope the terms of reference, focusing on delivering measurable outcomes.

This is not to say that there is not more to do! Far from it, and I am pleased to see that a revised, refreshed improvement plan for 2024-25 is contained within this report.

I hope that by 2026, the Borough's residents, communities of place, of interest and by association, and the Council's Members, Cabinet and senior management recognise and value CISC as an independent, objective, but critical friend. The Committee will refresh its approach to scrutiny of the Improvement and Recovery Programme as well as refine and build upon a new approach to Budget Scrutiny that was adopted in 2024-25

2. Context: Embedding and improving scrutiny in SBC

In October 2021, an [external assurance review](#) of Slough Borough Council was published. This included a [governance review by Jim Taylor](#) for the Secretary of State, dated September 2021. This called the scrutiny function 'under-resourced', with reports too complex and hard to interpret. Slough Children First felt there was a lack of focus on them, and councillors reported an erosion of trust, considering 'what has happened'. There was no scrutiny forward plan.

In December 2021, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities ("the Secretary of State") made [Directions to Slough Borough Council](#) under the Local Government Act 1999 which included the following [in section 3 of Annex A](#):

"In the first three months prepare and agree an Improvement Plan to the satisfaction of the Commissioners (which may include or draw upon improvement or action plans prepared before the date of these Directions), with resource allocated accordingly, and as a minimum, the following components:

...

An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of the scrutiny function..."

Slough Borough Council also commissioned the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to do a review of its scrutiny function. This review was carried out after Commissioners had then been appointed. The CfGS report was published in November 2022. It included a number of recommendations which were considered advisable for the further improvement of SBC's scrutiny function.

In response to the Secretary of State's Directions, and informed by the CfGS review, a Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan and Democratic Governance Improvement Action Plan were created, and this work has continued to the present. The Scrutiny Action Plan was endorsed by Full Council before the election in May 2023, and resulted in the single committee arrangement that was convened in June 2023. The work is monitored by Commissioners via the Improvement and Recovery Board. The CfGS also carried out an interim review in January 2024. Its recommendations have also been integrated into the Scrutiny Action plan

3. Delivering CISC: Year 2 Overview

Since the establishment of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC) in May 2023 and the recruitment of the Scrutiny and Governance Officer in September, the 2023-24 cycle saw the development and introduction of principles, processes and practices to deliver core functions and establish a style and culture for scrutiny in Slough. Year 2, from May 2024-April 2025 has focused on embedding and building on the achievements of the previous year. This has included a new approach to Budget Scrutiny and improved use of evidence by members.

CISC Terms of Reference (extract)

- Monitoring and driving Improvement against any Directions by the Secretary of State and other external or internal inspections/reviews/performance information;
- Monitoring and driving progress of major corporate improvement initiatives e.g., transformation programmes, major programmes of savings delivery, culture change, governance improvement;
- Scrutinising and inputting into the council's budget-setting cycle and monitoring the council's financial recovery progress;
- Scrutinising proposals for, and delivery of, major savings initiatives, including their impact on partners and residents; and
- Commissioning Task and Finish Groups to investigate specific discrete questions or issues.



Cllr Stedmond was appointed Chair of the CISC at the May 2023 annual meeting of full Council, and Cllr Hulme became Vice-Chair. The establishment of a new political group, the Slough Independent Group, required redistribution of group ratios with the result that CISC membership was comprised of 5 Conservative, 2 Labour, 2 Slough Independent and 1 Liberal Democrat. 6 of the 10 members were new to scrutiny, requiring the delivery of modified induction modules that incorporated the experience of the 4 roll-over members as part of the learning.

Officer capacity remains a challenge, especially in balancing the demands of day-to-day support to the committee, ensuring public meetings run smoothly and keeping momentum in implementing the scrutiny improvement action plan.

3.1 Delivery: Training and briefings 2024/25

Training and development for all councillors is recognised as key to the council's improvement and recovery. The programme of learning for scrutiny members needed to support the 6 new Councillors on the Committee as well as to continue the learning and development of the 5 Councillors continuing from 2023-24. The scrutiny programme locks in with the wider SBC member development strategy and plan which has been in place since 2022, and was reviewed, adapted and upgraded by Standards Committee on [19 March 2024](#). This included scrutiny induction for new CISC members and refresher courses for existing members. Most Scrutiny Training is also made available to other members whenever practicable. Full details of the CfGS proposal can be found at Appendix B to an [April 2023 Standards Committee report](#). Furthermore, the new scrutiny Chair benefited from the weekend long residential offered by the LGA.

The Chair has also recently joined the South East Regional Scrutiny Chairs network.

To the right is an indicative selection of the training opportunities and briefings which have been made available to Scrutiny members this year.

See [Report to Standards Committee on 20 March 2025](#) for details for the 2025-26 cycle.

Effective questioning	SBC	19 June	2024
Making Good Recommendations	SBC	06 July	2024
Scrutiny Data: From Corporate to Countrywide	SBC	04 September	2024
A Target operating model for Slough	SBC	11 September	2024
Prevention Matters	LGA	18 September	2024
Local Government Finance	SBC	22 October	2024
Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing Benefit	SBC	28 October	2024
Intervention and Recovery at SBC Commissioners' update		21 November	2024
Feedback from LGA Equalities Peer review	SBC	04 December	2024
Leadership Essentials Programme - Effective Scrutiny	LGA	24/25 January	2025
Devolution and LGR	SBC	05 February	2025
Safeguarding Children & Corporate Parenting	LGA	12 February	2025
Update on SBCs Financial Position	SBC	19 February	2025

3.2 Delivery: 2024/25 Scrutiny items

The main items for committee meeting this year are listed with links to the relevant agendas or papers.

Items marked * relate directly to finance or the *MHCLG or DfE improvement programmes*

This **EXCLUDES**:

- Launching of task & finish groups (reported on slide 9)
- Development or briefing sessions held in private, occasionally using committee time
- Work programming workshops and agenda items approving the forward plan

2024		2025	
July:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discretionary Property Licensing 	February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement and Recovery: Governance, action plan and scrutiny report *
September:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Target Operating Model for Slough * • OfSTED report and DfE Commissioners report * 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOM: Communications, Engagement and Change Management • MTFS and Budget 2025-26 *
October:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCF Annual report and Business plan 2025-26 • Report of the PCC and Thames Valley Police 	March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report from NHS Frimley ICB • Moving Jubilee Ward, Upton Park Hospital • Safer Slough Partnership • Report of the Scrutiny Task Group on Children's Engagement *
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget Management Q2 report * • MTFS and Budget 2025-26 * • Council Tax Support Scheme 	April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report of the Budget Task Group * • Proposal for Scrutiny of the I&R* programme * • Annual report

3.3. Delivery: Task and Finish Groups

Three Task and Finish (T&F) groups were commissioned this year. T&F work, while often quite resource-intensive, tends to produce more concrete and better-informed recommendations, while being more rewarding for the Members involved. It is primarily used for pre-decision scrutiny (policy development) rather than post-decision ('holding to account') scrutiny.

	Started	Completed	To Cabinet
Task Group 1: Budget	<u>July 2024</u>	April 28 2025	June 2025
Task Group 2: Children's Engagement	<u>Sept 2024</u> ,	March 04 2025	April 14 2025
Task Group 3: Provision for NEETS	<u>Feb 19 2025</u> ,	June 2025	<i>July 2025</i>

Each T&F has been launched, mindful of Councillors' learning curve and the availability of resources. Lessons learned from each have been fed into subsequent ones. Of note, the Budget Task Group consisted of the four political leads on CISC. They have engaged with the finance team and Department leads to explore in-year budget challenges and pressures on the 2025-26 budget and MTFS. The Children's Engagement Task Group opted to undertake a non-traditional approach by acting as a catalyst to begin the development of community and faith engagement in services through an initial 'scrutiny-in-a-day' style, face-to-face workshop with faith and community groups. Finally, a bespoke cabinet report template for making recommendations to cabinet (and/or other relevant bodies), introduced towards the end of 2023-24 has proven a simple, effective tool, to enable simultaneous reporting to and responding by cabinet in a formal, streamlined fashion. This then allows better tracking and accountability.

3.4 Delivery: Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan

Ref	Outcome	Outputs	Progress	Deadline for completion	Notes
1	Residents are better informed about Scrutiny at Slough	Web presence. Relevant page/s explaining the role of Scrutiny, the current forward plan and how Residents can engage with, attend meetings, provide evidence at meetings.	Completed Press have attended 2 CISC meetings	Sep 24	In 2025-26: explore social media options to promote scrutiny.
2	Residents able to propose scrutiny topics	Process, criteria and guidance produced, needs to link in with e-petition	Completed	June 24	
3	Members propose topics for scrutiny that are relevant and deliver impact	Design a topic-related training programme for 2024-25 for scrutiny members	Completed	June 24	
4		Process, criteria and guidance for members to propose scrutiny topics with recovery focus and criteria/information required	Completed	Dec 23	
5		Plan/process for evaluation of topics for Mid Term Review	Completed	Dec 23	
6		Mid-Year review of Forward Plan	Completed	Dec 23 Dec 2024	
7		Plan/process for evaluation of topics new forward plan municipal year 24/25	Completed	May 24	
8	Better evidence of good governance	Action Log circulated more frequently with updates	Regular updates to Chair and VC	Oct 23	
9	Better evidence of impact and of good governance	Recommendations Register and standard format cabinet report trialed to address cabinet response.	Cabinet report now Implemented	Oct 23	

3.4 Delivery Improvement Action Plan (cont.)

Ref	Outcome	Outputs	Progress	Deadline for completion	Notes
10	Assurance that scrutiny recognises the value of specific stakeholders	Co-optees and expert witnesses used as appropriate	75 % complete	June 25-2026	Health items now included SSP report included Police and Crime Commissioner held to account Education yet to be resolved
11	Better evidence of good governance	Review key dates initiation to publication of reports	Completed and amended timeline implemented	June 2024	
12	Residents recognise and engage with the work of scrutiny	Regularise/establish Scrutiny Brand for reports and publication routes	Established		
13	Directors and senior managers engage positively with the work of the committee and recognise the positive impact it can have	Engagement and training plan – include scrutiny in officer induction and repeat visits by Chair to CLT. CLT role in work programming. Consider a Cabinet-Scrutiny protocol.	Not yet restored To be Considered 2025-26	Sept 2025	
14	Scrutiny is evidence based 11	Identify data that can be used as evidence for Residents' big Issues	Completed	May 2025	
15		Develop a mechanism/procedure to use performance data, BMOs, IRB updates etc	Pending	April 2026	Need to embed this in item 7
16					
17					

3.4 Delivery: Improvement Action Plan (cont.)

Ref	Outcome	Outputs	Progress	Deadline for completion	Notes
18	Scrutiny is making a difference	CfGS progress review.	New Approach implemented and under way Proposal to be adopted in April Needs improvement	January 2027	
		Testimony from public and partners involved in scrutiny reviews		April 2026	
		Budget scrutiny is effective and mindful of national/local issues, and of risk.			
		Committee's role in non-financial recovery clarified.			
		Scrutiny of savings in-year happen meaningfully and in a timely fashion			
19	Agendas etc more accessible and of high quality	Clean up Agendas and distinguish between reports to Scrutiny rather than covering a report to Cabinet	Pending	August 2025	Democratic Services Service Plan 2024/25 includes a focus on quality and consistency.
20	Agenda items are more likely to be of Member origin or public origin	Public calls for evidence Members submitting good, viable, relevant ideas in the work programming exercise	Improved	May 2025	Next test will be May sessions Proposal template has resulted in 2 submissions to date. 01/12/23
21	Scrutiny helps residents to feel they can influence decisions made by the council	Various public engagement mechanisms in place – and regularly used, with a consequential impact.	Pending	May 2026	

3.4 Delivery: Improvement Action Plan (cont.)

Ref	Outcome	Outputs	Progress	Deadline for completion	Notes
22	Scrutiny Members feel that they have been able to adequately cover issues important to residents	Best Value is at the heart of scrutiny's decision-making processes. Well-evidenced prioritisation in work programming cycle Other regular opportunities for all-Member briefings (written or verbal) Options explored for additional officer capacity to support scrutiny or at least T&Fs	Underway	Ongoing	Work programming mechanisms reviewed recently. All-Member briefings appetite and mechanism to be explored with new incoming Chief Exec and CLT members. Seek more capacity from services to support T&Fs?
23	Scrutiny contributes to the wider partnership landscape, not only SBC's internal crisis	Joint working arrangement set up locally for scrutiny of health. Education co-optees formalised via an election as necessary Crime and disorder item scheduled annually in work programme.	Underway	May 2025	Arrangements in motion to create option of co-opting SBC members onto a neighbouring council's Frimley-focused health scrutiny committee. Crime and disorder items build into 23/4 work programme already
24	Decision-makers are held to account publicly	Consider a Cabinet-Scrutiny Protocol. All Cabinet Members appear on work programme reasonably regularly. Cabinet's good attendance record does not sour. System for news releases by O&S?	Pending	Ongoing	NB no Cabinet Member attended the late March Scrutiny Committee meeting – first time this has happened since May 2023.

4.1 Assessing improvement: All member survey

All Members were surveyed in December 2024 and results were reported in 2025. The survey was extensive covering a range of topics such as culture, Member support and Member wellbeing, as well as concerning Democratic Governance and Scrutiny in particular.

Overall, a moderately higher proportion of Members now agree or strongly agree with positive statements about scrutiny, compared with the previous survey. However, there is still polarisation.

2024/5: When it comes to our Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee

2023/4: When it comes to our Overview and Scrutiny Committee and



4.2 Assessing Improvement: Commissioners' comments

Slough Borough Council's government-appointed Commissioners were invited to an Extraordinary meeting of CISC on 13 March, along with the whole Cabinet and Corporate Leadership Team, as scrutiny aimed to hold the council's leadership to account on the pivotally important contents of the Commissioners' fourth letter to the Secretary of State.

[The minutes and webcast are available online](#). During the meeting, Lead Commissioner Gavin Jones gave a summary of serious issues still facing the council as well as some limited areas of success, and later the Assistant Commissioners offered direct feedback to the Scrutiny Committee.



On governance and scrutiny, some selected positive quotes from Commissioners follow. More quotes about next steps, including further challenges scrutiny must address to become more effective, can be found in section 5 below.

- “Governance has been an area that has really improved quickly”.
- “There has been a commitment to member development”.
- “Scrutiny needs to engage to see when is the right time to engage and ask questions and hold to account. You've modelled this well as a committee tonight, you're doing that very well. Scrutiny must stay involved in the business of the council - what's been modelled here today is a very good example of how scrutiny can contribute.”

4.3 Assessing Improvement: Councillors' annual review

A simple survey of CISC members was held during early March for the following purposes:

1. Reviewing the past year to inform the Scrutiny Annual Report
2. Collecting further qualitative information alongside the Member Survey, to inform the improvement of the Scrutiny function
3. Identify training, learning or briefings that members would welcome.



Summary of representative **POSITIVE feedback – What went well / improved in 2024/25?**

- The Committee seems to be working well as a group.
- Pre meetings have continued to help with organisation of the committee.
- Officers seem to be taking the committee more seriously.
- We have managed to keep politics out of CISC. Cross party discussions working well, especially with the more experienced councillors..
- Hardship Fund in relation to CT rise for first time Contributor,
- Slough children First report
- Balanced budget
- Teamwork

5. Next steps: Priorities for Improvement in 2025/26

The following two slides set out the next proposed phases of a Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan which has now been running continuously for several years, through at least three distinct planning and delivery phases before and after the May 2023 election.

The sources in this report have informed these actions. Those sources include:

- Reference to the draft Best Value Guidance published by DLUHC;
- The wider membership via the Councillor survey
- The committee's own reflections
- Commissioners' verbal advice
- Scrutiny officers' professional advice
- Prior actions still outstanding (action numbering relates to the previous action plan)

The plan recognises the importance of developing an effective scrutiny function. It incorporates in full the recommendations of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, although recognises that the Member Working Group will make an informed decision about what to recommend to Full Council where constitutional changes are required.



5.1 Next Steps: Councillors' annual review



Summary of representative feedback – What could have gone better / needs to improve?

- Recommendations to Cabinet. Even though the committee has made some, there seems to be too few given number of reports that come to the committee.
- We haven't done any public scrutiny work in relation to ASC this year despite it being our biggest area of spend.
- We have had no input from the public into the work of the committee and we are missing valuable resident feedback/evidence.
- Member engagement needs to improve, as a small group of members are doing all of the work.
- Planning Enforcement is in shambles, Parking and CPZ still unsolved puzzle
- Attendance by some members

5.2 Next Steps Improvement Action Plan 2025-26

Ref	Outcome	Outputs	Progress	Deadline for completion	Notes
10	Assurance that scrutiny recognises the value of specific stakeholders	Co-optees and expert witnesses used as appropriate	75 % complete	June 25-2026	Health items now included SSP report included Police and Crime Commissioner held to account Education yet to be resolved
13	Directors and senior managers engage positively with the work of the committee and recognise the positive impact it can have	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement and training plan – include scrutiny in officer induction and repeat visits by Chair to CLT. CLT role in work programming. Consider a Cabinet-Scrutiny protocol. 	Not yet restored To be Considered 2025-26	Sept 2025	
14	Scrutiny is evidence based	Develop a mechanism/procedure to use performance data, BMOs, IRB updates etc	Pending	April 2026	Need to embed this in item 7
18	Scrutiny is making a difference	CfGS progress review.	New Approach implemented and under way Proposal to be adopted in April Needs improvement	January 2027 April 2026	
		Testimony from public and partners involved in scrutiny reviews			
		Budget scrutiny is effective and mindful of national/local issues, and of risk.			
		Committee's role in non-financial recovery clarified.			
		Scrutiny of savings in-year happen meaningfully and in a timely fashion			

5.2 Next Steps: Improvement Action Plan 2025-26 cont

Ref	Outcome	Outputs	Progress	Deadline for completion	Notes
19	Agendas etc more accessible and of high quality	Clean up Agendas and distinguish between reports to Scrutiny rather than covering a report to Cabinet	Pending	August 2025	Democratic Services Service Plan 2024/25 includes a focus on quality and consistency.
20	Agenda items are more likely to be of Member origin or public origin	Public calls for evidence Members submitting good, viable, relevant ideas in the work programming exercise	Improved	May 2025	Next test will be May sessions
21	Scrutiny helps residents to feel they can influence decisions made by the council	Various public engagement mechanisms in place – and regularly used, with a consequential impact.	Pending	May 2026	Resident Survey pending
22	Implement Budget Task Group Recommendations	Agenda item 29 April 2025	New	June 2025	Relaunch in June to convene in July
23	Support I&R Task and finish group	Agenda item 29 April 2025: Launch of Task Group to convene in June	New	June. 2025	

6. Petitions Report for 2024/25

For the period 1st April, 2024 to 31st March, 2025 a total of 12 petitions were received: 5 paper petitions and 7 e-Petitions. Three of these met the [threshold \(1500\) for a debate of full Council](#).

Paper Petition Title	Signatures
24-01 - Parking Issues at Elmhurst Road, SL3 8LT	26
24-02 - Petition Against Council Motion on 25th July, 2024	56
24-03 - Petition in Support of 1984 Sikh Genocide	79
24-04 - Petition - Stowe Road - Parking, Speeding, Litter and Ant-social Behaviour	24
24-05 - Petition - Amendment to Vehicular Crossing Policy	14

ePetitions Title	Signatures
New Parking Space on Marescroft Road No: 115-137	27
Save The Curve!	2,192
Concerns and Objections to the Revised Bath Road Development Application P-19639-00	185
Wexham Road One Way System	33
Contest the Proposal for Resident Parking Permit Fees	94
Save Cippenham and Langley Libraries in Slough from Proposed Public Consultation	2,028
Support the Preferential Sale of Wexham Court Parish Council Hall Property from Asset Disposal List to (JETUK) for establishment of a Hindu temple in Slough	1,778 to date