

Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 29th July, 2025.

Present:- Councillors Khawar (Chair), Hulme (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Matloob, Mohindra, Muvvala, O'Kelly and Tomar

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Bedi, Chahal and Dhillon

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Mann

PART 1

6. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

7. Minutes of the last meeting - 24 June 2025

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2025 were a true and accurate record of the meeting, subject to the attendance of Councillor Muvvala amended as 'in attendance'.

8. Election of chairs and members of CISC Task Groups

Resolved: That the Committee agreed that the following Committee Members would create the Chair and Members for the Budget Management and Budget Planning Task and Finish Group for 2025/26 municipal year: Councillor Mann as Chair and Councillors Mohindra Tomar, Hulme and Matloob.

Resolved: That the Committee agreed that the following Committee Members would create the Chair and Members for the Improvement and Recovery Programme Task and Finish Group for 2025/26 municipal year: Councillor Hulme as Chair and Councillors Muvvala, Mohindra, Tomar and Mann.

9. Update on Temporary Financial Support Scheme for Residents through the Council Tax Support Scheme Hardship Fund

The Director of Revenues and Welfare Services presented the report to the Committee. The report provided an update on the Council Tax Support Hardship Fund for the period April to June 2025.

The current caseload was 6466. The Council Tax Support Hardship Fund had gone live on 1 April 2025, with applications being made by using the on-line Discretionary Hardship Payments application. Over the period 1 April to 30 June 2025, the Council received 337 applications. Of the applications, 26 had been awarded a CTS Hardship payment, 45 cases were currently pending, 173 cases were awaiting processing, and 93 applications had been refused.

There were three key learnings from the first three months. These were that additional resources were required due to the high number of applications

received. This had been allocated. Where supporting information was not received within the one month stipulated, 17 applications had been refused. It had been agreed that if information was received after the one-month period, the process would continue to ensure vulnerable residents were supported. And finally, the 337 applications received only represented 5% of the total 6466 current residents in receipt of CTS. As a result, direct contact would be made with those in receipt of CTS informing them of the Council Tax Support Hardship Fund.

The Cabinet Member highlighted that the CTS was in line with neighbouring authorities. There had been a good level of response, and the scheme was being closely monitored. In August, the Team would be reaching out to make more people aware as there was a duty of care to all residents.

Points raised by the Committee included:

- The Equality Impact Assessment seemed to be from Surrey County Council. Was the data from Slough and why was the Slough template not used? The Committee were reassured that the template had been used for years. The data used was for Slough. It was just an issue with the properties of the document.
- The CTS scheme process was explained that now it was automated, the file arrived from DWP with the information. The eligibility was considered and the claim was processed automatically. Before this took as long as 25 days, now it was completed in two days.
- The process was resource intensive. Before there was one officer dealing with the applications, each application took 30 minutes. In some cases additional information was required and then that needed processing too. There was now two officers processing the applications so was a lot faster. This was for a 5% take up. If the take up increased, more officers would be allocated. The uptake would be reviewed on a weekly basis. The Team would be writing to 6100 households so the take up may increase in autumn. This was the biggest risk and would be continued to be reviewed.
- Members asked why the take up was so low? Officers responded that the scheme had been communicated in a number of ways, using the website, meetings, social media and by writing to households but the level of response had still been low. The feedback received had been positive saying that the process was simple and easy to use and that the information required was readily available. It needed to be communicated more and better.
- Where residents were awaiting a response, could officers be sure that they were not being severely impacted? Officer reassured Members that the payments continued and where monies had been paid, these were refunded so residents were not affected.
- How was the evaluation done and what matrix was used in the CTS scheme? Officers reported that five scenarios had been modelled with different reductions, the scheme had been agreed at Cabinet to consult on. The scheme was then revised to make more generous and the hardship scheme more lenient.

- Members were informed that there was an appeal process but there had been no appeals in the first three months.
- A total spend of £1.4m in savings would be achieved. Weekly updates were provided to the Cabinet Member.

The Vice Chair requested further information on the exercise to be carried out to write to residents and the results of that exercise and if the take up had increased. Further information on the equality information. An update to be brought to Scrutiny later in the year. **ACTION**

Resolved: That the Committee noted the update provided on the first three months of the new CTSHF as in the report and noted the learnings and proposed actions outlined in the report.

10. Youth Justice Service Inspection Outcome and Improvement Plan Progress

The Executive Director of Children's Services/Chief Executive Slough Children First presented the report to the Committee. The report outlined the findings from the Youth Justice Inspection conducted in September 2024. The report highlighted the progress achieved against the agreed Improvement Plan and presented a summary of the Youth Justice Plan 2025-2026. The HMIP made ten recommendations for improvement. The overall results for each of the individual domains was as follows:

- Organisational Delivery (leadership, staffing, facilities) – Requires Improvement
- The Management of children serving court sentences (Court Disposals) – Inadequate.
- Children serving cautions or community sentences (Out of Court Disposals) – Inadequate

It had been found that everyone was dedicated to provide quality services to children and young people but significant barriers hindered their ability to deliver the necessary interventions to support desistance and protect the public. The efforts of the new Chair of the Youth Justice Service Management Board had been acknowledged. A Youth Justice Plan 2025-26 had been developed collaboratively with children, families, statutory partners and the workforce. The Plan had identified four strategic priorities for the coming year.

It was reported that an elevated plan had already been produced after the inspection that outlined what was wrong and what could be immediately fixed and put right as soon as possible. Significant progress had been made since the inspection and before the final report had been published.

The Cabinet Member reported that the priorities had been approved by Cabinet and Full Council quite recently so it was at the early stages of the elevated plan and it would have been better to report back to Scrutiny later as the process to embed the plan had just begun.

Members made the following points, that Officers responded to:

- The report commented that the case managers had a range of qualifications but specific skills needed to assess and plan for risk of harm were too varied across the team. How was this being addressed? Officers reported that instantly, a skills gap analysis was put in place for the entire service up to that point. There were obvious gaps and these were filled with specific training and specific approaches being considered that could be used by the team.
- The overall rating for the Youth Justice Service was inadequate. Did Officers accept this and what plans being put in place to have a good service? The overall rating was inadequate and was accurate and accepted. Improvements were required at Board level for the Board. The Board was now growing in strength to improve the other areas. Plans were in place to cover all areas of improvement that needed to be made. These were monitored at each Youth Justice Service Board through progress updated, data and update reports from partners. Also monitored on Quadrant 3, enhanced level of oversight from the Youth Justice Board which met monthly. The improvement plan had been merged into other plans to have a plan on a page to give an overall rating of improvement. Also monitored and scrutinized by HMIP and an Improvement Advisor.
- The Youth Justice Service Improvement Plan 2025-26 quoted that "For every child in Slough Youth Justice Service to be Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving", was this achievable? Officers responded that this was the vision for the children's services. It was aspirational but would continue to work towards this. It would never get to the point that every child in Slough would be happy, safe & loved and thriving as children had different needs and children had high level needs. It was about working as a partnership with all partners where the Youth Justice Service would provide a sizeable contribution.
- An Equality Impact Assessment had been approved by Cabinet but the risk assessment was inadequate as was the planning and implementation plan. What plans were in place to improve these? Assurance was given to the Committee that all had been covered in the elevated plan, in the substantive Improvement Plan and the annual Youth Justice Service Plan. Some of the training had been completed for front line staff for better quality for working with children and their families, the victim worker had been put in place and the voluntary cohort offering more work experiences and positive activities. The main priorities to focus on were prevention, equality impact, disproportionality and where young people were over represented.
- One of the biggest failures across the council was governance. The biggest help for this area was internal audit, a very helpful process when it worked. The internal auditor should be present for the meetings to offer an overview and reassurance to the Committee. A six-monthly update would also be helpful. Officers informed the Committee that nine months before the inspection, colleagues from other local authorities had come to scrutinise on what Slough does, this had been successful but they did not look at case work. When the Inspectors

looked at the case work, we had fallen down. Additional scrutiny at a granular level was required and the audits would have been very useful. More was being done now and as much scrutiny as possible was being encouraged. It came to light that staff knew their young people really well but this was not written down anywhere and that's where it fell down. The Cabinet Member commented that this was a Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee and the organization would benefit from a Children's Scrutiny Committee. This was currently being considered as this would be a dedicated benefit for Children's services.

- The report had commented that prior to the inspection in 2024, no inspection had been carried out since 2011 under the previous Inspection Framework. Was this because one was not required or was it missed out for a reason? The duration passed had been challenged with HMIP and had been well received by them. There was now likely to be another inspection within 12 months and the outcome would be a lot better as a lot of work had gone into the improvement, at pace. The inspection cycle normally ran on a three yearly basis unless inadequate. In which case it would be sooner to check that the improvements were being made and the services were improving. The next inspection would be under a new framework and was welcomed as many of the improvements made would show that they were no longer inadequate.
- There had been no emphasis on the police or on school involvement and it looked as though it was only the Council's report, whereas this was a partnership. What were their roles? The disproportionality was also a concern where broad ethnic headings did not show the sub groups of people. It did not show which parts of the community needed the most support and was it police data being relied upon or was it council data used for ethnic breakdown? At what point would we get better Equality data? Where children were absent from school, were they suspended, expelled or just not attending, did this data exist. It was fact that where children were not at school, they were more involved in the criminal justice system. What was going to be done about getting this right to ensure equality monitoring and data and what were the schools doing in the partnership working if there was no provision for them? What were the partners bringing to the table? Officers reported that the inspection was on the whole partnership and not just for SCF. SCF led the partnership but everyone had to work together to achieve. Partners would be invited to future update meetings for a wider view. It was worth the Committee noting that probation was not involved despite all efforts. There was no probation officer which would effect the ultimate goal. The data being used was council data and there was a lot of confidence in that data. Overrepresentation could be seen from certain groups. This had started to improve as looking into other impacts such as exclusions and the effects of this like being drawn into criminality and signs of increased exploitation from others. It was getting better as bringing it together under one system gave a better understanding and better analysis, leading to earlier being able to address issues earlier. There

was still a lot to do but it was a stronger position now than 12 months ago. Partners needed to attend Scrutiny and other Committees to answer questions raised by Members as they were responsible too. Head teachers and the Police needed to attend to give a clearer picture. Both were members of the Youth Justice Service Board and would be invited to future discussions.

- Had the new Education Strategy from the Police Crime Commissioner been taken into account? Officers felt that this would be a further opportunity around prevention. It would allow a reach to a wider cohort of children. The Violence Prevention Partnership along with the Education Partnership would assist in knowing the precursors for children entering the Youth Justice Service.
- The report highlighted that the knife incidents in Slough had decreased in the last quarter. What was being done to achieve this and was it sustainable? Officers pointed out that there had been a reduction but a lot more still needed to be done. The ActNow Programme had assisted where custody meetings could be attended when a child was arrested with a knife related weapon. This had now extended to any type of offensive weapon. The Youth Justice System could offer an intensive intervention over 12 weeks to try and prevent the child from reoffending. A lot of education around knife carrying was given. Over the last two years a lot work had been done. Schools were delivering more bringing the Youth Justice Service into the wider adolescents service, seeing them as victims too and looking at ways of supporting them.
- Was anything being put into place for non-violent crime such as young person on young person, grooming etc. What measures were being put into place to prevent these crimes? Both the victim and offender required support to prevent them from reoffending. Lived experiences were very important as they would be good mentors. Officers commented that non-violent crimes were often poverty driven such as shop lifting. Slough had a lower first time entrance compared with other local authorities and the national figures. Work was being done with offenders and victims. There had been 60 victims since the inspection with a large amount being children. The work with children was being done using the youth workers and practitioners and linking with the case managers, doing complimentary work with each individual. For lived experiences, a lot of work was being done with a number of organisations, working on a number of opportunities. It was important to work across all children's services on prevention and early help before they became bigger problems with bigger risks. Children needed to be seen as children recognizing their complex needs. Work was also being done with public health, accessing services early on for protective factors to support them. A Member pointed out that he had heard from young people that a simple caution for a minor crime had really helped and this was being used much more.
- The report highlighted that staffing was not sufficient. How was this being addressed? Officers reported a positive story that this had been a major concern and it had been very difficult to recruit posts but they had now been filled with good quality staff with high energy.

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- Based on the report, could the Committee have the following:
 - An update after the next inspection. **Action**
 - Site of the Victims Policy. **Action**
 - Site of the improved disproportionality statistics in future reports. **Action**
 - Details on the alternate provision offer for those excluded from school and the meanwhile offer whilst awaiting the alternate provision. **Action**
 - Details on the activities in the community on recreation and desistance. **Action**
 - Details on the specific needs offer. **Action**
 - Invitation to the Director of Education, Headteachers and Police to a future meeting. **Action**

Resolved: That the Committee noted the findings of the inspection by HMIP, commented on the Improvement Plan and noted the Youth Justice Plan 2025-26.

11. Date of Next Meeting - 23 September 2025

Resolved: That the Committee noted that the date of the next meeting was Tuesday 23 September 2025.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.15 pm)