

## **Appendix 4 -Recommendations and Commentary from Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee meeting – 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026**

The below is an extract from the minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026 CISC, highlighting commentary made by the Committee on the Report of the Overview of the Council's homelessness and temporary accommodation service improvement plan, and subsequent recommendations.

The Lead Member introduced the report. The report provided an updated overview of the Council's homelessness and temporary accommodation service improvement plan, following the previous committee meeting in October 2025. It outlined the ongoing challenges, including temporary accommodation pressures, increasing demand, rising costs, and significant system issues. It also summarised key risks and progress against the five-year recovery plan.

The report highlighted longstanding backlogs in homelessness assessments and delays in temporary accommodation case processing because of IT system issues, particularly across Jigsaw, NEC, housing benefits, and finance. This had created inconsistencies and increased manual work, leading to delays in both temporary accommodation and housing benefit processing, as well as difficulties in calculating subsidy loss.

The demand for homelessness services in Slough remained high, averaging 44 new cases per week. Temporary accommodation continued to be extremely costly, contributing to an estimated £15 million budget pressure, largely due to the housing benefit subsidy loss which is the gap between TA rental charges and the housing benefit reclaimable at the frozen 2011 Local Housing Allowance rates. The service continued to rely heavily on interim staff, and the recruitment freeze delayed appointments needed to support early intervention, compliance and move-on activity. Despite these challenges, the report also noted several key achievements. Prevention cases had risen from two per month in early 2025 to nine per month since October 2025. The Homeless Early Intervention work through prevention work delivered £3.8 million in cost avoidance, and additional funding had been secured to expand early intervention and move-on capacity. Rough sleeping numbers had also improved: 32 individuals were recorded in December, 80% of whom had no recourse to public funds. The number of families in B&B accommodation for more than six weeks had reduced from 12 to zero. Total households in B&B had reduced from 148 to 116 and 54 households had been moved to cheaper TA, generating £699K cashable savings between May 2025 and January 2026.

The Chair commented that it was disappointing that the Executive Director was not present at the meeting.

The Head of Temporary Accommodation & Allocation reported that since the report was issued, a further saving had been achieved by negotiating a reduced rate, resulting in total savings of £745,000. The team continued to work diligently to maintain progress. Although the temporary accommodation (TA) figure had remained static at 1,300 cases, it will begin to decrease as more families are moved on. A successful TA Housing Options Day had been held in the Council Chamber on 22 January, and 250 households in temporary accommodation attended. Attendees were offered additional support and advice, and around 70 households registered with the four relocation partners to move to neighbouring areas. This was considered a positive outcome. The event will now be run regularly, with increased participation expected from Public Health, Rents, Social Care, and other relevant services. Overall, it remained business as usual,

with continued focus on maintaining safe and compliant properties while reducing costs and moving households on.

The Interim Head of Homeless Demand & Rough Sleeping provided an update on the intervention model implemented to reduce the number of households entering temporary accommodation and to lower associated costs. As previously highlighted by the Lead Member, the team had achieved strong results. Procurement of private sector accommodation had been robust, with over 50 properties secured since October. Forty-two households were placed into private rented accommodation with minimal incentive payments, resulting in approximately £1.3 million in avoided costs. In addition, a HPG top-up of around £195,000 was used to support earlier intervention. Officers began working directly within community hubs to provide advice at the earliest possible stage, helping to prevent households from reaching crisis point. Two officers had recently commenced this work, and outcomes were being closely monitored to assess the model's effectiveness. Based on the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment, the service is working with the Welfare Services Team (Revenues and Benefits) to procure a software solution to help identify and reach the most vulnerable households who may be at risk of homelessness. This will support earlier intervention and enable the Council to demonstrate and monitor the equality impact of its homelessness prevention work. While challenges remained due to continued high demand, the early intervention model represented a proactive approach to managing pressures and improving outcomes.

The Director of Digital, Data and Technology provided an update on the lack of integration between the Jigsaw homelessness system and the NEC housing management system. As noted, Jigsaw did not currently offer the interfaces required to enable integration. There had been engagement with MRI, the system's supplier, over several months, and at a meeting held approximately two hours before this committee meeting. MRI had confirmed a change in their position. They had reported that several other councils, including major London boroughs, had raised the same issue, and they had therefore amended their product to deliver an appropriate interface by the end of June. This would allow the Council to progress the necessary integration. The discussions would continue with MRI to explore options for accelerating delivery, including the possibility of acting as an early adopter and supporting their development process. This represented a significant shift from their initial stance, and it was welcomed. It was also noted that the Committee's scrutiny of the issue had likely contributed to achieving this progress.

The Chair asked a question on behalf of a resident. The resident had been querying a bill of £28K for over six months and had received no communication. How could a resident get into a situation of have such a large bill and even though she was struggling to pay, no one from the Council was in communication with her. The Head of Temporary Accommodation & Allocation was aware of the case as she had attended the open day. The appropriate contact had been made with officers, and this would be followed up as a matter of urgency and assistance would be given to her to resolve the issue.

Members raised the following points:

- The committee asked what assurance could be given that the subsidy loss would align with the revised budget period, and that no further unexpected pressures, such as those experienced previously would arise. In response, reference was made to Section 3.5.2 of the report. The narrative in that section acknowledged that this figure did not accurately reflect what the subsidy calculation should have been when compared with the temporary

accommodation spend of £31.2 million. It confirmed that the correct figure should have been closer to £22.36 million. This discrepancy arose due to an incorrect starting-point figure for the year and a later recalculation, resulting in a £15 million budget pressure. Finance colleagues advised that the subsidy loss for 2026–27 would be correctly calculated as 66% of the projected temporary accommodation expenditure. Based on the known number of households in temporary accommodation and the average associated costs, the subsidy loss was expected to be approximately £22 million and, crucially, would be a known and accurate figure. As further explained, although the council could negotiate with providers to reduce costs, rental levels were set by the market, and the subsidy that can be claimed back was fixed at the 2011 Local Housing Allowance levels, which could not be altered locally. The reassurance offered was therefore that finance and benefits teams would calculate subsidy loss correctly going forward, recognising that this had not occurred at the end of 2024–25 when moving into 2025–26.

- The committee also asked what proportion of temporary accommodation placements could have been prevented through earlier intervention, and how effective homelessness prevention services were. Approximately 10% of households presenting to the service had previously been accepted under the main housing duty. In recent months, prevention performance had improved, with around 20% of cases prevented and a further 15% relieved, amounting to a combined 35% positive intervention rate.
- Members additionally queried the number of out-of-borough placements, including hotels and B&Bs. Officers reported that at the time, there were 200 out-of-borough placements, recently reduced to 187. A detailed breakdown of these placements was to be provided separately. ACTION All temporary accommodation placements outside Slough fell within this total, and officers confirmed that all considerations were applied such as, medical, school and employment as part of the out of borough placement.
- Under the risk-management implications, several items were rated red. An update had been provided as of January 2025, but no more recent update was available. Did these items remain red and had any amber items had progressed or changed status? It was explained that the January update aligned with the report-submission deadline, and no ratings had changed since the report was finalised on 10 February. The only item expected to change was the one relating to systems and data, pending further clarification that the Committee had received regarding MRI's offer. At the time of submission, updates were being completed manually, and further work was planned to confirm next steps for the next reporting cycle. Recruitment, skills, and retention risks remained red due to reliance on interim posts and the inability to move to permanent contracts. Subsidy loss also remained red, as the council was unable to change the 90% 2011 LHA rate and could only mitigate the impact through negotiation. None of the green-rated risks were reducing further, though it was hoped that continued work would enable more risks to move to green in the next reporting period. The concerns raised about the IT systems, noting that issues dated back to the May 2023 phase-two NEC Housing procurement, funded by the Housing Revenue

Account. The system had not operated as intended and had required extensive workarounds over a prolonged period, with poor integration across housing systems. As a result, significant staff time had been spent compensating for inefficiencies, and despite some recent improvements, the system remained unresolved. Members asked if this had effectively become a financial drain.

- The Council's existing IT systems were not functioning as intended, resulting in staff relying on workarounds and undertaking manual data entry, often using spreadsheets to obtain accurate information and ensure processes operated correctly. Members requested that costings be provided to show both the historical expenditure on these systems and the financial impact of their ongoing inefficiencies, including the additional staffing costs required to compensate for system failures. As part of the scrutiny role, one of the duty's was to ensure value for money, it was essential to understand how much the Council had been paying IT suppliers whose systems were not performing adequately. It was also suggested that this issue should be addressed within the report to Cabinet, as Cabinet Members would, or should, be interested in the true costs associated with IT system failures. Officers responded that there appeared to be two distinct issues raised. The first related specifically to the interface between the two systems, which had caused the particular operational impact under discussion. The second, as correctly noted, concerned the longstanding challenges associated with the implementation of the NEC housing system. Although its history pre-dated any officer involvement, it had become increasingly clear in recent months that staff were relying on workarounds and expressing concerns about the system's performance. A review of the system's implementation had since been completed and produced several recommendations. As a result, recovery actions were being developed, and it would likely be appropriate to bring a further update to the committee in due course. There was also interest in exploring whether the Council had any grounds for financial redress from suppliers, including through contractual clauses, should any failures be attributable to them. It was noted that the root causes of the issues could lie in multiple areas. With many software solutions, problems often stemmed less from the product itself and more from the way it was implemented. The review's recommendations primarily focused on implementation practices. Nonetheless, it remained important to apply lessons learned to future system procurements, particularly in the development of business cases. It was also recognised that the scale of implementation effort had not been fully anticipated when the original pre-COVID business case was produced. It was further acknowledged that the NEC system had not been implemented correctly at the outset, which likely meant compensation would be difficult to pursue, as the Council had purchased and configured the software itself. It was therefore suggested that the Committee may wish to examine the Council's wider IT systems, given that IT capability had long been identified as a major organisational risk requiring investment. Persistent reports from multiple departments indicated slow progress, and greater momentum was needed to achieve the improvements required.

- Members thanked Officers for returning with a comprehensive report. The report addressed the questions raised directly and demonstrated clear, positive progress. The two points had been previously raised. The first concerned the budget position, particularly the subsidy loss and its contribution to the current years overspend. Members had noted that the level of subsidy loss, approximately 56–57%, was known from 2024–2025, and asked why this had not been incorporated into previous budget forecasts. The cumulative impact of this omission appeared to have contributed to the situation this year. The second point related to data systems. The report referenced a request for funding, but did not provide detail on the amount required, its purpose, or whether it formed part of the forthcoming municipal year’s budget. It was explained that a backlog of housing-related system improvement requirements had been developed jointly by the housing, transformation, and related teams, with associated cost estimates incorporated into the draft budget. These costs were allocated primarily across the HRA and the transformation programme, which included work on implementing housing regulator recommendations and the system integration requirements discussed earlier. It was confirmed that the funding was designed to support implementation, not just investigation, and represented a significant seven-figure sum.
- Regarding equality and fairness, the Committee had asked whether any communities or household types had been disproportionately affected, how equality impact assessments were applied to temporary accommodation (TA) policy and placement decisions, and how language, cultural needs, and accessibility were addressed. Officers confirmed that an equality impact assessment was applied to policies and that the Council’s Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act were consistently applied. When offers of permanent accommodation were made, relevant protected characteristics, including disabilities and any associated vulnerabilities were checked to ensure that each offer was appropriate and robust. The low refusal rate for lettings and allocations (below one percent) indicated that offers had been suitable and aligned with equality considerations. In relation to governance and performance accountability, Officers outlined the key performance indicators (KPIs) for temporary accommodation. These included ensuring that TA requests had been thoroughly assessed, providing safe and compliant accommodation, and issuing timely and appropriate offers through the allocations process so that vacant properties were not left unoccupied. Additional KPIs focused on securing best value for the Council, including cost-effective procurement of properties and ongoing attention to financial efficiency. Regarding risks, Officers identified the continued rise in TA placements and the associated cost pressures, as the most significant risk if current trends persisted. Mitigation measures included maximising the use of empty homes, exploring additional supply and leasing options, and strengthening early intervention and prevention work at the front door to reduce the number of households entering TA.
- Could information on the number of children living in temporary accommodation, with a breakdown by family and children be shared, including clarity on how far these children were travelling to school, noting concerns

raised in other areas and seeking confirmation of the position locally. ACTION It would be helpful for future reports to include the performance indicators. ACTION Could an update on long-term leases, particularly where multiple units were being procured or leased within the same location, as this appeared to involve block arrangements, also be shared. ACTION Could future reports include a heat map showing concentrations of households in temporary accommodation. ACTION It had been highlighted that many residents in the town centre lived with uncertainty about the duration of their placement, which affected their ability to integrate into the community. This was especially true for those placed from outside the borough for prolonged periods. It had been suggested that a council-wide approach was needed to support community integration and improve democratic engagement, given that frequent moves and insecure housing reduced residents' sense of stability and connection. Officers confirmed that the number of children in temporary accommodation could be provided, along with details of school travel distances, which were generally within an hour even when placements were slightly further out. They also confirmed that KPIs could be incorporated in future reporting and that updates on lease arrangements could be shared where commercially appropriate. Heat maps showing concentrations of temporary accommodation placements could also be shared.

- It was noted that effective engagement with the council required the ability to track whether responses were being issued within appropriate timescales. Two developments were relevant to this. The first was the resident-portal capability within the housing management system, which had not yet been activated or implemented. This functionality formed part of a previous programme that had not been delivered. Funding for its implementation had been included within the budget proposals, subject to approval, and was intended to improve residents' digital access to the system and enable better tracking of their enquiries. More broadly, as discussed at the previous Scrutiny Committee, only a limited range of customer enquiries submitted through electronic forms were being processed through an electronic workflow system with trackable service levels. Addressing this gap formed part of the wider transformation and automation programme. A longstanding barrier to progress had been the absence of sustained investment in the underlying system capabilities required for transformation. The inclusion of dedicated investment within the forthcoming council budget was therefore considered a positive and important development, and the Committee's continued attention to this issue was welcomed.

Table 1 below sets out the recommendations agreed by the Committee, including those in the report and 2 additional recommendations.

The columns indicate:

- i. The recommendations to Cabinet (or alternative body) agreed by CISC at its most recent meeting, on 04/02/2026;
- ii. A link to the relevant source document or minutes for each recommendation.
- iii. The Cabinet’s recommended response;
- iv. The Relevant Cabinet Member and Director.

i.Recommendation	ii.Source document	iii.Cabinet recommended response	iv.The relevant Cabinet member and Director
That the draft Budget report going to Cabinet and Council provided more detailed information on the breakdown of the IT budget.	Minutes		Cllr Puja Bedi  Ian O’Donnell