



Slough Children's First Business Plan 2023-26

This is Internal Version

External version to include images

Owner:

Board Chair

Our three year vision and aspiration with a detailed one year business plan for 2023-24 (*will be formatted*)

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Introduction from the Board Chair and Chief Executive

Dear Colleague,

Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving.

Slough's Children's Services delivered by Slough Children First (SCF) are rated by Ofsted as 'Requires Improvement' and particularly as the area of Leadership and Management is assessed as inadequate this is simply not good enough for our children. We need to do more to meet children's needs at the earliest possible opportunity, safeguard them from the risk of significant harm, ensure they live in stable and loving homes and move into adulthood with confidence and the skills and knowledge they need to live successful and fulfilling lives. We must do this despite the national challenges facing us in our post-covid world and Slough Borough Council's (SBC) exceptional financial circumstances.

However, exciting times are ahead as there are now unprecedented opportunities to work across SBC and SCF on a shared agenda for improving children's lives and as the Slough Children First (SCF) Chair and Chief Executive, we see everyone's clear and resolute determination to enable all Slough's children to achieve their full potential. In Slough we have a rising childhood obesity issue in an already complex system where healthy life expectancy is ten years younger than neighboring Boroughs. These factors require a whole council, all partnership and community approach sharing an ambition for Slough's children and delivering a continuum of support particularly at an Early Help level but also through to more intense statutory services. Our business plan aligns with the Council plan for the Borough and our success will be clearly evidenced in clear key performance indicators.

Whilst acknowledging the challenges, this Business and Improvement Plan sets out the improvement journey and identifies solutions required to get to 'Good'. Our confidence in planning and delivering improvements for children is strengthened by the quality of our workforce. We value every one of them highly and want them all to appreciate their individual role in our improvement agenda. This confidence is increased by having a permanent leadership team and although we value our agency workers, an increasingly permanent workforce with a significantly decreasing staff turnover.

We recognize that almost all children and their families will need some help at some point in their lives, and given the national challenges faced by families, we want our families to know that we are here to help. In addition, Slough has a significant transient population with vulnerable families migrating into Slough from elsewhere in the country and from other parts of the world where they may have faced extreme danger and are now living with significant trauma. We do this through our partnership arrangements and relationships with other organisations, such as the Council, Schools including Early Years Providers, the Health Integrated Care Board, Health providers, the police, the Community and Voluntary Sector and faith communities.

The intention of our business plan is not to capture everything we do as a company or a detailed financial plan. It is a high-level strategic document which provides a clear framework for decision-making and how we prioritise and allocate our resources. We acknowledge the importance of living within our means and ensuring that we evidence best value for money. This will mean doing more for less.

This is a huge challenge, but this Business and Improvement Plan evidences our ambition and our commitment to being meeting it head on.

Signatures / NAMES

Our Overarching Three Year Vision

There have been some important changes since Slough Children First (SCF) was formed in April 2021. Most notably, from May 2023 the Board has a new Chairperson and a new Non-Executive Director representing the Council’s interests in the work of the Company. There is also a new and permanent Leadership team as the Chief Executive and Director of Operations joined the Company in January and February 2023 respectively and our Heads of Services are all permanently in post. Crucially in January 2023 Ofsted conducted our ILACS inspection (Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services) the outcome of which is that social care services remain rated as ‘Requires Improvement’, but Leadership and Management is now ‘Inadequate’. The recommendations from this inspection are set out in Appendix 2.

Ofsted notes that since the previous inspection in 2019 the overall quality of practice remains unchanged and several of the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection have not been successfully tackled.

Given the above it seemed appropriate for SCF to move into a new phase, and this led to the decision to redefine the way in which we work, and in consultation with our workforce to change SCF’s Vision so it becomes **our** new Vision.

In developing our vision and thinking about our values we engaged the whole workforce Here is what they said a new Vision should represent.



Here is what our staff told us about the values that are important to them in their work with children and young people.



Vision

Our vision is that children in Slough are **Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving.**

The Company as an entity has delivered social care services for Slough Borough Council (SBC) since 2016/17 but its name and ownership changed in 2021 when it became Slough Children First (SCF) and wholly owned by SBC. SCF works closely with SBC directorates, in particular the education service, sharing one ED of Children’s Services, who is the Chief Executive of SCF, and a member of SBC’s Corporate Leadership Team.

The aim is for the services delivered by SCF to move back into the Council during the lifetime of this plan. To support this ambition, we must continue to strengthen the relationship between the Council and Slough Children First, particularly regarding the complex financial environment. Both the Council and SCF are in intervention and formally scrutinised by Commissioners from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Department of Education (DfE) respectively. This scrutiny will ultimately determine when this can happen.

Comment / Quote from children/young people

Our Ambition for Children and Young People.

We know that everyone needs some help sometimes...

By 2026

- **We will** have developed and embedded new ways of working with, and for, Slough's communities, including our faith communities facilitating and providing support and help when it is needed and in a way which prevents need and risk from increasing.
- **We will** make services easy to access and at the right level to meet need. This means the right support, for the right child, in the right place and at the right time.
- **We will** support children and families to stay together when it is safe to do so, providing 'early help' in partnership with other agencies working with children such as schools and health.
- **We will** empower families to make their own decisions using ways of working such as Family Group Conferences.
- **We will** make informed decisions to avoid 'drift and delay' when children are at risk of significant harm planning for them to live in their 'forever homes' as soon as possible.
- **We will** work closely with the whole family to enable them to develop the skills and confidence to manage situations at a much earlier stage.
- **We will** develop and embed better ways of listening, enabling and working alongside children and young people. We need to support them, so they feel confident in telling us about their day-to-day realities but also to give them the opportunity to shape the services they receive.
- **We will** intervene in families' lives in a respectful and transparent manner, focusing on reducing risk so they can be supported without statutory intervention at an early help level.
- **We will** always recognise the importance of family, community, learning and enjoyment as central to a child's safety and wellbeing. We can only do that by working together.

These ambitions cannot be achieved without our fantastic workforce. **The leadership team will** listen to and hear what our staff are saying to us, and feedback on how this has influenced service development and therefore outcomes for children.

Slough Children First and Slough Borough Council, a Borough that prioritises its Children and Young People

Children and young people are a priority for Slough Borough Council. The Corporate Plan focuses on "Closing the healthy life expectancy gap by focusing on children". This underpins our work together to deliver our top priorities for children by:

- Providing quality services for vulnerable children and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people
- Tackling high rates of child obesity

- Increasing children and young people's participation in decisions that affect them and in shaping the future of Slough.

SCF is a company wholly owned by SBC and co-located with Council services in Observatory House, 25 Windsor Road, Slough SE1 2EL. As a separate company we set our objectives out within our Articles of Association. These are to provide social care, youth justice and other related services and support to children, young people, and their families for the advancement of the community, and in particular:

- (a) to keep children and young people safe from harm;
- (b) to provide high quality and coordinated services in connection with children, young people, and their families, including in relation to children's safeguarding, children in care and at the edge of care, children leaving care and adoption and fostering services;
- (c) to innovate and to secure improvements in the quality and effectiveness of the services provided to children, young people, and their families in respect of social care, family support and youth offending services and demonstrate value for money in doing so;
- (d) to advance and promote social care, family support and youth offending services available to children, young people, and their families;
- (e) to work collaboratively with other agencies to identify the individual social care needs of children and young people and to establish suitable arrangements to prepare for and meet such needs;
- (f) to make a positive and effective contribution to multi-agency early intervention support for children, young people, and their families to avoid the need for more intensive social care support;
- (g) to ensure that effective care planning and appropriate intervention is in place which protects children from harm, reduces the need for children to be in care unless absolutely necessary, and supports those in care;
- (h) to establish and operate arrangements based on best practice and innovation and to work in partnership with all agencies involved with children, young people, and their families to encourage and support children and young people to achieve positive outcomes; and
- (i) to establish, promote and encourage the development of collaborative working arrangements between individuals and organisations in the field of information, advice, guidance, and support to deliver high standards of social care, family support and youth offending services to children and young people.

The Chief Executive of SCF is the Executive Director of Children's Services (DCS) and therefore has professional responsibility for children's services in Slough, an integrated brief for both education and social care.¹ Children and their families do not care about artificial boundaries, and we must grow a 'one service approach' for Slough's children. Therefore, we have a shared Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and work closely to promote seamless services.

¹ Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and for the Lead Member for Children's Services. DFE 2013

SBC holds SCF accountable for its performance through quarterly contractual monitoring meetings. Our Ofsted inspection in January 2023 identified that improvements to be made in this relationship and we are committed to working together in the best interests of children and their families.

Our Current Challenges

SBC faces extraordinary financial challenges which are reflected in the Section 114 Notice and continued oversight and scrutiny by Commissioners appointed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). Inevitably these financial challenges affect the work of Slough Children First but despite these constraints SCF must also demonstrate that it provides services effectively and efficiently therefore evidencing best value for money. SCF is held to account by the Department of Education (DFE) appointed Commissioner who also scrutinises services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

There is a 'national cost of living crisis' and Slough's children and families are no exception to experiencing significant financial hardship and the consequential increased emotional burdens.

Children face the continued implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on their education and their mental and emotional wellbeing.

There are significant challenges for young people who have become more disengaged from services and are therefore more vulnerable to adults who seek to exploit them both criminally and sexually. We must focus on getting alongside our children and young people and work with our partner agencies to find ways to disrupt the adults who exploit them.

We are experiencing an increase in referrals relating to young people who are seeking refuge from their country of origin through the asylum system, and we must support them to recover from the trauma that they will have experienced. This includes working with schools and colleges to ensure asylum seeking young people's educational needs are met whilst also ensuring that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place where there is a dispute about their age.

The introduction to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care states that 'this is a once in a generation opportunity to reset children's social care. What we need is a system that provides intensive help to families in crisis, acts decisively in response to abuse, unlocks the potential of wider family networks to raise children, puts lifelong loving relationships at the heart of the care system and lays the foundations for a good life for those who have been in care. What we have currently is a system increasingly skewed to crisis intervention, with outcomes for children that continue to be unacceptably poor and costs that continue to rise. For these reasons, a radical reset is now unavoidable² However, implementing these changes may be resource intensive.

However, we believe that our newly appointed Executive Team, alongside the Company Board and the Council, are entering a year of opportunity in which relationships have improved and will mature over that time. This will facilitate a 'whole systems' approach towards providing services for Slough's citizens which has not been in place in recent years.

Our One-Year Plan

Our Ofsted inspection in January 2023 identified several areas in which we need to make significant and sustained improvement, not least in the relationship between SCF and the company. Our response to that inspection was to put in place an **Immediate 12-week Plan** to show intent and make progress at pace. (Appendix 6) Subsequently we have built upon this

² Independent Review of Children's Social Care

plan and produced a **Continuous Improvement Plan** (Appendix 7) which will support and monitor our journey to improve services for children and families.

We know that services provided by SCF will be re-inspected in the coming year to review the progress made since the ILACS Inspection in January 2023. It is our ambition to evidence, at that time, that services are much improved and being delivered to Ofsted's definition of a 'Good' standard.

We cannot achieve our ambitions without our fantastic workforce. We need to listen to and hear what our staff are saying to us, and feedback on how this has influenced our services. We have appointed our first dedicated Principal Social Worker.

Our Priorities

- **Priority 1**

Children and their families should be able to easily access Early Help and know where to go and who to speak to when they need it.

Our early help offer has been developed in collaboration with partners, with a key focus on increasing the role of the Lead Professional across partners agencies to reach more children through the **right conversation** at the **right** time leading to the **right** service.

- **Priority 2**

Education and learning are vital to ensure that our children have the best start in life and are empowered to go on to rich and fulfilling lives through work.

SBC is the strategic lead for education in the local area with a duty 'to promote high standards and fulfilment of potential in schools so that all children and young people benefit from at least a good education.' (Education Act 1996). Education is the main route to success for young people as adults, as well as teaching them the skills they need to navigate the route they want to choose through life and to make a positive contribution to society.

This is of particular importance for children at risk of disadvantage, such as children missing education and where SCF has specific responsibilities such as looked after children and children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

- **Priority 3**

Children in our care will have a stable place to live and our care experienced young people can access their own affordable homes.

We believe that all our children have a right to grow up in a family home, and that for most children this is at home with their family. We recognise that sometimes families struggle and need some extra help at times of great difficulty to prevent families from entering crisis and potentially resulting in children coming into care.

We therefore will create an edge of care approach to provide direct services to support families to prevent crisis and during any difficult periods. In-so-doing we seek to prevent admissions to care because of family breakdown; or when a care admission is needed, that we support children to return home as soon as possible with the right help.

- **Priority 4**

Children and their families will have effective support and care from a stable workforce. This will mean that children do not experience lots of changes of worker and they can develop a trusting relationship with someone who will help them and their family.

We will continue to establish a culture in which staff feel connected to the organization and leadership, through our shared vision and visibility of leaders. We will move towards a workforce of permanent employees, particularly in the field of qualified social workers, although we are grateful for our agency staff members and their commitment to Slough. We will support the retention of permanent staff members through a Career Progression Pathway and wellbeing offer.

- **Priority 5**

We will work with our children and young people to enable them to participate and shape services with us.

We will seek to involve children and young people at all stages of our work i.e., co-production and consultation at strategic level, monitoring and reviewing services when they are in place, and ensuring individual voices are evidence in all decision-making. Nothing about me without me.

- **Priority 6**

We will work in partnership with colleagues across the Council and all services that work with children, young people and their families. We believe that it is only together that we can make a difference. We value our relationship with Community and Voluntary Sector partners who know their communities well.

Children, young people and families have access to a large and diverse range of community, voluntary and faith organisations who provide significant support to Slough residents. We will find opportunities to join up and support the families we are helping to access these services so that when we are no longer needed, this support will continue. This will enable the right support to be available as and when needed in a cohesive and planned way, avoiding multiple areas of duplication and changes in workers for children and families.

Our Enablers

We are structuring the development of our services using the Local Government Association's seven enablers for children's services improvement³.

Enabler 1 – Strategic approach

- Implement our vision and strategic plan ensuring that strategies take account of Slough's particular context.
- Respond openly and honestly to any external feedback including inspections.
- Evidence that we know ourselves the improvements we need to make.

³ Action Research into Improvement in Local Children's Services, LGA Spring 2016

Enabler 2 – Leadership and governance

- Streamline our governance to ensure effective and professional governance.
- Ensure there is stable leadership in place at Board and Executive levels.
- Build a culture where everyone understands the impact of their decisions on outcomes for children and financial outcomes.
- Support the development of a 'High Support and High Challenge' culture.

Enabler 3 – Engaging and supporting the workforce

- Stabilise the workforce across Children's Services by recruiting, developing and retaining highly skilled permanent staff. This includes 'growing our own'.
- Enhance the skills, knowledge and experience of the whole Children's workforce to better meet children's and young person's needs.
- Put in place a wellbeing offer which is highly visible to our existing workforce and for those considering joining Slough.

Enabler 4 – Engaging partners

- Promote good relationships at operational and strategic level and support the effectiveness of the safeguarding partnership.
- Be outward facing, inviting and sustaining partnership involvement.

Enabler 5 – Building the supporting apparatus.

- Develop a framework to track progress, audit quality and monitor improvements in practice.
- Aligning practice with our practice model to support good quality and consistent services delivered to children and young people.

Enabler 6 – Fostering innovation

- Create a learning culture,
- Try out new ideas and initiatives to improve practice, evaluate them rigorously.

Enabler 7 – Judicious use of resources

- Align business and financial strategic planning.
- Ensure we achieve the best value for money.
- Producing sound business cases for transformation including invest to save opportunities.

Comment(s) from staff

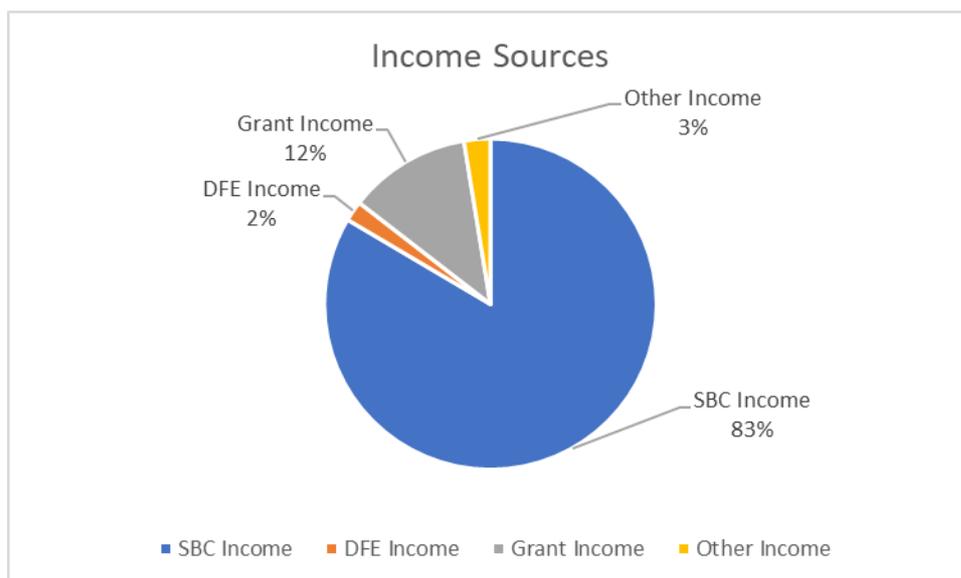
Our Financial Plan

Our financial model reflects the activities required to achieve these priorities for our children and our aim is to deliver better outcomes for children by **doing differently for less** with a clear focus on improving practice.

The financial modelling shows a £4.4m funding requirement to break even in 2023/24, this includes £2.03m of inflation added to Slough Borough Council's (SBC) Income and a further agreed contribution to the Core Contract of £4.6m to £36.065m as agreed at Cabinet in February 2023.

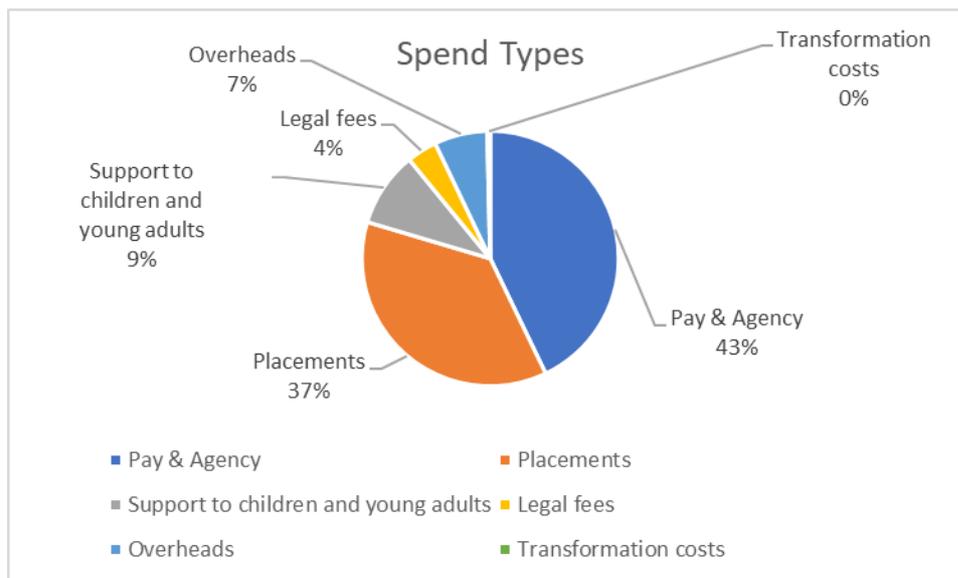
Savings of over £1 million from placement volumes and rates, staffing and legal fees are included in the plan.

Where our financial resources come from is shown in the pie chart below with income from SBC making up 83% (£36.17m) of all our funding.



The types of expenditure we have can be seen in the pie chart below, with the biggest categories of spending being salaries (43%) and placement costs (37%).

Of the total overheads' costs, 71% relate to recharges going back to SBC.



We have an increase in the complexity of needs, growth in children presenting to Slough seeking refuge from unsafe situations in their own countries, a cost-of-living crisis and rising prices. Our financial model reflects this and incorporates key activity needed in 2023/24 to realise benefits, as well as further phases of our plan, such as Family Group Conferencing and Family Hubs in later years.

Our modelling reflects **Priority 1** in Early Help through targeting a **5% reduction** in the number of families stepping up into statutory social care. This is by short- and medium-term funding for additional Targeted Early Help teams. In addition to these teams, the continuing development of partnership working (**Priority 6**) will mean that half of the children in need plans that close will be stepped down to Early Help teams and half to community partners.

Children who are being considered for care but have not entered it (defined as 'Edge of Care') will be supported with a specific Edge of Care team to support them to remain in their family home. This will **avoid entering care** alongside an **increase in the reunification** of children coming home from care (where appropriate).

With this support and the focus on **Priority 3** our **placement costs will start to fall**, particularly in the high-cost residential placements for those children with complex needs around Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Edge of care teams will also impact legal fees as they will also reduce as the volume of proceedings reduce.

Our in-house fostering service will continue to develop their support model and make Slough a great place to be a foster carer. Increasing their numbers and developing their specialist skills will help **avoid placing** with external fostering agencies also removing the margins we are charged by third parties - all driving greater **value for money**. We will target **six new carers** by the end of year 1 with further recruitment planned in future years.

Our spending on placements for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and Care Leavers is also expected to benefit from some commissioning initiatives aimed at targeting the rates paid and **driving better value for money**. This will be done through identifying multiple occupancy accommodation available for Semi-Independent and Independent living.

A stable workforce where Slough is an employer of choice is **Priority 4** for the company. Through successful international recruitment and our on-going ASYE programme, the ratio of permanent to agency social work staff is modelled at 77%: 20% with the remaining 3% factored for vacancies. This is based on our current data and in future years we expect to **improve**

this by 1 percentage point each year. The Company is working with Frontline to further grow our own sustainable and stable workforce. This has enabled the safe release of two managed agency teams earlier than we had originally thought. Those savings have allowed additional capacity to focus on improving practice and keeping caseloads at a manageable level.

Our Cashflow

This shows the movement of money in and out of our company and with the inclusion of the £2.03m + £4.60m increase in income from SBC in 2023/24 the cash balances remain positive throughout 2023/24. We assume there will be the settlement in Quarter 1 of £2.30m from outstanding invoices and in Quarter 2 that there will be two further in year requests for funding. One relates to 2021/22 of £0.72m assumed to be approved in June and paid in July, and the other request is for losses incurred in 2023/24 of £2.76m from rising demands, this assumes only 60% of losses approved through the process.

As the Company continues to operate with projected losses into 2024/25 the cash balances become negative in Quarter 2 2024/25.

	Mar-23	2023/24				2024/25			
		Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
Cashflow summary	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's
Cash inflow from income	3,877	14,983	17,090	12,582	12,843	12,879	12,730	12,808	12,658
Cash outflow from expenditure	(6,387)	(16,065)	(14,840)	(14,145)	(14,145)	(13,494)	(13,494)	(13,494)	(13,494)
Net cash movement in month	(2,510)	(1,082)	2,251	(1,563)	(1,302)	(615)	(764)	(686)	(836)
Opening cash at bank	5,069	2,559	1,477	3,728	2,165	864	248	(516)	(1,202)
Closing cash at bank / (overdrawn)	2,559	1,477	3,728	2,165	864	248	(516)	(1,202)	(2,038)

Our Balance Sheet

SCF's balance sheet shows the projected losses for 2022/23. It assumes the losses of £0.72m from 2021/22 will be covered by the in-year request (mentioned above) and paid in July 2023 and the recovery of 60% of 2023/24 losses.

The table below shows the projected movement on the projected balance sheet to March 2024, showing cash balances as positive with a reducing reserves position.

Balance Sheet	as at 31 Mar 2023	as at 31 Mar 2024
	£000's	£000's
Current Assets		
Debtors	6,860	4,316
Cash at bank and in hand / (overdrawn)	2,216	1,363
Total current assets	9,076	5,679
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	(9,388)	(7,203)
Total current liabilities	(9,388)	(7,203)
Net current assets / (Liabilities)	(312)	(1,524)
Long Term Creditors - Receipts in Advance	(5,000)	(5,000)
Total long term liabilities	(5,000)	(5,000)
Net Assets / (Liabilities)	(5,312)	(6,524)
Reserves		
Income and Expenditure Account	(5,312)	(6,524)
Reserves	(5,312)	(6,524)



Transformation Overview

Outcome: Supporting the workforce to improve and flourish



Years 2 and 3 Bridging the Gap. 2023/24 and 2024/25

SCF

The current 23/24 position is **£4.85m** over budget v the original forecast of **£4.9m**. The changes include

- Staffing reductions of **£476k** through the early release of the Innovate teams, the Business Support Review, improvements in the permanent /agency staff ratio, offset by additional costs from the peripatetic practice team, the Quality Assurance manager post and the Principal Social Worker post. The latter is a mandatory post but has not been in place or funded by SCF.
- **£123k** in placements reductions through 3 additional in-house foster placements
- However, the contextual safeguarding team and transformational posts Manager and Commissioner which had been removed were put back in by previous senior officers at circa **£450k**.

This means that SCF needs to avoid costs of **£4.85 million** over 2023/24 and as requested in the finance paper presented to CLT in April 2023, budget savings of **£2,226 million** in 2024/2025 - a total of **£7.076 million**. The rationale for the required amount to be saved in 2024/25 is that SCF draws on 38% of the overall council budget it is required to save 38% of the budget gap. However, it is important to note that a consultation process is in place to 'tupe' SCF's back-office staff into the Council. If this takes place the percentage of budget savings allocated to SCF should be reduced as there will be even less scope for savings to be made and the overall percentage of the overall budget will be less.

The reader should also note the Mutual Ventures review of the SCF Business Plan (December 22) in which they reported the following:

- **There is a significant risk that without additional well-targeted funding and well-thought-out improvement plans the service may slip back into 'inadequate.'**
- **Our (Mutual Ventures) financial analysis concludes that the SCF business plan underestimates the investment required over the period of the plan and accordingly under the proposed plan SCF would not be sustainable at current levels of funding.**
- **Our assessment of SCF's existing delivery capacity and capability found that SCF will need to strengthen its governance arrangements, business plan monitoring processes and benefits management discipline or further risk the delivery of proposed savings.**

To refer to the CLT paper which notes alternative approaches to identifying savings.

- **Sweating assets.** SCF operates outside of Observatory House. Additional bases are the contact centre for looked after children to have contact with their birth families and the short-breaks home for children with disabilities. Both are fully utilized however the buildings are SCF owned and they are required to fulfil statutory requirements.
- **Transformation.** The Company is on a journey of improvement and is planning to consider projects to better deliver services. These include an edge of care provision, based on the No Wrong Door Model, and collaboration with other authorities on placement provision. However, these are unlikely to deliver savings of any significance until 2025/26.
- **Benchmarking.** Noted below where relevant.
- **Targeting existing areas of high-cost pressure areas.** The main areas of spend are staffing and placements for looked after children and feature in the proposed savings.

- **Governance and oversight of external looked after placements** – a dedicated panel overseen by a senior manager will be in place to provide ongoing oversight and review of all children’s placements which are outside of our own resources.
- **Income and debt management:** SCF does not generate income or manage debt.
- **Partnership working and or external funding.**
 - Health contributions to placement costs need further exploration and we will work with an ‘expert’ to review and secure joint funding arrangements where possible.
 - A bid is being submitted for £350k of improvement money from the DfE to be spend by March 2024. It seems that in previous year(s) improvement money was used for day-to-day costs and the DfE have made it very clear that this must not happen again if our bid is successful. However, it may be able to offset money for improvement posts where the original plan was for the costs to come out of the staffing budget.

2023/24

£K	Comment	Risk
77	Agency staff. Reduce the number of agency social workers from 17 to 14 (5%) by recruiting permanent staff. Overall gain of 3 permanent social workers	
190	Legal costs. Legal services are provided by a Joint Legal Partnership hosted by Reading. There is concern that Slough’s current costs are heavily weighted towards commissioning Barristers and independent social workers. Discussions are taking place with legal services to safely decrease costs. (Current costs £2million per year. The highest across the legal partnership). This has been discussed with the lead lawyer and is seen to be an achievable savings target with a particular focus on practice improvement Reduction of legal fees requires a shift in culture and practice to reduce reliance on advice. However, improved practice in decision making is intended to reduce the overall number of children subject to proceedings	
100	Services for care experienced young people. Practice improvement This relies on partnership with colleagues in Housing being able to provide housing options. Alternatively we would need to act as a guarantor or up-front rental costs to private let market. There may be some potential reputational risk if any property is damaged. Risk that young people accessing private let may lose the ability to move into Housing Association , so we would need to provide a safety net to enable young people to present as homeless should their circumstances need this. (Suggest 2 year period).	
30	Section 17. To provide specific support to prevent children from needing to come into care, or to support children to return home Any reduction of this budget may inadvertently increase placement costs	

500 - 667	Reduction of 3 children/young people in external residential care - stretch target of 4 children Residential provision is in place for 28 children, 1 being for a child who is serving a custodial sentence. Permanency Management Group and external placement panel would provide detailed oversight of any plans to support those children to move home or into foster care placements.	
81 - 136	Return 3 children home from independent foster care. Improved practice and management oversight. Stretch target of 5 children Improved practice and oversight of new panel process will drive improvement and planning	
20K	Improvement posts. Current plans are to fund from SCF budget but if the DfE bid is successful they will be funded from grant monies Conversion of commissioning lead role to permanent by month 6.	
Total 998 - 1220	Overall risk	

2024/25

£k	Comment	Predicted Risk
100	Legal costs (additional). Improved practice reducing applications to court and reduction of Independent Social Worker use. Reduction in legal application and improved practice to conclude proceedings more quickly. Current costs highest across the partnership.	
550	Reduction of an additional 2 children and young people in external residential care. Full year based on £5500 achieved through improved practice	
81	Reduction of three children from external fostering placements and reunified home Improved practice and oversight of external placements.	
5	Section 17. Additional savings Further reduction on this budget may place a risk of increased care admissions or family breakdown	
360	Reduction of agency staff from building Practice team	

Total 1096	Overall Risk	Medium risk
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Our Profit and Loss Account

Profit & loss account	Plan 2023/24 £000's	Plan 2024/25 £000's	Plan 2025/26 £000's
Income			
SBC Income	(36,068)	(37,545)	(38,286)
SBC other income	(100)	(100)	(100)
DFE Income	(853)	(168)	(168)
Grant Income	(5,142)	(5,267)	(4,337)
Other Income	(1,104)	(1,141)	(1,162)
Total Income	(43,267)	(44,220)	(44,054)
Expenditure			
Pay & Agency	20,439	20,081	20,448
Placements	17,564	16,557	15,496
Support to children and young adults	4,531	4,765	4,728
Legal fees	1,814	1,850	1,716
Overheads	3,188	3,210	3,227
Transformation costs	178	82	84
Total revenue expenditure	47,713	46,546	45,700
Revenue (Surplus) / Deficit	4,447	2,326	1,646

NB The £4.632m increase in contract growth was awarded as on going rather than as a one off. Previous versions of the business plan assumed all but the inflation element of it was a one off.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Our Governance

In response to a direction from the Secretary of State for Education, Slough Borough Council established Slough Children’s Services Trust in October 2015, to deliver its statutory children’s services.

In April 2021, the Trust was replaced by a company limited by guarantee and wholly owned by Slough Borough Council (SBC). SCF is a not-for-profit company providing children’s social care services including early help services and the Youth Justice Service under contract from SBC. The company has been focused on improving these services and achieving an Ofsted judgement of ‘Good’ or above.

As a wholly owned company Slough Children First has retained operational independence in the delivery of its services, and the Council as the sole owner has oversight, providing challenge and influence through the Company’s governance arrangements. There is a contract between the council and the company, which details those governance arrangements.

The Executive Director of Children’s Services (DCS) is employed by the Council and seconded to the Company as its Chief Executive. The DCS also has responsibility for Education services which includes services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

1.1 The Board of Directors

The Board is responsible for setting the strategy for Slough Children First; driving high performance and quality; ensuring that the contract objectives are met and promoting the interests of Slough’s vulnerable children and young people.

The Non-Executive Board Chair and Non-Executive Directors (NEDs), bring professional skills and expertise from different sectors whilst Executive Directors are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Company. All Board Members are registered as Company Directors with Companies House.

At of 1st June 2023 Members of the Board are

- **Chair of the Board:**
 - Paul Moffat (temporary appointment until mid-August 2023)

- **Non-Executive Directors:**
 - Nina Robinson
 - Raj Bhamber
 - Lesley Hagger
 - Steven Mason SBC Representative
 - Ketan Gandhi SBC Representative

- **Executive Directors:**
 - Chief Executive: [OBJ] Sue Butcher
 - Director of Operations (Children’s Social Care): Ben Short
 - Director of Finance: [OBJ] Vacant

Members of the senior leadership team and from specialist areas such as health and safety and staffing and personnel report to the Board and attend Board meetings as required.

1.2 Board Committees

The Board operates through committees to monitor progress in detail.

- **Audit and Corporate Governance (ACGC):**
Chair Nina Robinson and Steven Mason
- **Remuneration Nominations and Appointments Committee (RNAC),**
Chair Raj Bhamber
- **Quality & Practice Improvement and People Committee (QPIP),**
Joint Chairs Lesley Hagger and Ketan Gandhi

Working Groups: The Board may establish a limited number of working groups, when intensive scrutiny and/or additional Board level support is needed.

1.3 The Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

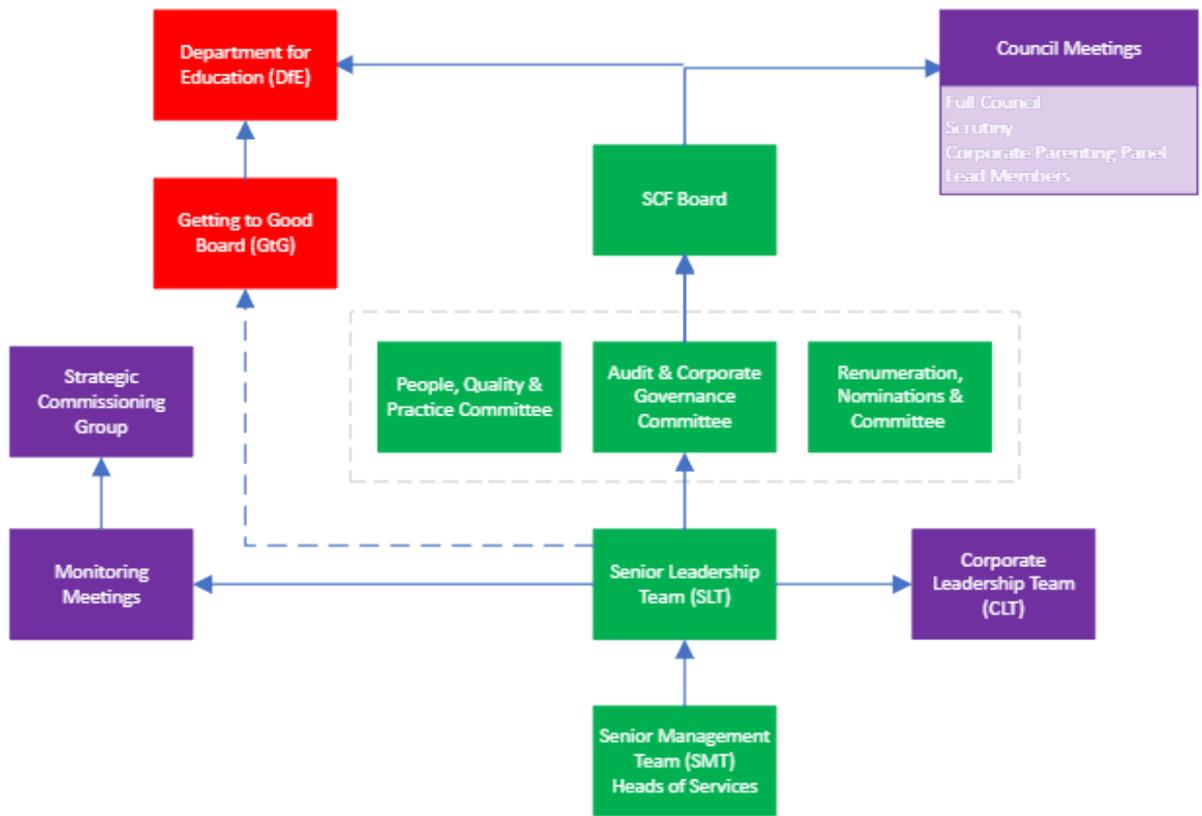
The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meets weekly to provide the strategic leadership, management and direction of the Company. It seeks to ensure that there is a focus on shaping and delivering the strategic priorities of the Company in as resourceful, efficient and effective a way as possible.

The membership is complemented by the Associate Director of Education and the Education Finance Business Partner to ensure that wherever possible services for children are delivered in conjunction with each other.

Membership as of 1st June comprises

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| • Chief Executive/DCS: | Sue Butcher |
| • Director of Operations (Children's Social Care) | Ben Short |
| • Director of Finance | Vacant |
| • Head of HR and OD | Kate McCorriston |
| • Business Planning Manager | Stephanie Clark |
| • Associate Dir of Education | Neil Hoskinson |
| • Finance Business Partner | Neill Butler |

1.4 Governance Arrangements





Inspection of Slough local authority children's services

Inspection dates: 23 January to 3 February 2023

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

What needs to improve?

- The scrutiny by senior leaders of the council and the governance arrangements between these leaders and Slough Children First.
- The impact of leaders and managers, including the corporate parenting board, on driving progress for all children.
- The participation offer and engagement of children and young people in the development and delivery of services.
- The quality of practice and the timeliness for achieving permanence.
- The impact of quality assurance processes to improve social work practice and, in particular, the quality of children's plans.
- The assessment, planning and service provision for children in private fostering arrangements and for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds.
- The timeliness and oversight of placement with parents and connected persons arrangements.

The full report can be accessed [here](#)

Appendix 3 – Our Demographics



Pen portrait of our children and our service (31 March 2023)

Our aspiration is for children to be **Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving**

Number of children with a child protection plan 264

Number of employees

Gross budget £37m

Number of children in care 263

40 unaccompanied asylum seeking children
45 foster care households – ?? placements
Children adopted ??

Child breakdown by age

Under 1
1-4
5-9
10-15
16-25

491
Children in
Need (with
plan)

1,072
Open
children

260
Care
Leavers

Appendix 4 – Our Commitment

To inform this Business Plan we asked colleagues in SCF and in the education directorate “What is their role was in making a difference to the lives of our children in Slough?”

Their responses demonstrate our whole Company commitment to delivering the priorities set out in this Business Plan

- Promoting and ensuring a good working relationship with Partners
- Supporting and empowering children and families
- Ensuring children are safeguarded
- Really and genuinely **listening** to the children
- Supporting our teams to be the best they can be
- Believing in a child’s potential
- Early identification and support to prevent escalation
- Advocating for our staff so they can advocate for their children and young people
- Quality assuring plans and ensuring they are progressed in timely way
- Recruiting quality and talented staff
- Ensuring every child has a school place/education setting
- Knowing how to piece things together
- To be accountable for everything we do
- Promoting permanence for children
- Having an effective early years service

Appendix 5 - Our key performance indicators (KPIs)

Performance/Efficiency Indicators	Good to be
Early Help Assessments. SCF Lead Professional	
Early Help Assessments. Partner Lead Professional	
Contacts	
Referrals	
% of Re-Referrals	↓ <i>Low</i>
% Core Assessments completed on time	↑ <i>High</i>
% ICPC (Initial Child Protection Conference) timeliness (statutory measure by child)	↑ <i>High</i>
% of Children subject to CPP (Child Protection Plan) with all reviews within timescale	↑ <i>High</i>
CP (Child Protection) Visits undertaken on time	↑ <i>High</i>
% CLA (Children Looked After) visits undertaken on time	↑ <i>High</i>
% of CLA with their latest review within timescales	↑ <i>High</i>
Participation in CLA reviews	↑ <i>High</i>
CLA placed over twenty miles away	↓ <i>Low</i>
% Children seen on their own	
Placement Stability - short term	↓ <i>Low</i>
Placement Stability - long term	↑ <i>High</i>
Care Leavers EET (Education, Employment or Training)	↑ <i>High</i>
Care Leavers with a pathway plan (18+)	↑ <i>High</i>
Supervision	↑ <i>High</i>
% Agency social work staff	
% All staff turnover	
Financial Indicator	

Appendix 6 - Our 12-week Improvement plan

Slough Children's Services Immediate Improvement Plan

Executive Summary

The purpose of this plan is to identify the key themes and areas for improvement arising from the recent Ofsted inspection (16 Jan – 3 Feb 2023) and ensure robust actions are in place to improve children's services in Slough. The timeframe is from April to June 2023 and is succeeded by the Continuous Improvement Plan in Appendix 7.

This plan is being used to monitor progress and provide assurance on the progress of the immediate improvement plan – this will be reported regularly to the SCF Board, Slough Borough Council and Getting to Good Board.

This plan is an evolving document and will change as we consult with and co-produce improvement priorities with children, young people, their families and our partner agencies.

A central and essential part of our plan is that it reflects the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people and these will be identified throughout the plan. We will look for opportunities for children and young people to participate.

Improvement Plan

Using the 7 enablers for improving children's services, the following key themes have been identified for this improvement plan:

1. Strategic approach, leadership and governance
2. Engaging and supporting the workforce
3. Engaging partners
4. Children's voice and influence
5. Practice and performance
6. Fostering innovation
7. Better use of resources

Objective	What Ofsted told us	Action	Intended Impact for Children
Strategic Approach, Leadership and Governance			
Good governance	<p>Funding is not agreed for some desired activities. There has been a lack of focus on planning to consider the whole of the child's journey and to ensure that there are sufficient finances to support all aspects of social work, intervention and support.</p> <p>The wider leadership has not addressed weaknesses effectively and leaders have not been sufficiently challenging or effective in prioritising and making the necessary improvements.</p> <p>The governance arrangements are cumbersome and impede those focused on improving children's outcomes for achieving their goals.</p> <p>Much senior leadership time has been focused on the Authority's financial challenges with an insufficient focus on children's experiences.</p>	Commission an independent diagnostic of the capacity of the system and its governance arrangements, to take forward the improvement plan. A set of recommendations and an action plan to achieve this to be completed and taken forward	Have in place a system which allows social worker, manager and leaders to focus on the services which make a difference to their lives
Clear strategic and management oversight	<p>The self-evaluation does not provide sufficient challenge to achieve improvements in set time frames.</p> <p>Key areas have not developed or improved sufficiently at pace. There is also little evidence of critical reflection on practice and the impact of practice on children and their families</p> <p>Leaders have been focused on compliance rather than the impact and quality of practice. The focus is now shifting but this is not embedded or seen consistently across case work or through feedback from children.</p> <p>There is a focus on strengths and insufficient consideration of the vulnerabilities.</p> <p>The environment has been one of high support and low challenge.</p> <p>The frequency, quality and impact of management oversight and supervision in progressing children's plans are inconsistent. there is much variability in the quality of management oversight and supervision meaning that cases are affected by drift and delay and some risks are unassessed</p> <p>Placements that have not been approved by panel lack subsequent senior management oversight and increased visiting or support.</p> <p>QA framework poor</p>	<p>A business case to secure funding to increase capacity to implement a revised QAF has been submitted</p> <p>A new QAF is to be developed and implemented, including an audit schedule to provide scrutiny into practice and support our SEF.</p> <p>Business case has been submitted to secure additional support from a senior manager to support the development of Corporate Parenting Board which has children at its heart and who are actively engaged in shaping this space. (Building Practice Lead).</p>	<p>Children will benefit from improved services as we know ourselves well, identify what we need to do better and have a system to make sure this happens</p> <p>Team managers can evaluate practice across the child's journey</p> <p>Create a culture of professional curiosity, challenge and improvement</p>

	Audit activity is completed in isolation but is descriptive rather than evaluative, focusing on compliance.		
Partners roles and responsibilities understood	The Corporate Parenting Board is underdeveloped, it is ineffective at demonstrating that children matter in Slough, that corporate parents fully comprehend their responsibilities and that they respond to children.	LGA review of Corporate Parenting Board	Ensure that leaders and partners are engaged and bring resources to their corporate parenting role to ensure that our children in care and care experienced young people have the best opportunity to have happy, successful, and healthy lives.
	<p>The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board is enthusiastic and child-focused however she is not being well supported by the wider strategic leadership to address children's needs</p> <p>PAs encourage young people to reach their potential in terms of education and employment but this could be further strengthened by the local authority supporting care leavers to access apprenticeship programmes.</p> <p>Professional relationships between the Council and Slough Children First have improved however the wider strategic leadership has not fully understood and embraced their collective responsibilities and accountabilities for Slough children.</p> <p>Strategic leaders at the highest level have not worked collaboratively or with determination to improve the experiences and progress of children who need care and protection.</p> <p>A refresh and review of the participation strategy is needed to ensure that all children and young people can provide their views and engage in future service development.</p>	Update the sufficiency strategy	We will identify opportunities to access accommodation for our children in care, as well as have clear workstreams to develop this space based on a clear understanding of the needs of our children in care.
Engaging and Supporting the Workforce			
Retention and stable workforce	<p>Changes of social worker have impacted on the progression of plans within care proceedings.</p> <p>Some children experience too many changes of social worker, and this impacts on quality of the relationship with the child and the timeliness and effectiveness of intervention and support to families.</p> <p>There continues to be some negative impact on children and their families who experience too many changes in workers involved in their lives.</p>	We will refresh our Recruitment pages with our workforce offer to support our recruitment of permanent staff	Reducing costs on expensive teams will mean that money can be better used on support and prevention services.
Structure fit for purpose	There has been some improvement in workforce stability. However, this is fragile.	A Principal Social Worker role will be established to lead our social work practice. This role will include the strengthening of our student offer, ASYE programme and career development pathways.	A stable workforce will reduce changes in social worker for children and families, reducing them having to tell their story over and over

		We will exit the costly Innovate teams by recruiting a temporary small team of agency staff internally and building our offer to recruit permanent staff	Increased ability for workforce development will support social workers to remain in Slough increasing awareness of the local context and town.
Engaging Partners			
Information sharing	There needs to be closer alignment of our SEND priorities across Social Care and Education	SEND WSOA6 – Social Care information sharing to inform EHCP plans – reporting to be in place around compliance and multi-agency audit of quality of plans and impact	Children will have quality EHCP plans to identify their needs and support in place for them
Partners supported to help in specific circumstances	<p>The numbers of children known to be at risk of FGM (female genital mutilation) and HPV (honour-based violence) and radicalisation are also very low; and the quality of information sharing is variable There has been insufficient education of partners to ensure that all are aware of the specific needs and risks associated with the variety of vulnerable groups.</p> <p>The quality of referrals from partner agencies is variable meaning the MASH team is required to gather additional information to inform decision making.</p> <p>Extensive development work has taken place but there is more to do within the partnership to ensure all agencies understand their responsibilities and are referring concerns as appropriate.</p> <p>The numbers of children known to be living in private fostering arrangements and the numbers of 16 and 17 year old homeless children are very low. There is much more to do to ensure that your responses to these children are effective, that risks and needs are fully assessed and that appropriate support and provision are provided.</p> <p>Dental Care is not always prioritised.</p> <p>The quality, timeliness and impact of return home interviews are inconsistent with these being less evident for your children in care than children living at home.</p>	Workshops to be arranged across the partnership, including awareness raising materials in relation to FGM and Honour Based Violence	A partnership which is educated in these complex issues will mean that children have the benefit of support from those who understand and know what to do to help keep them safe.
		Private fostering education across the partnership to support identification of children who may be privately fostered to ensure that referrals to access support are made to Social Care	Children who are privately fostered will receive the right help
		Regular MASH multi-agency audits to form part of the regular QA activity	Good quality referrals will help decisions about the right level of help to be made quickly, avoiding delays.
		Centralised list and understanding of CME	Good quality referrals will help decisions about the right level of help to be made quickly, avoiding delays.
Partnership working is integrated	<p>Early Help is under-developed</p> <p>A small number of (Strat) discussions lack attendance by key partners such as health and education. This affects the quality of information being considered as key information may be missing</p> <p>When concerns for Children in Need escalate within the assessment or intervention period, we have seen delay in some strategy discussions being held and then</p>	Early Help strategy to be agreed	We will be able to offer support to children and their carers who are privately fostered
		Additional Targeted Early Help teams to be recruited to	Help will be given when it is needed, it will be easy to access and help needs getting more complicated within families.

	<p>further delays in completing Child Protection inquiries and convening initial Child Protection conferences</p> <p>There are challenges in accessing specialist assessments. This can delay care planning and finding permanent placements.</p> <p>Permanency planning is improving, but there is more to do. Meetings are well attended by key professionals although their quality and impact remain variable. Most provide an update only and lack analysis rationale for decision making and SMART actions.</p> <p>There are a high number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in unregulated placements, many undergoing age assessments. This is due to a local context.</p>		
Childrens Voice and Influence			
<p>Childrens voice heard and influences policy and practice</p>	<p>Children feel unable to influence and shape service provision and delivery.</p>	<p>Participation strategy to be updated</p>	<p>Children will know who senior leaders are and have direct access to them</p>
	<p>Children’s voices are not heard or acted upon swiftly by senior leaders.</p>	<p>Engage a provider such as Care Leaders to review our current participation and support our aspiration for children and young people to influence services they receive</p>	<p>Children will directly shape and influence our decisions at all levels of the organisation</p>
	<p>Young people told us “They asked us, we tell them, they don’t listen. So what’s the point?”</p>	<p>Local Offer for Care Leavers to be updated</p>	
	<p>There is limited evidence of IROs, visiting or having contact with children between reviews.</p> <p>Young people told inspectors they do not always have access to the internet in their accommodation and the local authority is considering this in the review of the local offer</p> <p>Care leavers and young people's participation on the corporate parenting board is underdeveloped and they don't have direct access to the corporate parenting board or senior leaders. It is therefore difficult to ascertain how they influence and shape service provision and delivery or how young people's views lead to improvements in services.</p>	<p>Take findings from Peer Review to next stage of planning¹</p>	<p>Children will see ‘you said, we did’ outcomes and know they are heard and action is taken</p>
Practice and Performance			
<p>Consistency in quality of practice</p>	<p>There is too much variability in the quality of management oversight and supervision leading to drift and delay</p> <p>Care plans are variable in quality and they are not usually SMART or IMPACT focused.</p> <p>There are too many changes in social worker</p>	<p>A programme of practice learning workshops to be put into place for all staff to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans and planning Management oversight Supervision 	<p>Managers will support and challenge decision making in teams to make sure that children receive the right support.</p>

		Pathway planning Permanence Chronology	
Agreements in place for all children	Children live at home with their parents where there is no placement with parent agreement.	Review mechanism for children living at home subject to placement with parents to be developed within a Permanence Monitoring Group framework.	A clear process is in place to review children's permanence arrangements, including supporting children to their permanence plan as soon as possible, including: Placed with parents Connected carers Adoption plans
Children live in stable supported homes.	Support when placements are fragile is not often provided quickly enough.	Refresh the placement stability and disruption process to provide clear practice guidance for teams so we offer support at the earliest opportunity to prevent breakdown and inappropriate increased placement costs	Children will not have to live in lots of different places which causes more anxiety and trauma for them.
Timely and appropriate support and plans that meet children's needs and safeguard	The provision of support for homeless 16 and 17 year olds needs strengthening	Practice guidance for homeless children to be revised, and the support they received to be evaluated via audit	Children who become homeless benefit from social work support which has clear practice guidance to support decision making for them.
Exploitation risks and safeguarding factors clearly understood	Contextual safeguarding does not have systems which are sufficiently robust to ensure that risk assessments are up to date and that agreed actions take place.	Review the Practice Framework and systems in relation to exploitation to ensure there is sufficient partnership responsibility and that there are clear lines of sight for our most at risk children	Children who are vulnerable to exploitation are supported through robust assessment and plans
Timely progress of pre-proceedings	Work in pre-proceedings needs urgent attention as some children are subject to pre-proceedings for far too long, leading to uncertainty for those children and their families	Revised ToR for legal gateway, including tracking mechanism and reporting to provide assurance that we are completing PLO in 12-16 weeks and reducing children in court for more than 26 weeks	Children benefit from early permanence decisions, where drift and delay is avoided
Fostering Innovation			
To be developed in the business plan and business cases	Edge of care Residential units Step-forward from residential to fostering	Staying Close bid submitted to DfE end of Feb for additional funding.	
Better use of Resources			
		Support to facilitate the immediate improvement plan, which has been costed and business cases submitted.	

		Further savings plans to be considered within sufficiency strategy and workforce development – focus on reduction of external placements, exit of innovate teams and workforce stabilisation.	
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Appendix 7 – Our Continuous Improvement Plan

As defined in Appendix 6, this will immediately follow the initial 12-week improvement plan.

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
Strategic approach, leadership, and Governance			
Consolidate a clear Vision for Slough's Children's and engage with partners to work towards agreement on a shared vision and approach to the transformation of services for children and young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with Staff in SCF Devise and agree Vision and Imagery This will be highlighted in the business plan and feed into service plans 	In line with our practice model we will have a shared vision to be prominent in all planning, policy and practice evidencing the golden thread between them. This will bring staff purpose together and enhance the focus on outcomes for children.	End of June 2023
Provide the supporting apparatus for improvement and transformation.	Ensure that key priority strategic actions have Programme and Project support by appointing a Business Planning Manager and Programme Support	Improvement and transformation is appropriately supported to ensure grip, pace, and delivery of improvement to support children	End of May 2023
Ensure there are sufficient resources to support practice improvement and carry forward sufficiency transformation work.	Resource, appoint and deploy a 'Building Practice' Lead to promote and support Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement	The provision of ongoing support and training and 'closing the loop' on audit findings, will improve practice and therefore outcomes for vulnerable children	End of April 2023
Implement robust strategic financial monitoring to identify emerging trends in demand and related cost-pressures to inform management action	Resource, appoint and deploy a 'Sufficiency lead' to lead the development and implementation of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Sufficiency Strategy a Corporate Parenting Strategy, Permanency 	<p>An increased focus on permanency, will reduce drift and delay in achieving 'forever homes' for our children</p> <p>An increased focus on building local capacity in Edge of Care and fostering provision will support children to live with their families or ensure the availability of local foster placement avoiding 'at a distance' placements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In post May 2023 Sufficiency strategy – to cabinet by August 2023 (via Senior Leadership Team and Corporate Parenting Panel) Corporate Parenting signed off August 2023
Refresh the workplan of the joint commissioning group to reflect the ambitions of the joint commissioning strategy.	Develop forecasting and demand models to identify emerging trends and inform strategic planning and transformation work	Understanding patterns and trends enables planning of services to benefit children and families	End of November 2023
Implement and maintain clear lines of sight for SCF Leadership, Lead Member and Senior Managers into practice, supporting the development of a 'High Support and High Challenge' culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) Maintain a robust Quality Assurance, Audit Programme Improve the performance framework including developing a focused performance dashboard aligned with the improvement plan that drives the quality of practice and supports senior leaders in understanding the quality of practice Regular reports on practice to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting to Good Board, 	<p>Children will benefit from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The scrutiny of Members and Officers who are better informed and more able to champion their needs. Clear lines of sight which will identify areas where practice improvement activity needs to be focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> QAF produced June 2023 Performance Framework produced July 2023

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
<p>Ensure senior managers have sufficient capacity and oversight of key decision-making processes and the timeliness and impact of outcomes for children.</p> <p>Create a system which supports a learning model for the whole child's journey to work across children's services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Senior Leadership Team ○ Corporate Leadership Team ○ Contract Monitoring ● Business case to DFE to increase capacity at senior level for 6 months to support the delivery of QA and performance 		
<p>Put into place good corporate parenting for our children in care and care experienced young people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Take forward the recommendations from the Peer Review of Corporate Parenting and move into Task and Finish Group to develop a clear action plan with the new Lead Member, 	<p>Strengthen the oversight and challenge of Members</p> <p>Improve partnership working to ensure that we provide quality parenting or our children in care.</p>	<p>End of September 2023</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reset Corporate Parenting Panel structure and governance ensuring that all Members and Officers are clear on their role. ● Identify Lead Officers and Member Champions for key Corporate Parenting themes 	<p>Children and Young People will have opportunities and support to shape the services they receive</p>	<p>End of September 2023</p>
	<p>Corporate Parenting training offered to all Members in accordance with their involvement with Children's Services</p>	<p>Children and young people will benefit from members being better informed about their corporate parenting responsibilities and the need to ask 'is it good enough for my child'</p>	<p>End of July 2023</p>
	<p>Take forward 'Protected Characteristic' for care experienced young people in slough</p>	<p>The introduction of a Protected Characteristic for Care Experienced Young People will ensure that their needs must be considered as a priority in political and strategic as well as practice decision making</p>	<p>End of December 2023</p>
<p>Involve Members and senior officers in Practice shadowing opportunities and Practice Weeks</p> <p>Implement a programme of ongoing training, development and coaching support for members building on local resources and wider regional and national networks including the LGA leadership programme</p>	<p>Develop a programme of Shadowing Practice opportunities for CEx, Lead Member, DCS, DSC and CP Champions – twice per year</p> <p>Plan attendance at practice week session for CEx, Lead Member, DCS, DSC and CP Champions.</p>	<p>Direct involvement in practice and learning supports improvement</p>	<p>End of June 2023</p> <p>End of July 2023</p>
<p>Produce a sufficiency strategy based on current demand and needs of our CLA population and forecasted demand</p>	<p>Develop and gain agreement for the Sufficiency Strategy and move into a Sufficiency Project Board with key workstreams e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● fostering, ● edge of care, ● accommodation for care experienced young people 	<p>When children and young people cannot live with their families there will be sufficient placements available to meet their needs near to their own communities. h.</p> <p>Provide good quality accommodation for care experienced young people with clear pathway to housing</p>	<p>End of August 2023</p> <p>Work streams to commence September 2023</p>

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
Strengthen the impact of the Youth Justice Board	Seek an LGA/ Peer review of Youth Justice and identify opportunities to improve the oversight of the Management Board Inspection preparation and SEF to be completed through task and finish group	Children benefit from a service focused on their needs and oversight from a board clear on their role.	End of July 2023
Ensure governance framework drives improvement across the partnership with membership from multi-agency partners, Council leaders and elected members	Key strategic partners are members of the Getting to Good (G2G Board) and are enabled to provide high support and challenge to support the improvement of services for children. A G2G Board away morning to be arranged to strengthen the Boards role and oversight.	Services for children and improvements are well considered across the partnership to find collective opportunities	July – membership of G2G to be confirmed September 2023 for away day/ half day
Develop a robust and effective framework for self-assessment and evaluation that is subject to ongoing continuous review to ensure it is providing the evidence necessary to accurately inform the authority of the quality and impact of Children's Services	SEF preparation framework to be aligned with our QA and audit programme to develop challenge sessions within Children's Improvement Group and SMT to regularly review our practice and update the SEF.	Children will benefit from a service which knows itself well and is able to learn from audit to improve practice and services.	Framework aligned with QA framework – July 2023
Improve and streamline the governance between Slough Children First and the Council	Business plan to be agreed between SCF and the Council based on service provision to children and families, including identifying realistic options to save money and invest to save approach. Agree the monitoring arrangements between Council and SCF and the key indicator reports. Agree use of report format which is in line with reporting to other Boards so one report services all meetings to prevent additionality of reporting.	Clear overview arrangements between council and SCF provide a joined-up approach to practice and delivery allowing the focus to be outwards on delivery.	End of July 2023
Leaders will implement and demonstrate our practice model across the organisation Develop communication strategy to ensure leaders are visible, staff are engaged and feel supported. We build a culture in which practice flourishes	Leaders will consistently demonstrate our model in practice. This includes how meetings are chaired, interaction with the workforce and across the partnership. Feedback will be received through staff surveys conducted throughout the year. All practitioners and managers will demonstrate the practice model in their assessment and planning work.	A restorative, trauma informed and strengths based workforce will model this approach with families	Staff survey – September 2023 and then quarterly
Engaging and supporting the workforce			
Slough becoming an Employer of Choice and we further stabilise the Children's Services workforce by recruiting and retaining permanent staff.	Involve children and young people in redesigning our online recruitment profile to increase footfall and applications to permanent roles. Young people will be involved in staff interviews and the recruitment process.	Children benefit from fewer changes in social worker which will prevent drift and delay in planning for their wellbeing.	Task and finish in place by June 2023 and revised page by August 2023
	Launch Slough's first Frontline Unit to support the permanent recruitment of Newly Qualified Social Workers		End of September 2023
	Complete and implement the Career progression Framework		End of August 2023

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
Enhance the skills, knowledge and experience of the whole Children's workforce to better meet children's and young person's needs Produce and implement a comprehensive workforce strategy for the children's workforce driven by our improvement priorities	Undertake a skills gap analysis to inform a workforce training programme across frontline staff, managers and leaders.	Identifying areas for development will support practice.	End of August 2023
	All staff in Children's Services to have an annual appraisal and review to support their development and ensure that they are clear about their role in the Children's Services Improvement Programme.		End of July 2023
	Design a leadership development programme for leaders and managers at all levels of the system of support for children to progressively strengthen the quality of strategic and frontline leadership. Work with Hampshire as SLIP partners to support Leadership programme	Children will benefit from an increased level of competence in management oversight	End of September 2023
Children's Services to directly contribute to the Getting to Good Board.	Support staff to set up a shadow Getting to Good Board	The improvement and delivery of services for children will be enhanced by the views the staff who work to support them and improvement their outcomes.	First meeting to be held by end June 2023 and thereon before each board.
Put in place a wellbeing offer which is highly visible to existing workforce and for those considering joining Slough	Put in place half day to focus on CPD each month for staff across Children's Services Mental health and wellbeing check offer Mental health first aiders in workforce Staff feedback to be undertaken through a regular wellbeing survey on a quarterly basis	Increasing support to staff supports sense of wellbeing in work, reduce sickness and attrition intended to reduce changes in lead worker for children	Rolling September, December, March, June
Review expectations of home-based v office-based working including the use of Teams meetings and expected etiquette.	Put in place guidance regarding 'Teams' and face to face meetings – e.g. CLA review and PEPs		End of August 2023
Engaging with partners			
Agree clear and achievable strategic priorities as a partnership. Social Care will work across the partnership to develop and embed local priorities, such as Supporting Reduction of childhood obesity, reducing Antisocial behaviour and support the implementation of the domestic abuse strategy	Put in place an escalation policy and process for partner where they want to raise concerns or compliments about practice including a reporting back mechanism	Good practice will be shared with the workforce to support improvement. Practice which is not working for children will be addressed to ensure their needs are met and to identify learning.	End of September 2023
	Senior Managers will attend Safeguarding Partnership Board, Safer Slough Partnership, Childrens Health and Wellbeing Board – and others	Collaborative approaches to support children provide improved opportunity to help and make a difference	End of July 2023
Invite and sustain partnership involvement in the Getting to Good Board to develop a culture of 'High Support and High Challenge'	Strategic partners to be active members of the Improvement board to support challenge and support 'unblocking' of issues	Providing different perspectives supports creative thinking in delivery of services to improve children's experiences of support	End of September 2023
Identify opportunities to work alongside Community and Voluntary Sector; and faith leaders/ groups.	Regular liaison between DCS and DoSC with Leaders of community. Leaders invited to lead sessions at practice week.	Children will benefit from services being informed and delivered by groups from their communities, and their faith groups. Services will be more relevant to their needs. More sustainable	End of September 2023

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
	Student and ASYE programme includes time with community organisations.		
Undertake regular multi-agency audits into key themes	Include multi-agency thematic audits with regular reports to SPB and G2G	Multi-agency audit provided opportunity to learn and develop better services for children	End of September 2023
Ongoing support and training around complex safeguarding issues	Regular training cycle for FGM, HBV, radicalisation and exploitation	A partnership which is educated in these complex issues will mean that children have the benefit of support from those who understand and know what to do to help keep them safe.	End of June 2023
Increase awareness of Private Fostering arrangements	Deliver Private Fostering training across the partnership to support identification of children who are privately fostered to ensure that referrals to access support are made to Social Care Private fostering local awareness campaign.	A partnership which is educated in these complex safeguarding issues will mean that children have the benefit of support from those who understand and know what to do to help keep them safe.	End of June 2023 End of February 2024
MASH Partnership	Identify opportunities to increase partnership presence in the MASH		End of October 2023
Youth Justice	Include YJT in Children's Improvement Group and maintain audit programme to drive improvement in delivery of support to this cohort	Better support to those on the edge of offending, and clear support to reduce/ stop offending for those who have already committed crime.	End of June 2023
SEND	Tracking and escalation process to be in place to ensure that EHCP advice requests to be returned within one week, with good quality information	Information provided supports the right level of support identified via the EHCP plan	End of May 2023
Support for care experienced young people	Work across the partnership including housing, to deliver local offer. Housing options for Care experienced young people will be improved and a local approach to private rental with a safety net will be developed	Care experienced young people will have access to a well understood local offer, including options for their own home.	End of December 2023
Children's Voice and Influence			
Ensure that Children and Young People have opportunities to shape the services they receive	Co-produce a Participation Strategy with Children and Young People.	Children will directly shape and influence decision-making at all levels of the organisation	End of June 2023
	Provide training to Corporate Parenting Panel and young people to support participation in a meaningful way	Children will directly shape and influence our decisions at all levels of the organisation	TBC
Provide apprenticeships for care experienced young people	Identify opportunities for apprenticeships and work experience placements across Slough council and partner agencies	Young People will have a clear pathway into work opportunities	End of October 2023
Care experienced young people have clearly defined support	Provide targeted practice support to improve the quality of services to children and review impact	Care experienced young people will be clear about their entitlements.	End of June 2023
Care Leaving to become a Protected Characteristic		The needs of Care Experienced Young People are considered and prioritised in all decisions made by the Council	End of December 2023
Practice and Performance			
Clarify and strengthen the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) arrangements	Revise the policy and practice framework of MACE and relaunch to provide clear distinction between Operational and Strategic MACE	There will be a focus on Victims, Offenders, Locations and Themes to ensure children and young people who are victims	End of September 2023

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
		are supported and offending is subject to a programme of disruption.	
	Put in place programme of Workshops and Practice Learning sets, including staff feedback, to support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervision and Management oversight Use of chronology to inform practice Plans and planning Case summaries to support direction of travel 	Children and families benefit from understanding what support they will receive and why; management grip and drive to ensure it happens and has impact and everyone is working to the same goal.	End of June 2023
	Our audit work tests impact of workshops on practice	Children's Services know themselves well	End of May 2023
Improve management oversight and touch-points to support driving and delivery of plans within the child's timeframe.	Practice standards for team managers supervision and oversight will be reviewed and measured through performance surgeries.	Management grip and oversight will drive plans for children to improve outcomes	End of September 2023
Increase the timeliness of decision making for Children	Initial Child Protection Conferences must take place within the statutory timescales – incremental target setting (70, 75, 80% consistency).	Children and young people will feel safe and will not experience unnecessary drift and delay in safeguarding them and progressing their plans	70% by June 2023
	A clear process from the point of strategy meeting to ICPC will be in place and implemented across services.		75% July 2023
	Reduce emergency applications to Court by having clear senior manager oversight of all decision via legal gateway.	Children will not experience unnecessary drift and delay	80% August 2023
	Where needs may require legal intervention, this is done in a planned way and utilising PLO (Pre-Proceedings)	Children entering PLO will benefit from their wider family and network being explored to provide support, or to be a carer if they cannot stay at home. Children entering PLO will benefit from their wider family and network being explored to provide support, or to be a carer if they cannot stay at home.	85% September 2023
	We will reduce the number of children experiencing delay in their public law proceedings and conclude more cases under 26 weeks' by focusing on front-loading. We will ensure that tracking is completed within the legal gateway process and that final care planning meetings are undertaken to provide a clear and rationalised plan for the child, including clarifying the support provided.	Children will not experience unnecessary drift and delay	End of June 2023
Permanence	Review mechanism for children living at home subject to placement with parents to be developed within a Permanence Monitoring Group framework.	A clear process is in place to review children's permanence arrangements, including supporting children to their permanence plan as soon as possible, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Placed with parents Connected carers Adoption plans 	Panel and tracking June 2023 Care planning process – August 2023
Data	Develop 'self-serve' access to live data and annex A information – PowerBI	Live data supports practice	Was May – push to end June 2023

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
Practice Standards	Revise all practice standards and ensure that a central library and toolkit is available (Tri-X as example). Provide access to partners to our practice standards.	Social workers have clear practice standard to ensure a minimum standard of support and service	End of October 2023
IRO's and CP chairs through their oversight will support consistency, challenge and a focus on the child's needs and voice.	Relaunch the Dispute Resolution Management policy	IRO will have clear footprint and scrutinise plans which are not working or are delayed	End of July 2023
	Mid-way monitoring will be in place for each child with the IRO providing a clear oversight and challenge to the plan, which is written in the child's record to show why and what happened.	Clear IRO footprint and supporting the quality and delivery of plans	End of July 2023
Safe space for care experienced young people	Provide a pop-in space for care experienced young people to be scoped and found	Care experienced young people will have access to a space in which they can access support, spend time with others or access the internet.	End of October 2023
LADO will provide scrutiny and oversight where professional issues have been raised.	LADO policy and process will be reviewed and an audit of LADO work scheduled into the Audit cycle as part of dip sampling,		End of November 2023
Children are supported by right team to meet their needs.	Review and amend the case transfer policy to support there will be good practice and timely arrangements in place for children transferring between teams, there will be handover arrangements and case work will be completed to a good standard	Children will receive the right support based on their needs	End of September 2023
Children subject to child protection plans are reviewed to avoid drift and delay.	A Child protection challenge panel will be implemented to Review Child Protection Plans open for over 12 months to provide additional review point specific to supporting driving the plan to meet the child's needs.	Drift and delay is avoided for children subject to plans for long periods of time	End of September 2023
Adoption plans are progressed for children where this is appropriate	We will strengthen early permanence considerations through legal gateway and RAA sitting on panel When a plan of adoption has been confirmed the progression of achieving that plan is closely scrutinised by Permanence Monitoring to progress the plan as soon as it can be	Children achieving their adoption plan is achieved as soon as possible avoiding drift and delay	End of September 2023
Fostering Innovation			
Identify opportunities to locate social work teams in the Early Help space	Locate Frontline unit in Early Help to provide opportunity for early support and brief intervention to prevent needs escalating.	In line with the Ind Review, strengthen early help for families to prevent needs escalating	End of October 2023
Edge of Care	Identify opportunities to create edge of care support within the Borough – No Wrong Door, MST, FFT etc.	Support children to stay at home by preventing family breakdown	End of October 2023
Mockingbird	Explore introducing second Mockingbird constellation		End of October 2023
Pre-birth pathway	Scope out demand in pre-birth space and update local protocol. Identify partnership opportunities – pre-birth forum - to increase support to expectant parents' and wider families. Support permanence where significant safeguarding concerns are present.		End of September 2023

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
	Ensure Adoption Workers sit in legal gateway.		
Court Work Progression	Explore option for court work progression manager to increase oversight of care proceedings, improving grip and reducing drift and delay	Reduce drift and delay in achieving a permanence decision	End of September 2023
Review operating model to provide locality/team around school model and frontload help and support.	Review demand and forecasting and review current operating model effectiveness. This is with a view to 'front-loading' and providing support earlier on; and reducing changes in social workers for children and families	Reduce changes in worker Provides support early on	End of October 2023
Family led decision making to avoid escalation of risk and improve safe planning for children and making permanence decisions as early as possible.	Develop and launch a Family Group Conference model of approach to engage, support and promote family-based arrangements to address identified needs, risks and circumstances and ensure there is robust decision making for children entering care	Family led decisions support children to remain within their family or close network where possible	End of January 2024
Strengthened oversight of children vulnerable to exploitation.	The MACE arrangements will be reviewed across the partnership to strengthen operational and strategic oversight. The current team structure for exploitation will be reviewed to identify opportunities to put in place an exploitation and Missing coordinator to strengthen oversight of vulnerable children. Missing from home process reviewed and updated. Risk assessment tool and oversight of exploitation reviewed, updated and d.	We will improve our understanding of children at risk and themes so that we can provide support and strengthen disruption to keep children safe.	MACE arrangements – July 2023 Team structure – December 2023 Processes and tools – July 2023
Judicious use of resources			
Living with financial means	Deliver against the Slough Children First Business Plan		End of March 2024
Oversight of all external placements	External placement panel in place to regularly review all external placements with a view to identifying step-forward and reunification options.	All children will have regular scrutiny of their plans to ensure that they don't end up 'stuck' in residential care if their needs are better met by fostering or returning home	End of June 2023
Reduce overall spend in Joint Legal Team space which has arisen because of high demand	Put in place gatekeeping to reduce reliance on legal to provide care planning advice and decisions, ensuring that they can advise on a well-articulated and considered plan. (Social worker is the expert)	Social work teams provide clear plans for children which are considered and achieve permanence	End of March 2024
Independent assessments in PLO cases	Explore options to create a 'bank' of ISW's to complete work. Explore Court Assessment Team (CAT) options internally to reduce legal spend	Locating assessments in the local area means that children benefit from assessments completed by those who know the Borough and local resources to provide the best offer of support	End of October 2023
Reduce managed teams	Put in place plans to exit the remaining innovate team	Children will have stability of teams working in Slough	End of September 2024
Improved oversight of the child's journey to identify drift, avoid high-cost placements and support children to live in appropriate accommodation.	Review current panel process, chairing arrangements and implement revised TOR and scope for Legal Gateway, Permanency Management Group and high-cost placement panel		End of August 2023

