SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO:	**Cabinet**
DATE:	**18 September 2023**
SUBJECT:	**Approval of annual Business and Improvement Plan for Slough Children First Limited (SCF)**
CHIEF OFFICER:	**Stephen Brown – Chief Executive**
CONTACT OFFICER:	**Sarah Wilson – Head of Legal**
WARD(S):	**All**
PORTFOLIO:	**Councillor Smith – Leader of the Council** **Councillor Kelly – Lead Member Children's Services**
KEY DECISION:	**YES**
EXEMPT:	**NO, with the exception of Appendix 9 to the SCF Draft Business Plan**
DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN:	**YES**
APPENDICES:	**Appendix A - SCF Draft Business and Improvement Plan 2023 to 2026** **Appendix B – In-year change requests for deficits arising from 2021/22 and 2022/23.**

1 Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report seeks approval of the Slough Children First (SCF) Business and Improvement Plan for 2023 to 2026 (Appendix A), on an interim basis as well as seeking approval for retrospective in-year change requests for the previous two financial years to fund historic deficits. As SCF is wholly owned by the Council, it is bound by its Articles to submit its draft Business and Improvement Plan for approval by the Council. The Business and Improvement Plan is a critical document governing how SCF conducts its business, and it is not permitted to enter into transactions, agreements, or contracts unless they are in accordance with its Business and Improvement Plan.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- Approve the SCF's Business and Improvement Plan for 2023 to 2026 at Appendix A.

- Approve the requests for funding of deficits from 2021/22 and 2022/23 at a total of £5.312m from the budget equalisation reserve
- Approve the increase in the contract sum for 2023/24 of £4.447m, taking the total contract sum to £40.514m using in-year contingency budgets.
- Note the plan for future cabinet reports as follows:
    - December 2023 – approve the 2024-2027 Business and Improvement Plan with details of the requested contract sum for 2024/25 and the updated contractual key performance indicators and formally note the SCF Annual Report for 2022/23.
    - February 2024 – contract sum to be formally approved as part of the Council's budget setting process.
    - June / July 2024 – note the Annual Report for 2023/24 and an update on progress against the approved Business and Improvement Plan.

Reason:

SCF requires a high quality, long-term Business and Improvement Plan setting out its strategic priorities and financial strategy. The previous year's plan was only approved on an interim basis and the re-submitted plan was subject to a review by Mutual Ventures with Cabinet agreeing not to approve it in February 2023 and to require an updated version to be submitted in July 2023. Further work was required on the financial strategy resulting in this being delayed until September 2023. SCF has a new executive leadership team, new Chair and non-executive director on the Board and the Council has new DLUHC commissioners. There has therefore been enhanced scrutiny of the to support SCF to deliver high quality and cost-effective services. This plan requests further significant financial support for the financial year 2023/24 over and above what was agreed by Cabinet in February 2023. In approving this additional amount for SCF it needs to be recognised that this places an additional burden on the council to manage the rest of it's resources within it's means. Although this is proposed to be funded from contingency budgets, that reduces the ability to deal with any other in-year pressures identified.

The Council is also asked to approve significant historic deficits arising from the two previous financial years. SCF is relying on its loan to fund these and this is creating cashflow issues. Detailed information has been submitted on the reason for the deficits. In future SCF needs to submit and the Council consider in-year change requests promptly to allow decisions to be made on whether an increased contract sum is justified.

The Council must continue to monitor SCF's performance to ensure that limited available funding is directed to the right place and supporting the Council's improvement journey. For this reason, Cabinet is requested to note the future reports throughout the year on various aspects of governance of SCF.

Commissioner Review

Children services nationally are operating in a complex and challenging environment, balancing the tension between delivering essential improvements and financially constrained budgets. The business and improvement plan sets out the vision for how Slough Children First, plan to improve the quality-of-service delivery to children, young people and their families and the key priorities for 2023/24.

The report and business and improvement plan, outline the increased financial risk to the Council, and it is important that the operating and reporting arrangements, derived through close working relationship, engagement with key stakeholders, sound corporate governance arrangements within the company and Council and regular reports to the Board and Council with strengthened financial oversight, are effective in managing the risks.

The commissioners are content with the recommendations in this report.

2 Report - Introduction

2.1. SCF became wholly owned by the Council on 1 April 2021, with new articles of association setting out its governance arrangements. The Articles of Association set out a list of reserved matters, which must be approved by the Council, as the sole owner of the Company.

2.2. SCF delivers prescribed statutory and discretionary children's social care functions under a direction of the Secretary of State and in accordance with a service delivery contract between SCF and the Council. Improvement activity across children's services is a critical part of the Council's improvement journey and the Council should work with the new SCF executive leadership team, board of directors and DfE commissioner to ensure that the services can be delivered in a cost-effective way, contributing to the delivery of required financial savings to enable the Council to become financially sustainable within the medium term.

2.3. A new Chief Executive for SCF (also the Executive Director of People – Children / statutory director of children's services) commenced in role in January 2023. On the day of her arrival Ofsted commenced its inspection of children's services and found that overall the service 'requires improvement to be good,' but the impact of leaders is 'inadequate.' The People Scrutiny Panel task and finish report recommended an enhanced focus on partnership working, alongside other recommendations for SCF which have been incorporated into the Business and Improvement Plan. The submitted draft Business and Improvement Plan is a significant improvement on the previous plan, with clear and focused improvement plans linked to savings, however it also requires significantly more funding than the Council has budgeted for, which puts pressure on other council services and on the Council's long-term viability. Many of these financial pressures are related to national factors and replicated in local authorities across the country.

2.4. The Department of Education (DfE) has appointed a Commissioner, Paul Moffat to oversee Children's Services improvement who has had oversight of this plan.

Options Considered

2.5. The following options were considered:

Option	Pros	Cons	Recommended
Option 1: Approval of business and improvement plan and historic deficits	• Ensures compliance with Articles of Association. • Ensures SCF has a longer-term business strategy to manage its services.	• The plan assumes funding that has not been agreed by the Council and will put pressure on other services.	**Recommended**

	• The new plan will be owned by new Chief Executive and Board of SCF. • The payment of historic deficits and increased contract sum will enable SCF to operate on a solvent basis in the medium term.		
Option 3: Do not approve the Business and Improvement Plan or historic deficits	• The Council does not approve the business and improvement plan and requires an updated version to be prepared in a new timetable. • The business and improvement plan can set out a more realistic and affordable medium term financial strategy.	• The previous interim Business and Improvement Plan will apply, which does not address how SCF will seek to deliver financial savings in the current context. • SCF is not able to demonstrate improvement in its Business and Improvement Planning processes, an issue that was flagged in the governance review. • Time and resource will be put into updating the plan which may not result in an approved medium term position and this effort would be better put into effective delivery plans.	**Not recommended**

Background

2.6. SCF's objects are set out in its Articles of Association. These are clearly set out in the Business and Improvement Plan.

2.7. SCF has sets out a vision and ambition for children, priorities, and enablers. The enablers form the basis of the Director of Children's Services report to the Getting to Good Board chaired by the DfE Commissioner. There is a financial focus to the plan, including savings targets for 2023/24 and 2024/25 as well as a 12-week improvement plan and the subsequent continuous improvement plan.

2.8. As part of ensuring appropriate scrutiny and challenge, the draft of the previous plan was reviewed by Mutual Ventures, who were commissioned by the DfE, and by a task and finish group of members from the People Scrutiny Panel. Key findings from these reviews are set out below:

Affordability of services

2.9. Mutual Ventures made it clear that both the Council and SCF need to be clear about the affordability of services and have full confidence in the proposed plans, given the Council's tightening financial envelope. Mutual Ventures assessed that SCF's previous business plan under-estimated the cost of invest to save proposals and inflationary pressure and was potentially over-ambitious regarding placement rates and vacancy factor. However, in other areas, it viewed the proposals as not being ambitious enough. It is important to note that some matters have moved on considerably since the Mutual Ventures review and there is a new executive leadership team in SCF who are bringing fresh experience and challenge. Therefore, whilst it is relevant to consider the analysis contained in the review, appropriate weight needs to be given to it in view of these changes.

2.10. The figure below is an extract from the Mutual Ventures report which was published as an appendix to the February cabinet report. This indicates that the 2023/24 funding requirement was £39.330m, however this took account of a £3.387m deficit. If this deficit is funded via adjustment of previous years' contract sums, the budget requirement is £35.943m. The Council agreed a contract sum in excess of this figure, but the current Business and Improvement Plan is indicating that a further £4.4m is required over and above this figure.

Figure 16. Comparison of business plan with review outputs, in £'000.

Current SCF contract value

SCF Business plan position

Revisions to Business plan resulting from review findings.

Includes:
- Adjustments for technical errors
- Revision to optimism bias in assumptions
- Application of alternative population growth forecasts
- Correction and revision to inflation assumptions

Revised funding requirement

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
SCF BUSINESS PLAN (Appendix D)							
SBC core contract	31,700	32,350	32,770	33,170	33,573	33,966	34,361
Contribution to Virtual School	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Capitalisation Directive Funding	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
SCF deficit/(surplus)	5,175	3,387	2,158	1,433	420	(745)	(1,620)
TOTAL SBC FUNDING REQUIREMENT	**37,070**	**35,836**	**35,023**	**34,708**	**34,094**	**33,321**	**32,841**
ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO - REVISED ASSUMPTIONS							
Correction of errors in SCF model		(146)	(307.00)	(313.00)	(299.00)	(178.00)	(92.00)
Baseline revisions							
Placement rates		236	211	197	186	167	154
Vacancy factor		(875)	(892)	(910)	(910)	(890)	(890)
Total baseline revisions		**(639)**	**(681)**	**(713)**	**(724)**	**(723)**	**(736)**
Demographic growth revision		**64**	**22**	**(103)**	**(210)**	**(330)**	**(483)**
Savings impact revisions							
Net foster carer recruitment		220	336	435	517	585	626
Placement rates		820	890	890	847	793	740
Care leavers volume		442	480	513	460	451	523
Care leavers rates		471	587	587	587	589	587
Family Hubs / Targeted Early Help impact		151	338	524	685	731	740
Edge of Care impact		400	397	391	390	389	379
Timing of Innovate team reduction		412	371	742	371	405	(0)
Total savings revisions		**2,914**	**3,408**	**4,082**	**3,858**	**3,942**	**3,596**
Additional inflation		**1,408**	**1,760**	**1,872**	**1,953**	**2,054**	**2,104**
TOTAL REVISIONS		**3,601**	**4,202**	**4,825**	**4,574**	**4,765**	**4,388**
Less revisons funded by partners/grants		(59)	(41)	(30)	(37)	(35)	(32)
TOTAL REVISED SBC FUNDING	**37,070**	**39,330**	**39,184**	**39,503**	**38,630**	**38,007**	**37,198**

2.11. There are no specific requests for "invest to save" funding in the Business and Improvement Plan, although the detail demonstrates that additional funding is needed in the early years of the Plan to assist with delivery of savings and containing demand pressure in future years and helpful assumptions are given on the impact of these proposals. Reference is also made to applying for grant funding from the DfE to support transformational change. The plan sets out the significant impact of loss of DfE funding compared to previous years. The savings proposals include ambitious targets to reduce placements costs and less stretching targets for some other areas. It is assumed that the proposals have built in inflation and that SCF will be able to contain further demand and inflationary pressures within its medium-term financial plans as this was built into the modelling undertaken by Mutual Ventures.

2.12. SCF is required to produce its draft annual business plan by 30 September in the previous financial year. Complying with this timetable will assist the Council with its budget setting process and its own Medium Term Financial Strategy for future years.

Proactive demand management

2.13. Mutual Ventures state that the financial outlook for SCF could be improved through a dedicated drive to focus on throughput of work, with a review of existing cases being closed where they are low risk.

2.14. The Task and Finish Group heard that managing risk and closing cases requires stable leadership and management to ensure social workers felt confident and safe in their decision-making and this is now in place.

2.15. The draft Business and Improvement Plan makes the following assumptions to reduce spending:

- a 5% reduction in families being stepped up to statutory social care by more targeting in the early help teams;
- The in-house fostering service will target six new carers by the end of 2023/24 with further recruitment planned in future years;
- Improved commissioning for accommodation for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and commissioning support to improve participation with children and young people (subject to receipt of DfE grant funding).

2.16. It is critical that there is a renewed focus on driving down demand where appropriate and monitoring against these targets will help identify whether these are overly ambitious or not ambitious enough.

2.17. There are also demand pressures that are caused by national factors. The demand pressures are mainly caused by a significant increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and increase in need for external residential placement. There is also a significant increase in caseloads in general. Some of the financial pressures for UASC is due to a delay in receiving funding from the Home Office and is therefore more of a cashflow issue than a demand pressure.

Workforce

2.18. Mutual Ventures stated that the previous invest to save proposals did not address the main reason that staff are leaving, namely caseloads. Mutual Ventures also commented on the intention to keep the two managed agency (Innovate) Teams until March 2025 as concerning, as these teams are expensive and should only be used to fill short term gaps. With stable, skilled, and confident leadership it was proposed that a more ambitious target could be set and caseload levels are now less of a concern, leading to a reduced need to rely on such teams.

2.19. The Scrutiny Task and Finish Group heard from frontline managers about the strong morale and the positive impact that programmes such as Step Up to Social Work and employing overseas qualified social workers were having on recruitment and retention. The latest figures indicate that the current workforce strategies are working. SCF has recently partnered with “Frontline” as further evidence of investment in practice development and support. The draft Business and Improvement Plan assumes an increase in permanent recruitment by 1% each year to reduce the costs spend on more expensive agency arrangements. This is building on the current successful programmes already in place which have seen an increase in the ratio of permanent to agency/vacancy which now sits at 77:23. This has enabled the release of one managed agency team 20 months earlier than planned and the second 18 months earlier.

Early Help

2.20. SCF is expected to and does positively and effectively contribute to multi-agency early intervention support for children, young people, and their families to avoid the need for more intensive social care support.

2.21. The Mutual Ventures report noted that all the original invest to save proposals will strengthen the service offer and there should not be a 'pick and mix' approach.

2.22. The Task and Finish Group noted the national evidence of the need to focus on the wider children's workforce and ensuring that the wider partnership worked effectively to support children and young people.

2.23. An in-year funding request to support increasing the size of the targeted early help service was agreed in 2022/23 and there is evidence that this has started to have an impact on reducing reliance on statutory intervention for families. This service should also have a focus on multi-agency working and encouraging other agencies to take the lead on specific aspects of early help support.

2.24. The assumptions made in relation to an effective early help system have been highlighted in the proactive demand management section above.

Edge of Care

2.25. The Edge of Care team is intended to focus on preventing family breakdown and contextual safeguarding (safeguarding children from risks outside the home including criminal or sexual exploitation and youth violence).

2.26. The Task and Finish Group also heard from practitioners who had seen the success of a previous Innovate Team which consisted of multi-disciplinary practitioners who supported young people and families in crisis.

2.27. An edge of care team is intended to support reunification of children coming home from care in appropriate cases and reduce placement costs.

Deliverability and leadership capability

2.28. Mutual Ventures raised concerns about delivery capacity and capability and that SCF needs to strengthen its governance arrangements, business plan monitoring processes and benefits management discipline, work which is now underway. This includes strengthening the finance function, developing a structured approach to demonstrate value for money, having in place robust governance and board oversight arrangements and comprehensive risk assessment processes.

2.29. Some of these issues have also been identified as part of the Council's governance review of SCF. The Council appointed an Executive Director – People (Children) who is also the statutory Director of Children's Services who is seconded into SCF and appointed by SCF as the Chief Executive. This permanent appointment has led to a permanent leadership team and there is a new Director of Finance and Business and Improvement Planning manager which are both positive steps. The board has also been strengthened with appointment of a new non-executive director with a finance background and an experienced local authority senior leader as Chair of the Board.

Partnerships

2.30. Both Mutual Ventures and the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group refer to the critical importance of the wider partnerships. Other Local Authority areas that have made sustained progress are good at engaging and collaborating at a strategic and operational level. Engaging partners is one of SCF's enablers for improvement.

2.31. It is positive to see a priority around partnership working, both with the Council and wider children's workforce, including the community and voluntary sector. One of the enablers is also around engaging partners.

2.32. Reducing demand on statutory social care and investing in early help is a partnership responsibility and this cannot be achieved by SCF or the Council alone. Requesting an update in 3 months will allow the Council to review SCF's progress in ensuring both the statutory partnerships and individual partner agencies are fully contributing to supporting families and children in Slough to thrive.

Governance and contractual requirements for approval of the business plan

2.33. Article 7 sets out the requirements for an annual business plan. This requires that for each year, no later than 30 September in the preceding year, the board of directors should prepare and submit a draft business plan for approval by the Council covering the next 3 years. The content of each business plan shall include relevant information under each of the following headings:

(a) introduction;
(b) strategic framework;
I working with partners;
(d) priorities and objectives;
(e) financial strategy and plans;
(f) profit and loss account;
(g) cash flow statement;
(h) revenue budget and working capital requirements; and
(i) capital expenditure requirements.

2.34. The Business and Improvement Plan can be varied each year, but that will also require prior written approval of the Council. If, prior to the state of the year, the board of directors has not sought the approval of the Council then for as long as approval has not been secured, the business plan for the previous year shall continue to apply.

2.35. Since February 2014, the Slough Children's Services have been subject to intervention from the Department for Education. The draft Business and Improvement Plan sets out a focused 12-week plan and a continuous improvement plan intended to provide a roadmap and an accountability framework for how it will deliver good services to enable the intervention to be removed.

2.36. In addition to the Business and Improvement Plan, if SCF finds itself in a position whereby it cannot balance its budget in year, there is a contractual mechanism to allow it to submit an in-year change request for increased funding either on an invest to save or demand pressures basis. There is a detailed process to follow to ensure the requests can be properly considered by the Council and to manage any disputes between the parties. SCF has submitted 6 in-year change requests for 2021/22 and

2022/23 to deal with its historic overspends. The Council did approve similar requests last year but requested that submission of further requests be delayed pending receipt of the revised Business and Improvement Plan. The requests are summarised below:

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

2.37. The Council supported a previous request for funding to support an increase in the numbers of UASC, but for 2022/23 this was only for a 6-month period. On the basis of the previous request, it was assumed the annual figure would be about £450k and provision was made for additional funding in the contract sum set for 2023/24. However, the 2022/23 figure is now £742k, which is partly due to an increase in numbers from 31 in September 2022 to 45 in March 2023. SCF is clear about the need to recoup all monies from the Home Office and has social workers with increasing skills in undertaking age-assessments and decision making on whether to defend age assessment challenges. Updates on current and future pressures as well as any communication with the Home Office to deal with delays in payment will be presented in future reports.

Legal Costs

2.38. These costs include court fees, legal fees from the Reading joint legal team, counsel's fees, and expert fees. The costs are largely dependent on the number of care cases and other legal proceedings such as judicial reviews but are also impacted by more complex cases and judicial continuity issues requiring more hearings or court delays. The new leadership is looking to reduce the number of proceedings in the future by focusing on child in need, child protection and PLO processes. Benchmarking data needs to be used to demonstrate cost efficiency. The Business and Improvement Plan rightly focuses on early help and edge of care team, and these should lead to a reduction in the number of proceedings in the future.

Salary pressures

2.39. The salary pressures were not unforeseen and should have been budgeted for by SCF. However, it is positive that the workforce strategy has led to the Innovate teams being released earlier than expected and the ratio of permanent to agency has improved significantly providing evidence to indicate that the strategy is working.

Loss of transformation grant

2.40. The loss of DfE grant in 2022 has been covered by the increased contract sum for 2023/24, however it would have been more prudent if SCF had considered its options at the point the grant was stopped, rather than continuing to fund services for which it had no budget. The Business and Improvement Plan refers to applications for grant funding from DfE and if provided, SCF needs to have and has requested project management capacity to ensure the funds are used in accordance with the terms of the grant.

Placement pressures

2.41. The Mutual Ventures report contains revisions based on unrealistic assumptions on unit cost and placement budgets. The request states that costs are low statistically, however no benchmarking data is presented to allow comparisons to be made. Costs have increased significantly since August 2022. The Scrutiny task and finish group raised concerns about increases in fostering households being undeliverable, which would place further pressure on the placements budget. The placements budget is clearly strongly linked to the number of children in care and most solutions are relatively long term. Future reports should contain a detailed update on placement budgets, including benchmarking data and progress against savings proposals, including risks.

Care leavers/care experienced young people

2.42. The historic overspend is £430k, not including spend on UASC. It is not clear why this was not foreseeable or what consideration was given to the risks or reducing the cost of support. Most of the overspend has been funded by grant, which is positive. Further work needs to take place between SCF and the Council's housing service to understand how delays in housing panels can lead to overspends and how the risk of this is raised corporately.

2.43. It is recommended that the Council formally agree the historic deficits. In future the Council needs to receive and consider in-year change requests promptly at the time SCF believes that the pressure cannot be met by mitigating measures elsewhere.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1. <u>Financial implications</u>

3.1.1. Full Council in February 2023 approved a contract fee for 2023/24 of £36.067million - an increase of £4.632m from the previous financial year.

3.1.2. SCF have requested one off funding amounting to £5.312 in respect 2021/22 and 2022/23, outside of the agreed budget setting process. This is summarised in the table below:

21/22 and 22/23 One off Bids for funding

	£m
DfE Transformation Grant loss	0.348
Salary Pressures	1.432
Placements	2.180
Other Child Support	0.095
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children	0.742
Legal Costs	0.515
Total Additional Budget Pressures 2023-24	**5.312**

3.1.3 At the time the 2023/24 Council budget was set, it was on the basis of SCF staying within with the agreed contract fee of £36.067m. This business plan is requesting additional £4.47m for 2023/24 which would be funded through use of in-year contingency budgets.

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3.1.4 The assumed contract sums in the draft plan for 2024/25 and 2025/26 will need to be considered as part of the councils medium-term financial planning.

3.1.5 The Company has no reserves and relies on the £5m loan from the Council for cash-flow. This loan will permit SCF to be financially solvent, however it must ensure that this loan is only used for cashflow purposes and not utilised for service delivery pressures. The Council expects repayment of the loan in full at the end of the service delivery contract, which ends in 2026 if not extended and this carries a high risk for the Council and SCF. By agreeing to pay sums for previous years, this will assist the in-year cashflow position.

3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 The Secretary of State for Education has powers to issue a direction in relation to specified social services functions relating to children under s.497A of the Education Act 1996. Various directions have been issued in relation to statutory functions in Slough since 2014.

3.2.2 The seventh statutory direction was issued in August 2023. This requires that the Council secures that prescribed children's services functions are performed by SCF and the Council jointly and other prescribed children's services functions are performed by SCF on behalf of the Council. The Council was also directed to enter into a new service agreement to implement the discharge of these functions and continue to comply with any instructions of the Secretary of State, his representatives and the Children's Services Commissioner in relation to ensuring that the Council's children's social care functions are performed to the required standard. The seventh direction contains reference to the DLUHC appointed commissioners requiring the DfE commissioner to work in partnership with these commissioners to contribute to the work to rebuild the finance and governance capacity of the Council and to secure its compliance with the best value duty in so far as it relates to children's services. The DfE commissioner is expected to review the delivery of children's services, determine improvement priorities, including scope, budgets and governance arrangements and ensure that any work on future delivery is led and informed by him, taking into account the work of the DLUHC commissioners.

3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 There are risks that the company will not achieve its agreed budget as highlighted in the report. The Council is mitigating this risk through regular financial and performance monitoring meetings and reports to Cabinet on key matters. The risks to children and families as a result of risks arising from the lack of a Business and Improvement Plan and effective leadership within SCF are covered in the Council's corporate risk register and in the governance review, which are regularly monitored by the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.

3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 None

3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 The Council has a duty contained in section 149 of the Equality Act to have due regard to the need to:

a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

3.5.2 The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day-today business and to keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services. As a body delivering public functions, SCF is expected to comply with this duty.

3.5.3 High quality and cost-effective children's services are critical to supporting both the Council and SCF to meet their equality duties, particularly in relation to advancing equality of opportunity by way of reducing inequalities that exist between certain groups of vulnerable children and their families and the wider population. As part of the update reports, it is expected that information will be presented on how SCF is meeting its equality duties and how this is supporting the Council to meet its own duties.

3.6 Procurement implications

3.6.4 There are no procurement implications from this proposal. SCF operates within the "Teckal Exemption" meaning that the Council does not have to undertake a procurement process to commission services from it. This exemption is on the basis that the Council has adequate control over SCF and that at least 80% of SCF's services are provided to the Council.

3.7 Workforce implications

3.7.1 None.

3.8 Property implications

3.8.1 SCF will need to consider its future building requirements as part of the Council's wider asset disposal programme. At present SCF operates from 3 separate buildings, including leasing office space in Observatory House, operating a contact centre in Cippenham, and operating a respite centre in Priors Close and these are all seen as required operational assets.

4. Background Papers

None.