



# Slough Children First Business and Improvement Plan 2023-26

**Our vision and aspirations for  
children and families during 2023-26  
including a detailed one-year**



## **OWNER**

Simon Baker, Company  
Chair

Sue Butcher, Chief  
Executive and Executive  
Director of Children's  
Services

## **VERSION**

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## Introduction from the Board Chair and Chief Executive

Children's services in Slough, 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 the confidence, 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 unprecedented opportunities to work across SBC and SCF on a shared agenda for improving children's lives. As the Slough Children First 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 can be ten years younger than neighbouring Boroughs. These factors require a whole council, whole partnership, and community approach. Sharing an ambition for Slough's children and delivering a continuum of support from an Early Help level through to more intense statutory services. Our business plan aligns with the Council's plan for the Borough and our success will be evidenced in clear key performance indicators.

Whilst acknowledging the challenges this Business and Improvement Plan sets out our improvement journey and identifies the solutions required for SCF 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 delivering our improvement agenda. This confidence is increased by our having a permanent leadership team in place and, although we value our agency workers, an increasingly permanent workforce with a significantly decreasing staff turnover.

We recognise 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. This can be from elsewhere in the country or 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, Police, Community and Voluntary Sector and faith communities.

The intention of our business plan is not to capture everything we do as a company. It is a high-level strategic document which provides a clear framework for our 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, and this Business and Improvement Plan evidences our ambition and our commitment to meet it head on.

**Simon Baker**

**Sue Butcher**

# Our Overarching Three-Year Vision

There have been some important changes since Slough Children First (SCF) was formed in April 2021. Most notably since May 2023 the Board has appointed 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 Strategic Leadership Team (see Appendix 1 for further details), 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 was that social care services remain rated as 'Requires Improvement', but Leadership and Management is now 'Inadequate'. The recommendations from that inspection are set out in Appendix 3.

Ofsted noted 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. In consultation with our whole workforce, we looked at what they believed the vision of Slough Children First should represent. The word cloud below pictorially represents their feedback.



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

To further engage the workforce with our improvement journey we asked them about the values that are important to them and that underpin their work with children and 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.

**The leadership team will** listen to and hear what our children and families say to us and feed back to our staff when they have made a difference to the outcomes of children such as the messages received below.

*[they helped me] grow a closer bond with my mum as before me and her were not so close and I couldn't speak to her about stuff*

*[the] social worker has been great, no words can describe how she has changed our family's life, we will definitely miss her help and support.*

*We actually felt like we had a social worker for once that was listening to us regarding the kids and was always available when we reached out to her to listen as well as make sure all things was done and put into place when needed.*

## 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.

The Company, as an entity, has delivered social care services for Slough Borough Council (SBC) since October 2015 but its name and ownership changed in 2021 when it became Slough Children First (SCF) and wholly owned by SBC. 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) and work closely to promote seamless services.

As a separate company SCF set out objectives 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 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 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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

The aim is for the services delivered by SCF, to move back into the Council during the lifetime of this plan with the caveat that this must be in the best interests of Slough's vulnerable children and young people. 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 the move can take place.

SBC holds SCF accountable for our performance through quarterly contractual monitoring meetings. The Ofsted inspection in January 2023 identified improvements to be made in this relationship and both SCF and SBC 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 DLUHC. Inevitably these financial challenges impact on the work of SCF. Despite these constraints we must demonstrate that we provide services effectively and efficiently therefore evidencing best value for money. SCF is held to account by the DfE appointed Commissioner who also scrutinises services for children with 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 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 committed to supporting young people who are seeking refuge from their country of origin through the National Transfer Scheme particularly in the light of the recent Kent judgement and the need to accommodate asylum seeking young people in accordance with our quota of 0.1% population children and young people 0-18 years. 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 unavoidable.<sup>2</sup> However, implementing these changes may be resource intensive.

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 SBC and SCF. Our response to that inspection was to put in place an Immediate 12-week Plan to show intent and make progress at pace. Subsequently we have built upon this plan and produced a **Continuous Improvement Plan** (Appendix 7) which will support and monitor our journey to improve services for children and families.

We anticipate 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 continue listening to what our staff are saying to us (like the examples below) and feedback on how this has influenced our services.

<p>Support and work together to promote a culture that values each other with kindness and respect</p>	<p>Model good practice</p> <p>Maintain ongoing transparency</p> <p>Create an avenue where staff can voice their feelings and feel like they are heard</p>
<p>Be open to creative and different ways of doing things</p>	

We have appointed our first dedicated Principal Social Worker in order to promote excellent professional practice, leading on practice improvement and providing a bridge between professional and managerial responsibilities.

<sup>2</sup> Independent Review of Children’s Social Care

## Our Priorities

### Priority 1

**Children, young people and their families must 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 partner 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 has the strategic lead for education in Slough 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 for young people to achieve success 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 particular 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 SEND.

### 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 organisation 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 improvement<sup>3</sup>.

### 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 the improvements we need to make.

### Enabler 2 – Leadership and governance

- Streamline our governance to ensure it is effective and professional.
- 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Action Research into Improvement in Local Children's Services, LGA Spring 2016

### **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**

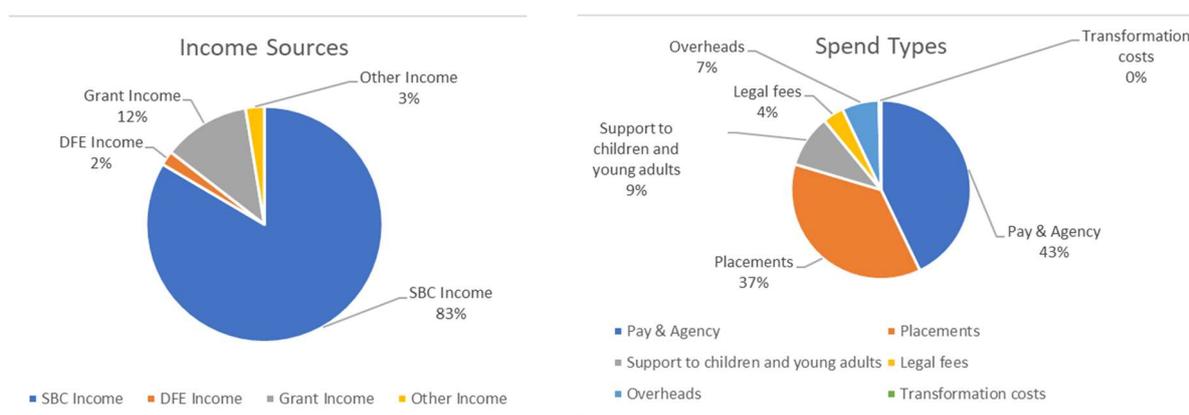
- Align business and financial strategic planning.
- Ensure we achieve the best value for money.
- Producing sound business cases for transformation including invest to save opportunities.

## Our Financial Position

We are a demand led service and the operational costs are driven by the demands made on the service. In order to move forward with our financial plans, we need to demonstrate the financial position we as a Company are currently in and how changes in demand and funding have contributed to this. The table below directly compares 2019/20 to the first year of this business plan, 2023/24.

Costs	Actuals		F'cast		Var.	
	2019/20 £k	2023/24 £k	4 year change £k %		Ave. annual change £k %	
SBC Core Income	(30,104)	(36,067)	(5,963)	20%	(1,193)	4%
DFE Income	(3,649)	(1,544)	2,105	-58%	421	-12%
Other Income	(1,889)	(5,655)	(3,766)	199%	(753)	40%
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>(35,642)</b>	<b>(43,265)</b>	<b>(7,623)</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>(1,525)</b>	<b>4%</b>
Pay	12,100	17,121	5,021	41%	1,004	8%
Agency	3,714	3,495	(219)	-6%	(44)	-1%
Placement Allowances	12,213	17,564	5,351	44%	1,070	9%
Other Child Support Costs	1,910	4,531	2,621	137%	524	27%
Legal Fees	1,846	1,814	(32)	-2%	(6)	0%
Other Overheads	478	3,188	2,710	567%	542	113%
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>35,642</b>	<b>47,714</b>	<b>12,072</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>2,414</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Net Surplus/(Loss)</b>	<b>(0)</b>	<b>4,449</b>	<b>4,449</b>		<b>890</b>	

Where our financial resources come from is shown in the pie chart with income from SBC making up 83% (£36.07m) of all our funding.

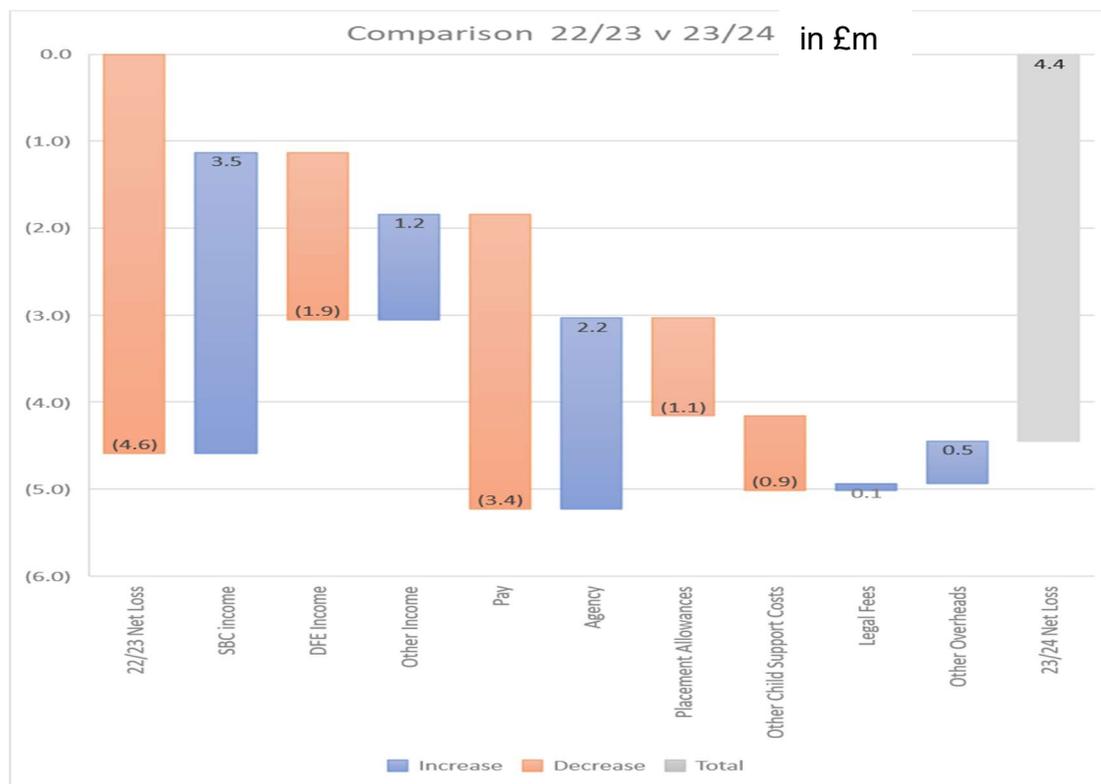


Similarly, the types of expenditure we have can be seen in the pie chart next to Income sources, with the biggest categories of spending being salaries (43%) and placement costs for children in care (37%). Of the total overheads costs, 71% (which equates to £2.2m) relate to recharges going back to SBC.

The table below directly compares 2022/23 to the first year of this business plan, 2023/24.

Costs	22/23	23/24	Variance	Comment
SBC Core Income	(32,606)	(36,068)	(3,462)	Approved increase in Contract Value of £4,632k less funding of in year losses to September 22 of £1,170k.
DfE Income	(2,780)	(853)	1,927	Reduction in income from DfE running costs grant
Other Income	(5,128)	(6,345)	(1,217)	Increase in Home Office funding for UASC offset by one off funding received in 22/23
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>(40,514)</b>	<b>(43,266)</b>	<b>(2,752)</b>	
Pay	13,733	17,121	3,389	Expected improvement in permanent workforce, plus 5% inflation
Agency	5,693	3,495	(2,198)	Reduction in agency workforce, most notably early release of Innovate teams
Placement Allowances	16,435	17,564	1,129	Growth in NMFA carer rates, inflationary uplifts on external providers and growth in overall placement volumes by 14
Other Child Support Co	3,676	4,531	855	Growth in inflationary uplifts on care leaver (£91 per week - £355k) and growth in overall placement volumes by 13 (£770k), (£130k) growth in interpreting due to UASC growth, (£100k) in CWD packages of care - partly funded through health
Legal Fees	1,894	1,814	(80)	Reductions in counsel fees
Other Overheads	3,676	3,188	(488)	Small reductions across all areas including recruitment and professional fees and staff allowances due to reduced overseas recruitment costs, reductions in subscriptions, printing and other overheads
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>45,107</b>	<b>47,713</b>	<b>2,606</b>	
<b>Net Surplus/(Loss)</b>	<b>(4,593)</b>	<b>(4,448)</b>	<b>(145)</b>	

Looking specifically at the inflows and outflows forecast in 23/24 starting with the £4.6m deficit from 22/23, the 'waterfall' diagram below shows that when you add in the £3.5m income from SBC, the reduction of £1.9m in DfE funding etc. the end position is shown as a £4.4m deficit.



Included in this comparison are the increasing change from agency staff to permanent staff:

- The average annual salary change between 22/23 and 23/24 has increased less than 5%
- Overall headcount has increased on 22/23 actuals on the assumption that our vacancy rate will be lower on 23/24 – we have more people on permanent contracts demonstrating commitment to the Company
- Agency numbers are lower in 23/24 than 22/23 and therefore permanent numbers of staff have improved
- 22/23 saw agency staff in key posts of CEx and Operations Director hence the average agency rate for Corporate was so high
- 23/24 has seen successful recruitment to more experienced / higher paid posts of management but that has led to a growth in average salary in permanent staff in Frontline teams
- Corporate services are expecting a reconfiguration midway through 23/24 to incorporate more admin posts from front line services, so this has depressed the average permanent salary but also meant that on a like for like basis, Corporate services have actually reduced payroll spending
- The movement between the increasing average annual salary costs in frontline service and the corresponding decrease in agency costs is caused by successful permanent recruitment to more team manager posts in front line services. These are the highest paid posts after Heads of Service in front line teams and is offset by a corresponding reduction in the average salary in agency staff working in front line teams.
- Admin posts which are predominantly filled by permanent workers and are those on the lowest grades have also transferred into central corporate teams, hence a reduction in permanent average salary in Corporate services, further reducing the average salary in permanent staff in front line teams.

Pay costs Service	22/23 Actual £'000s		22/23 Actual Total		23/24 budget £'000s		23/24 budget Total		Variance £'000s		23/24 budget Total
	Permanent	Agency	Permanent	Agency	Permanent	Agency	Permanent	Agency	Permanent	Agency	
Corporate	£1,845	£566	£2,410	£2,243	£161	£2,404	£398		-£405		-£6
Front Line	£11,624	£5,410	£17,034	£14,879	£3,334	£18,213	£3,255		-£2,076		£1,178
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>£13,469</b>	<b>£5,976</b>	<b>£19,445</b>	<b>£17,121</b>	<b>£3,495</b>	<b>£20,617</b>	<b>£3,653</b>		<b>-£2,481</b>		<b>£1,172</b>
Headcount Service	22/23 Actual		22/23 Actual Total		23/24 budget		23/24 budget Total		Variance		23/24 budget Total
	Permanent	Agency	Permanent	Agency	Permanent	Agency	Permanent	Agency	Permanent	Agency	
Corporate	40.91	5.89	46.80	52.31	3.59	55.90	11.40		-2.30		9.10
Front Line	260.09	59.53	319.62	273.57	43.07	316.64	13.48		-16.46		-2.98
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>301.00</b>	<b>65.42</b>	<b>366.42</b>	<b>325.88</b>	<b>46.66</b>	<b>372.54</b>	<b>24.88</b>		<b>-18.76</b>		<b>6.12</b>
	301.00	65.42									
Ave. salary Service	22/23 Actual		22/23 Actual Total		23/24 budget		23/24 budget Total		Variance		23/24 budget Total
	Permanent	Agency	Permanent	Agency	Permanent	Agency	Permanent	Agency	Permanent	Agency	
Corporate	£45,093	£96,034	£51,504	£42,877	£44,885	£43,006			-£2,216	-£51,149	-£8,498
Front Line	£44,692	£90,881	£53,295	£54,387	£77,411	£57,518	£9,694		-£13,470		£4,223
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>£44,747</b>	<b>£91,345</b>	<b>£53,066</b>	<b>£44,747</b>	<b>£91,345</b>	<b>£55,341</b>	<b>£7,479</b>		<b>-£64,619</b>		<b>£2,275</b>

Corporate will actually have reduced more as there has been a slight reconfiguration of admin staff moving from front line to Corporate services

## Our Demand-Led Service

One of the key points highlighted in the four-year comparison in the section above is that whilst our income has grown on average 4% a year (21% in total) our costs have increased to a greater extent at on average 7% a year (34% in total).

Activity	Actuals		F'cast		Var.	
	2019/20	2023/24	4 year change		change	
	Volume	Volume	Volume	%	Volume	%
Cases	1,422	2,472	1,050	74%	210	15%
Placements	431	462	31	7%	6	1%
Care Leavers in placement	26	65	39	150%	8	30%
<18's UASC	3	51	48	1614%	10	323%
18+ UASC	7	38	32	485%	6	97%

As a demand-led service although we use projections and models as far as possible, we still need to analyse the change in demand of activities we undertake in order to start to explain our financial position. The table above shows an increase in the cases managed by SCF of 74% in that same four-year comparison period and although the number of placements paid for has not seen that level of increase (further details in the table below), the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) has on average tripled each year.

Placement Budget 2023/24 (£'000s)									
	Actual 22/23			Budget 23/24			Variance		
	Volume	Avg weekly rate	Total	Volume	Avg weekly rate	Total	Volume	Avg weekly rate	Total
<b>Children Looked After</b>									
External Residential	19	4,503	4,521	24	4,467	5,490	4	-36	969
Asylum Seeker 16-18 (Semi-Independent)	36	800	1,484	51	800	2,144	16	-0	659
Semi Independent < 18's	18	2,187	2,025	17	1,796	1,621	-0	-392	-404
Secure Remand	1	2,426	99	0	0	0	-1	0	-99
<b>Total Children Looked After</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>2,125</b>	<b>8,129</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>1,923</b>	<b>9,255</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>-202</b>	<b>1,126</b>
<b>Permanency</b>									
Adoption Allowances	75	216	847	71	210	776	-4	-7	-71
Special Guardianship Order	150	205	1,607	150	187	1,456	-0	-19	-150
<b>Permanency total</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>2,454</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>2,233</b>	<b>-5</b>	<b>-15</b>	<b>-221</b>
<b>Fostering</b>									
External Fostering Agency	82	980	4,195	81	1,068	4,483	-2	88	288
In House Foster Carers	71	423	1,558	69	444	1,593	-2	21	35
<b>Fostering Total</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>5,753</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>6,076</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>323</b>
<b>Total Placements</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>16,336</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>729</b>	<b>17,564</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>1,228</b>
<b>Careleavers</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>634</b>	<b>1,711</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>2,165</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>454</b>

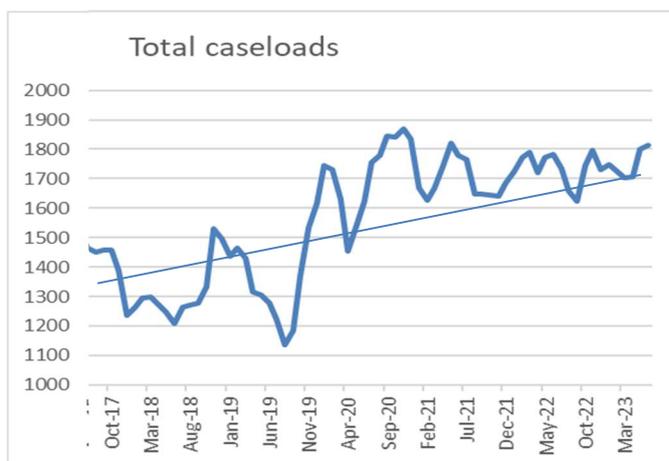
Specifically looking at the UASC increase, we can spotlight on the budgeted cost impact of our UASC population within the budget for 23/24 below – some figures are calculated, others estimated but the overall net pressure would be £1.3m for a cohort of 51 children under 18 and 41 young people over 18. This accounts for 28% of our expected deficit for 23/24.

	Budget £000's
Accommodation, support and subs costs	2,144
Care leavers accommodation, support and subs costs	1,427
Translation services costs	218
Social work, including Age Assessments	141
Legal	50
Home office funding income	<u>(2,723)</u>
<b>Totals spend / adverse position</b>	<b><u>1,256</u></b>

There are currently significant delays being experienced from the Home Office in their processing of funding applications which then brings a risk to SCF with regards to income recovery in the region of an additional £900k for 2023/24. The risk is not assumed in the business plan income levels.

Claims by SCF submitted to the Home Office since November 2022 have not, at time of writing been confirmed in detail, so funding estimated to be in the region of £700k for 22/23, although accrued for, cannot yet be reconciled to what the Home Office have funded.

In addition, to this some of the young people seeking asylum and transferred to Slough have had age assessments that concluded that they are over 18 years old. In these circumstances although the young people may have been supported financially for several months, Home Office funding will only be paid for the first month of a local authority's involvement. This means that income cannot be assumed to be awarded until the Home Office has confirmed that they agree with the young person's claim. This can be months later and as such funding is uncertain. In addition, all UASC accommodated by SCF and meeting certain criteria become care experienced young people and are entitled to services including financial support until the age of 21 and it can be requested until they are 25 years old. Failure to provide or the perception of failing to provide any support can result in the threats of Judicial Review.



This increase in overall demand is further illustrated by the graph on the left which shows a rising trend in the total number of caseloads held within SCF.

These factors have all influenced our financial modelling.

## Our Financial Model

The financial model we have used reflects the activities required to achieve **Our 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.

As demonstrated in the previous section, 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 the 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 a preferred employer 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, England's largest social work charity to further grow our own sustainable and stable workforce. This has enabled the safe release of two managed agency teams considerably earlier than planned. Those savings have allowed additional capacity to focus on improving practice and keeping caseloads at a manageable level.

**Overall, 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 SBC's Cabinet in February 2023.

To validate our assumptions an independent review was carried out in 2022 on our financial modelling the conclusion is known as the 'Mutual Ventures' report. This report is in the public domain and available at the link on this footnote.<sup>4</sup>

Although we cannot reduce the demand we experience as such we can implement strategies to meet it and a number of recommendations were made within the Mutual Ventures to address this.

One such recommendation that was actioned was the early ending and therefore cost avoidance of two managed teams provided by Innovate which released an overall total £1.1m saving.

The whole of the report was taken into account by SCF and our responses to its content and recommendations can be reviewed further in Appendix 8.

Role	Annual costs
Innovate T1	£737,176
Innovate T2	£737,176
Full year cost if teams not released	<u>£1,474,352</u>
<b>LESS</b>	
Replacement team (1 TM and 3SWs)	£107,718
Spend prior to release	
Innovate for 1 mth	£56,396
Innovate for 3 mths	£183,287
	<u>£347,401</u>
<b>Total Saving</b>	<u>£1,126,951</u>

## Our Cashflow

The monthly cash flow as depicted in the table below, without mitigation, suggests that the Company will be in deficit by the end of the financial year 2023/24 – detailed analysis predicts this will happen by November 2023 and at the end of the financial year we will run out of cash. A one-off historical debt with SBC was resolved at the beginning of this financial year.

### CASH FLOW FORECAST

	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24
	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's						
RECEIPTS:	-7,199	-3,651	-3,730	-5,164	-4,297	-4,835	-4,014	-4,014	-4,984	-4,481	-3,863	-4,416
EXPENDITURE:	5,058	5,458	4,452	4,296	4,912	4,393	5,815	5,362	4,401	5,832	4,519	4,419
NET CASHFLOW	-2,141	1,807	722	-869	615	-442	1,801	1,348	-582	1,351	656	3
BANK BALANCE B/F	-2,559	-4,700	-2,893	-2,171	-3,040	-2,425	-2,867	-1,066	282	-300	1,050	1,706
BANK BALANCE C/F	-4,700	-2,893	-2,171	-3,040	-2,425	-2,867	-1,066	282	-300	1,050	1,706	1,709
SECONDARY ACCOUNT BALANCE	-31	-31	-31	-31	-31	-31	-31	-31	-31	-31	-31	-31
Total	<b>-4,731</b>	<b>-2,924</b>	<b>-2,202</b>	<b>-3,071</b>	<b>-2,456</b>	<b>-2,898</b>	<b>-1,097</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>-331</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>1,675</b>	<b>1,678</b>

The 3 year cash flow below suggests that were prior year losses to be funded during 23/24, then the company could remain cash positive over the term of the business plan.

<sup>4</sup> <https://democracy.slough.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx>

	£'000		
	23/24	24/25	25/26
<b>Opening Cash Balance</b>	<b>2,559</b>	<b>-1,709</b>	<b>-4,123</b>
Core Contract Payments (VAT inc.)	43,489	45,133	45,967
DfE Running Costs Grant	1,179	381	381
Home Office Funding	1,917	2,981	3,040
YJB / EYJS Grants	479	388	388
Pupil Premium	228	465	437
Movement in SBC & other debtors	5,289	0	0
Other Income	2,067	2,515	1,584
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>54,647</b>	<b>51,863</b>	<b>51,797</b>
Payroll Costs	-16,107	-17,372	-17,739
Agency (VAT inc.)	-4,851	-3,108	-2,795
JLT	-2,158	-2,220	-2,059
Placements Expenditure	-19,672	-18,544	-17,290
Other Expenditure	-7,329	-7,082	-6,738
SBC Recharges	-2,191	-2,191	-2,191
VAT	-6,083	-3,760	-3,995
Movement in creditors	-526	0	0
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>-58,915</b>	<b>-54,277</b>	<b>-52,807</b>
<b>Closing Cash Balance</b>	<b>-1,709</b>	<b>-4,123</b>	<b>-5,133</b>
<b>Mitigation</b>			
21/22 In Year Losses (Vat exc.)	719		
22/23 In Year Losses (Vat exc.)	4,593		
Total Prior Year Losses (Vat exc.)	5,312		
<b>Adjusted Closing Cash Balance</b>	<b>3,603</b>	<b>1,189</b>	<b>179</b>

Our income is expected to reduce over time as the DfE grant funding prescribed for the running costs of the company will reduce again from 24/25. Expenditure is expected to decrease as cost reductions are made in reducing SCF over the 3-year term. However, the gap between income *in* and expenditure *out* is widening, and cash deficits are increasing year on year.

A decision has not been made as yet on the in-year requests that have been made for funding prior year losses of £5,312k (these were caused by the increase in demand during and following the pandemic). **The non funding of the prior losses are causing a significant drain to the operating cash of SCF, resulting in us running out of cash in financial year 23/24.** If these prior losses were to be approved and funding received it is expected that SCF would remain cash positive over the 3-year term.

## Our Balance Sheet

SCF's balance sheet shows the projected losses for the end of 2023/24. The table below shows the projected movement on the projected balance sheet to March 2024, showing cash balances as negative with a reducing reserves position.

The balance as at 31 March 2024 is the accumulation of unfunded prior year losses from 21/22 through 23/24.

In order to remain a going concern, additional funding of £9,760k is required.

- £5,312k accumulated losses from years 21/22 and 22/23 – subject of previous in year requests to fund
- £4,448k – expected deficit from 23/24 business plan

The long-term loan of £5m from Slough Borough Council remains unpaid during this time and has been used in prior years to ensure the company meets its liabilities whilst it has experienced year on year losses following increasing demand that has been unfunded.

## Slough Children First Ltd

<b>Balance Sheet</b>	<b>as at 31</b>	<b>as at 31 Mar</b>
	<b>Mar 2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Debtors	6,860	4,326
Cash at bank and in hand / (overdrawn)	2,216	(1,709)
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>9,076</b>	<b>2,617</b>
<b>Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year</b>	<b>(9,388)</b>	<b>(7,377)</b>
Total current liabilities	(9,388)	(7,377)
Net current assets / (Liabilities)	(312)	(4,760)
<b>Long Term Creditors - Receipts in Advance</b>	<b>(5,000)</b>	<b>(5,000)</b>
Total long term liabilities	(5,000)	(5,000)
<b>Net Assets / (Liabilities)</b>	<b>(5,312)</b>	<b>(9,760)</b>
<b>Reserves</b>		
Income and Expenditure Account	(5,312)	(9,760)
<b>Reserves</b>	<b>(5,312)</b>	<b>(9,760)</b>

## Our Profit and Loss Account

The table below shows the projected profit and loss account over the life of this business plan. The £4.632m increase in contract growth from 22/23 was awarded as ongoing rather than as a one off. Previous iterations of the business plan had assumed all but the inflation element of that funding was to be a one off.

	Plan 2023/24 £000's	Plan 2024/25 £000's	Plan 2025/26 £000's
<b>Income</b>			
SBC Income	(36,067)	(37,511)	(38,206)
SBC other income	(100)	(100)	(100)
DFE Income	(853)	(168)	(168)
Grant Income	(5,142)	(5,267)	(4,337)
Other Income	(1,104)	(1,250)	(1,274)
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>(43,266)</b>	<b>(44,296)</b>	<b>(44,085)</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>			
Pay & Agency	20,439	19,962	20,068
Placements	17,564	16,557	15,438
Support to children and young adults	4,531	4,667	4,369
Legal fees	1,814	1,850	1,716
Overheads	3,188	3,210	3,227
Transformation costs	178	82	84
<b>Total revenue expenditure</b>	<b>47,714</b>	<b>46,329</b>	<b>44,902</b>
<b>Revenue Surplus / (Deficit)</b>	<b>(4,448)</b>	<b>(2,033)</b>	<b>(816)</b>

The table below sets out the funding requirement for Slough Children First over the next 3 year period.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
<b>Total Funding Requirement from SBC</b>		<b>40,515</b>	<b>39,544</b>	<b>39,022</b>
<b>Made up of:</b>				
22/23 Contract value	31,435	31,435	31,435	31,435
Uplift on interest payable		11	11	11
Contract Inflation		1,051	1,663	1,900
Pay Inflation		925	1,758	2,216
Additional agreed on going core contract uplift		2,644	2,644	2,644
One off In year funding	1,170			
	32,605	36,067	37,511	38,206
Incurring / Expected deficit	4,593	4,448	2,033	816
<b>Funding Requirement</b>	<b>37,198</b>	<b>40,515</b>	<b>39,544</b>	<b>39,022</b>
One Off funding to cover prior year unfunded losses		5,312		
<b>Total Funding Requirement</b>	<b>37,198</b>	<b>45,827</b>	<b>39,544</b>	<b>39,022</b>
Less currently agreed Core contract value		36,067	36,067	36,067
<b>Annual change in funding requirement</b>		<b>9,760</b>	<b>3,477</b>	<b>2,955</b>
<b>Minimum annual additional cash required to remain solvent - including 20% tolerance</b>		<b>2,051</b>	<b>2,896</b>	<b>1,212</b>

Appendix 10 includes further detail demonstrating the funding requirement changes between 22/23 and 23/24.

## Our Plans for Years 2 (2024/25) and 3 (2025/26)

Our financial modelling includes the delivery of our improvement plan in Appendix 7 and covers the actions being undertaken in Year 1. Further details on the additional opportunities and risks for Year 1, along with any mitigating actions, can be seen in Appendix 9. However this business plan is a three-year plan and additional approaches include:

- 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.
- Health contributions to placement costs need further exploration and we will work with an 'expert' to review and secure joint funding arrangements where possible.
- 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
- Reconfiguration of caseloads across frontline teams
- Deep dives to be undertaken on standalone services to review structures, locations, sell additional capacity and benchmark fee/payment schemes



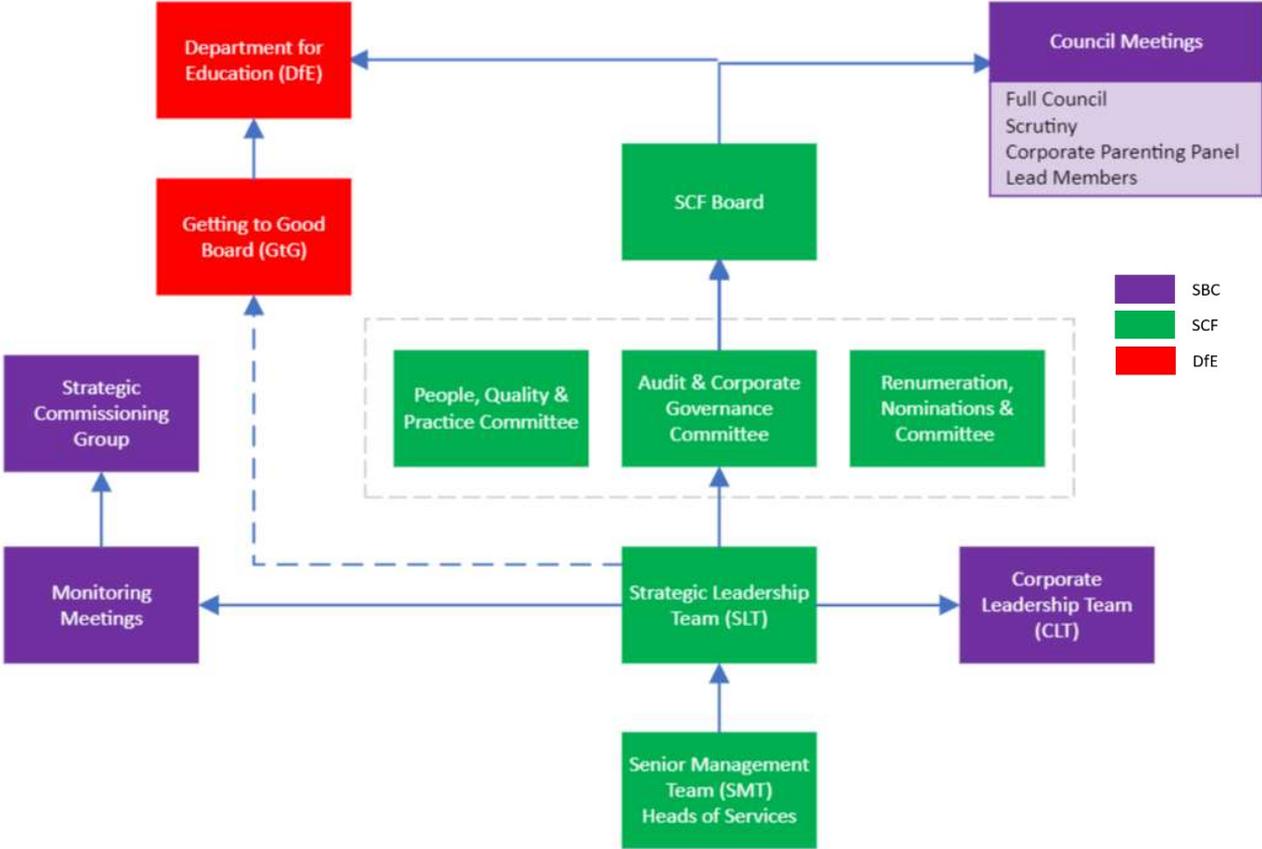
### Board Committees

The Board operates through committees to monitor progress in detail.

- Audit and Corporate Governance Committee (ACGC):**  
 Joint Chairs            Nina Robinson and Steven Mason
- Remuneration, Nominations and Appointments Committee (RNAC):**  
 Chair                      Raj Bhamber
- People, Quality and Practice Committee (PQPC),**  
 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.

### Governance Arrangements



### The Strategic Leadership Team

The Strategic 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.



## Appendix 2 – Our Financial Oversight

**This paper covers the following matters with the aim of offering assurance to both DfE and DLUCH Commissioners that robust financial oversight is in place in respect of:**

- The Role of the Slough Children First Company Board
- Financial Decision-Making Controls
- Changing the culture

### **The Role of the SCF Board.**

Slough Children First's Company Board meets on a three-monthly basis. The previous permanent chair stepped down in May 2023 and whilst the DfE conducted a procurement exercise to appoint his replacement, Paul Moffat, our DfE Commissioner, held the chair on a temporary basis. The successful candidate, chair Simon Baker, assumed the role on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2023. There are three sub-committees namely People, Quality and Practice; Audit and Corporate Governance; and Remuneration, Nomination Appointments Committee, each chaired by a Non-Executive Director.

SCF Board's agendas have included financial information however, the general view on reflection is that what had been provided to the Board, and separately to the Director, was detailed but did not allow them to have sufficient strategic oversight into the Company's financial situation and therefore the effective and efficient running of the Company. Such were the challenges that the Company's Business Plan was not agreed and the relationship between the Council and the Company was a casualty of this situation and may have contributed to the inadequate judgement for Leadership and Governance in the Ofsted inspection in January 2023. The Mutual Ventures report specifically mentions the need to 'strengthen the Company's finance function to ensure that the Finance Director can have a more strategic role.'

To strengthen the Board's financial acumen and to give the Council greater oversight of SCF's financial arrangements, the SBC appointed Steve Mason as its second council representative on the board and he assumed the role in May 2023. Steve has experience of working with arrangements like those in Slough and has also been a Section 151 local authority officer. Both of the Council representatives on the panel are required to balance the Council's challenging financial position with particular regard to the restrictions placed upon it by the Section 114 notice and the financial, mainly demand driven, issues in SCF. To support them with this task a pre-meet is being put in place before each board for the council representatives, the Council's section 151 officer, the SBC Chief Executive and the Council's stakeholder representative to highlight financial issues.

The SCF Director of Finances and Resources left their position at the end of March 2023 due to personal circumstances. A Business and Planning Manager had just been appointed and the resources aspect of the Director of Finances role has, in the main, been transferred to

that new post. SCF's longstanding Finance Business Partner took on aspects of the Director of Finance's role on a short-term basis and has grown to become a valuable member of the Strategic Leadership Team.

Significant consideration had to be given to recruiting another Financial Director particularly given the changed remit of the role. The other aspects requiring consideration were the proposed back-office merger. That meant that the finance team might be merged back into the Council and so the role might not exist other than in the short term and would need now only be a part-time role. We have therefore recruited to the role on a day rate for 75 days per year. The days can be deployed as necessary in line with business needs. The new incumbent from July 2023 is Chris Reilly who has a wide range of experience in the commercial world, bringing a different perspective and challenges to SCF's financial management. As Chris is new in post, he has not been able to influence the writing of the Business and Improvement Plan as much as he will be able to going forward.

Therefore, the financial basis of the Company is likely to be firmer for the following reasons.

- The experience of the new SCF board chair
- The recent appointment of a council appointed director
- The 'pre-meets' between the council appointed directors, the council's Executive Financial Director (s151 director)
- The appointment of a new financial director with a wide range of experience
- The wider experience and expertise of the longstanding business partner which will allow the Financial Director to concentrate on the strategic aspects of his role.
- A permanent SCF leadership team.

### Financial Decision Making. Direct Controls.

Forum/ work	What is overseen?	Who is involved?	What will we achieve?	Impact/ challenges?
External Placements Panel	All children who are living in placements other than our own 'in-house' foster care placements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent and child assessment centres</li> </ul>	Head of Sufficiency and Performance (Chair)  Virtual School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The right home for a child in order to meet their immediate and long-term needs.</li> <li>• Identification of cost unit savings per</li> </ul>	This is a new forum however it is already identifying cost savings

Forum/ work	What is overseen?	Who is involved?	What will we achieve?	Impact/ challenges?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residential children's homes</li> <li>Supported and semi-supported accommodation for care experienced young people.</li> <li>Unaccompanied asylum seeking (UAS) children, all placement types</li> <li>Unregistered placements</li> </ul>	Finance Manager  Placements  Commissioning  Housing representation would be advantageous for discussions about care experienced young people – an area for development*	placements for settled and long-term placements  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify children who can move on from semi-supported to their own accommodation.</li> </ul>	Finance colleagues to present 'live' information to the panel on the financial impact of placement changes.  Local housing market for young people is challenging. Further work needed with Housing colleagues to attend panel/ create housing panel for care leavers.
Legal Gateway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decisions to make public law applications.</li> <li>Decision to enter Pre-Proceedings (step before court to safeguard children to try and avoid court)</li> <li>Tracking court work to final order</li> <li>Financial decisions for assessments as part of pre-court and court proceedings</li> </ul>	Head of Family Support and Safeguarding  Principal Lawyer JLT  Service Manager IRO  Placements team  Fostering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction in the number of new applications to court</li> <li>Reduction of emergency applications to court. No unplanned applications without approval from the Director of Operations.</li> </ul>	Slight reduction in numbers of children entering PLO in July. Decrease expected to continue. Significant decrease in time spent in PLO leading to 6 exiting in June and 10 in July.  No unplanned applications in July

Forum/ work	What is overseen?	Who is involved?	What will we achieve?	Impact/ challenges?
		<p>Adoption agency (RAA)</p> <p>DCS and Director of Operations challenging requests from JLT to commission counsel as a default position.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grip and reduction on commissioned assessments</li> </ul> <p>Direction of Operations' approval required to commission</p>	<p>ISW cost for assessments appears to be reducing month on month Apr- 14K, May 21K, June £8.5K (average amount £2.5K)</p> <p>Number of children In proceedings remains high with 72 Interim Care Orders – court backlog issues and need for greater grip</p> <p>Potential 'invest of save/practice improvement support of Court Work Progression Manager to support completion of proceedings in as timely a way as possible. To be costed</p>
Continuing Health Care and Health	Financial contributions from Health to complex packages of care for children with a high level of health needs.	A specialist in funding complex packages was commissioned to look for income potential from	Reduction in care package costs to by funded by SCF	Potential cost avoidance to be established from the report but ball park figure is £90K

Forum/ work	What is overseen?	Who is involved?	What will we achieve?	Impact/ challenges?
contribution work		health for packages of care. - Heads of Service Commissioning Finance		
Access to Resources Panel (ATR)	<p>This panel is split into two parts:</p> <p><u>Part 1</u> Section 17 spend for support or services over £500 which are not covered in Legal gateway or external placement.</p> <p>This may include specialist assessment or support to prevent a care admission.</p> <p><u>Part 2 – children with disabilities and short breaks</u></p> <p>This is to consider, review and agree (or decline) specific short breaks</p>	<p><u>Part 1</u> Head of Service for Assessment service Finance Virtual School</p> <p><u>Part 2:</u> Commissioning Heads of Service – Regulated Services and Children with disabilities</p>	<p><u>Part 1</u> Decisions to agree spend under Section 17 and support costs are scrutinized by panel to ensure that we only provide financial support when necessary and when this is not available from elsewhere.</p> <p><u>Part 2</u> Fulfils out statutory duties to children and families with complex needs.</p>	<p>Oversight of spend to allow for forecasting.</p> <p>Membership allows other funding streams to be identified</p> <p>Ensured we can meet the needs of children to keep them safe and prevent care admissions (more costly)</p> <p><u>Part 2</u> Rigour in costings presented to the panel.</p>

Forum/ work	What is overseen?	Who is involved?	What will we achieve?	Impact/ challenges?
	<p>support for children with complex needs.</p> <p>These breaks form part of support to families where they are parenting children with overly complex needs. This includes the provision of Direct Payments, overnight stays or packages of care to be commissioned to support families.</p>	<p>Finance</p> <p>Ratification by Director of Operations</p>	<p>Provides oversight of spend and looks for reduction in packages.</p>	<p>These services are statutory services and for many families, without which there would be a significant pressure which may result in family breakdown and expensive looked after arrangements</p>
<p>Expenditure Control Panel (ECP) process</p>	<p>All expenditure over £500.00 except placements, short break costs, court costs are agreed by SBC's ECP panels informed by financial business cases</p>	<p>SBC panels</p>	<p>Ongoing Expenditure Control – providing evidence and satisfying Council Colleagues of the need to spend money. .</p>	<p>SBC has suggested that SCF should now manage its own finances and therefore does not need to engage in the ECP process. This is under consideration as it is an effective oversight mechanism but is also time consuming. Parameters to be changed instead? Decision to be made end August 2023</p>
<p>Decisions to agree child becoming</p>	<p>This decision has been delegated to Heads of Service</p>	<p>Heads of Service with critical friend discussion</p>	<p>Ensure only those children who need to become looked after do so.</p>	<p>Herd indicator report shows new looked after arrangements are in-line with expectations – 11</p>

Forum/ work	What is overseen?	Who is involved?	What will we achieve?	Impact/ challenges?
looked after (emergency)				May, 3 June and has been consistent for the last 7 months.

### Changing the Culture in SCF – Best Value spending.

This work must be aligned to the overarching vision for children and families in Slough which is to be 'Happy, Safe, Loved, Thriving' and the financial controls, including the role of the board, as set out above. The imperative to improve practice and therefore outcomes for Slough's most vulnerable children and young people cannot be seen as a reason to spend more money. To be more precise, although it is an essential part of a social worker's role to advocate for the children and families with whom they are working, all spend must be set against assessed need. Likewise leaders must not think about training and development as being based around expensive commissioned training programmes but use information from training and skills gap analysis to consider what can be done through avenues such as sector led support.

Culture change is being approached through various routes including:

- A clear message that the Business and Improvement Plan aims to bring together practice improvement and financial planning into one overarching plan because they are mutually dependent
- Regular updates on the Business and Improvement Plan at weekly 'all staff' briefing sessions. (includes all staff in People (Children's) directorate). These messages
  - Endorse the fact that there is money, but it must be spent wisely and well. Children's needs must be met but not necessarily families'/professionals' additional expectations
  - Have introduced the requirement to evidence Best Value
  - Emphasised that good practice costs less than poor practice – e.g., well-planned court proceedings can save placement costs.
  - Stressed the importance of use of 'self.' Staff are our best resource by far.

However frequently these messages are repeated, the current budget monitoring arrangements need to be reset and rescheduled on the advice of the new Finance Director and the Finance Business Partner, to provide clearer lines of financial awareness and accountability.

When the Business and Improvement Plan is signed off by Cabinet a 'Turning the Curve' 'all-staff awareness event' will be held with the aim of :

- Promoting staff awareness of the Vision for vulnerable children and young people
- Supporting every member of staff to be clear about their role in implementing Slough's Business and Improvement Plan including the judicious use of resources
- Identifying what 'Best Value' looks like in social work/social care terms. For example, when a social worker visits a residential children's, home how will they assess, as part of ensuring the young person is being well cared for, that their care is the best value for money.

SB. 23/08/2023

## Appendix 3 – Our Recommendations from Ofsted



# Inspection of Slough local authority children's services

**Inspection dates:** 23 January to 3 February 2023

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Grade</b>
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 4 – 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

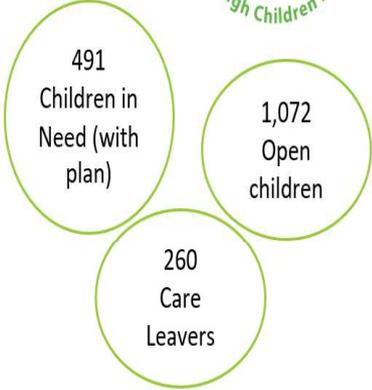
Number of employees

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



*Demographics being updated following review and inclusion of data from the Slough Observatory – therefore a new version will be included in the public version.*

## Appendix 5 – 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 6 - Our Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The KPIs listed below are the initial indicators the Company was using to measure the impacts of our delivery. A new dashboard is in development, and these will cover our contractual KPIs that can and will be discussed at the contact monitoring meetings with SBC.

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 7 - Our Improvement Plan

### Executive Summary

The purpose of SCF's immediate plan was to identify the key themes and areas for improvement that arose from the Ofsted inspection outcomes that were published in March and to ensure robust actions were in place to improve children's services in Slough. The period was from April to June 2023 and was succeeded by this Continuing Improvement Plan which also incorporated those actions exceeding that short period.

This plan is being used to monitor progress and provide assurance by reporting regularly to the SCF Board, Slough Borough Council and Getting to Good Board (chaired by the DfE Commissioner).

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.

The actions listed within the Company's Improvement Plan are not the limits of the work being undertaken – each Service has their own individual delivery plan which underpins the wider improvement plan.

### Improvement Plan

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

1. Strategic approach,
2. Leadership and governance
3. Engaging and supporting the workforce
4. Engaging partners
5. Practice and performance (Building the Supporting Apparatus)
6. Fostering innovation
7. Better (Judicious) use of resources

The participation of children and young people is a theme running through the sections listed above.

The plan below is a general overview only as it does not list action owners or updates on progress to date.

Ambition for Children and Young People	Action	Due by
<b>Strategic Approach</b>		
To ensure focus on improvement and transformation leading to better outcomes for Children, Young People, and their families	Ensure that key priority strategic actions have Programme and Project support	30 September 2023
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	30 April 2023
Ensure there is sufficient resource to support practice improvement and carry forward sufficiency transformation work.	Resource, appoint and deploy a 'Sufficiency lead' to lead the development and implementation of: Sufficiency Strategy; Corporate Parenting Strategy; Permanency strategy	30 September 2023
To identify emerging trends and inform strategic planning and transformation work	To develop forecasting and demand models through contribution to wider SBC review on future investment in IT and Informatics	30 November 2023
To support the development of a 'High Support and High Challenge' culture	Create a system which supports a learning model for the whole child's journey to work across children's services by launching a revised Quality Assurance Framework	30th March 2024
To ensure senior managers have sufficient capacity and oversight of key decision-making processes and the timeliness and impact of outcomes for children.	Develop and implement a revised, robust QA audit programme	30 September 2023
To improve the performance framework	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	31 December 2023
Produce a sufficiency strategy based on current demand and needs of our Children Looked After population and forecasted demand	Develop and gain agreement for the Sufficiency Strategy and move into a Sufficiency Project Board	30 August 2023
To strengthen the impact of the Youth Justice Board	Seek an LGA/ Peer review of Youth Justice and prepare for inspection and SEF through task and finish group	30 September 2023
To ensure strategy in place for Children and Young People to have opportunities to shape the services they receive	Co-produce a Participation Strategy with Children and Young People.	30 September 2023
To support participation of young people in a meaningful way	Provide training to young people to enable them to contribute to high level meetings, recruitment etc.	30 November 2023
<b>Leadership &amp; Governance</b>		
To develop a shared vision and approach to the transformation of services for children and young people.	Consult with Staff in SCF on vision for ownership of Business and Improvement Plan	01 June 2023
To increase capacity to support the delivery of QA and performance	Submission of business case to DFE to increase capacity at senior level for 6 months	30 June 2023
Lead the development of good corporate parenting for our children in care and care experienced young people	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,	30 September 2023
Address recommendations for the development of the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB)	Reset Corporate Parenting Panel structure and governance ensuring that all Members and Officers are clear on their role.	30 September 2023
Ensure members of the CPB have the training required to fulfil their roles	Corporate Parenting training offered to all Members in accordance with their involvement with Children's Services	30 July 2023
Care Leaving to become a Protected Characteristic	To write proposal and take to Cabinet via Lead Member	30 September 2023
Involve Members and senior officers in Practice shadowing opportunities and Practice Weeks	Develop a programme of Shadowing Practice opportunities for CEx, Lead Member, DCS, DSC and CP Champions – twice per year.	31 December 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 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.	30 November 2023
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.	31 October 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.	01 July 2023
Leaders will implement and demonstrate our practice model across the organisation 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.	30 September 2023
<b>Engaging and supporting the workforce</b>		
Young people will have their voices heard in the recruitment process	Involve children and young people in redesigning our online recruitment strategy	31 October 2023
To support 'staff pipeline opportunities' for Newly Qualified Social Workers	Launch Slough's first Frontline Unit through recruitment to new posts	01 September 2023
To support staff pipeline opportunities for career progression to enhance retention	Complete and implement the Career progression Framework	31 December 2023
To enhance the skills, knowledge and experience of the whole Children's workforce to better meet children's and young person's needs.	Undertake a skills gap analysis to inform a workforce training programme across frontline staff, managers and leaders.	31 December 2023
To ensure that the workforce are clear and engaged about their role in the Children's Services Improvement Programme.	Process to begin for all staff in Children's Services to have an annual appraisal	30 September 2023
To progressively strengthen the quality of strategic and frontline leadership.	Design a leadership development programme for leaders and managers at all levels of the system of support for children	30 September 2023
For other stakeholders to directly contribute to the Getting to Good Board.	To set up an ongoing shadow Getting to Good Board	31 July 2023
To present SCF as an employer with clear focus on staff's wellbeing to existing workforce and for those considering joining Slough	To formalise the wellbeing offer including, MHFAs, wellbeing check and launch	31 December 2023
To review expectations of home v office-based working	To develop guidance about hybrid working and approach	31 December 2023
To provide apprenticeships for care experienced young people	Increasing opportunities for apprenticeships and work experience placements across Slough council and partner agencies	31 March 2024
To ensure staff understand their responsibilities for health and safety	Raise the profile of Health and Safety obligations	31 December 2023
<b>Engaging with partners</b>		
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 partners where they want to raise concerns or compliments about practice including a reporting back mechanism Agree clear and achievable strategic priorities as a partnership.	30 September 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	31 August 2023
To demonstrate clear improvements in working alongside Community and Voluntary Sector; and faith leaders/ groups.	To produce firm action plan to deliver EH Strategy that includes Comm and Vol sector and faith leaders	30 September 2023
Undertake regular multi-agency audits into key themes	Include multi-agency thematic audits with regular reports to SPB and G2G	30 September 2023
To facilitate ongoing support and training around complex safeguarding issues	To design and implement a regular training cycle for FGM, HBV, radicalisation and exploitation.	31 October 2023
To increase awareness of Private Fostering arrangements through campaign	Review materials and devise comms plan to raise Private Fostering across the partnership to support identification of children who are privately fostered to ensure that referrals to access support are made to Social Care	31 October 2023
To strengthen the Multi-Agency Strategic Hub Partnership	Look to increase partnership presence in the MASH	31 March 2024
To raise the focus of Youth Justice within the Company	Include Youth Justice Service in Children's Improvement Group and maintain audit programme to drive improvement in delivery of support to this cohort	30 September 2023

SEND linkages	Tracking and escalation process to be in place to ensure that EHCP advice requests to be returned within one week with good quality information	30 May 2023
To provide support for care experienced young people - clear and concise in support available to them	Work across the partnership including housing, to deliver local offer.	31 December 2023
<b>Practice and Performance</b>		
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	30 September 2023
Provide targeted practice support to improve the quality of services to children and review impact	Put in place programme of Workshops and Practice Learning sets, including staff feedback, to support. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision and Management oversight</li> <li>• Use of chronology to inform practice.</li> <li>• Plans and planning.</li> <li>• Case summaries to support direction of travel.</li> </ul>	30 June 2023
Embed audit programme to improve the quality of services to children and review impact	Our audit work evaluates impact of workshops on practice.	31 May 2023
Improve management oversight and touchpoints 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	31 December 2023
Increase the timeliness of decision making for Children	To re-educate operational teams on providing timely and accurate information so that Initial Child Protection Conferences take place within the statutory timescales	31 December 2023
To prevent unnecessary court applications and look for more supportive outcomes	Reduce emergency applications to Court by having clear senior manager oversight of all decision via legal gateway.	30 June 2023
Children entering the Public Law Outline process will benefit from their wider family and network being explored to provide support, or to be a carer if they cannot stay at home.	Where needs may require legal intervention, this is done in a planned way and utilising PLO (Pre-Proceedings)	30 June 2023
To provide a clear and rationalised plan for the child, including clarifying the support provided.	We will ensure that tracking is completed within the legal gateway process and that final care planning meetings are undertaken	31 August 2023
A clear process is in place to review children's permanence arrangements, including supporting children to their permanence plan as soon as possible	Review mechanism for children living at home subject to placement with parents to be developed within a Permanence Monitoring Group framework.	31 August 2023
To link into wider Council plan to develop 'self-serve' access to live data	To contribute to SCF requirements re PowerBI and Annex A	31 March 2024
To finalise 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.	01 October 2023
IROs and CP chairs through their oversight will support consistency, challenge and a focus on the child's needs and voice.	To implement Escalations in 'Forms' within ICS . This- will provide an audit trail and be reportable in line with Dispute Resolution policy	30 September 2023
Children will have plans that are progressed in a timely manner - any drift and delay will be addressed	Midway form already in place for Ch, need to implement for CLA - can then formally report	30 September 2023
Safe space for care experienced young people	Provide a 'pop-in' space for care experienced young people to be scoped and found	30 October 2023
For LADO to provide scrutiny and oversight where professional issues have been raised.	To schedule LADO work into the Audit cycle as part of dip sampling.	30 November 2023
Children are supported by the right team to meet their needs.	Review and amend the case transfer policy. Supports 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	30 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.	31 December 2023
Adoption plans are progressed for children where this is appropriate	We will strengthen early permanence considerations through legal gateway and the Regional Adoption Agency sitting on panel.	30 September 2023

Joint housing protocol benefits from CSC input	Contribute to discussions with Housing to ensure meeting legislation and CEYP requirements	30 November 2023
YP know how to access help and professionals with regards to homelessness	Revise and refresh homelessness for 16- and 17-year-old leaflets	30 September 2023
<b>Fostering Innovation</b>		
To identify opportunities to locate social work teams in the Early Help service	To locate the Frontline unit within Early Help to provide opportunity for early support and brief intervention to prevent needs escalating.	30 October 2023
Support children to stay at home by preventing family breakdown	Explore opportunities to create edge of care support within the Borough – No Wrong Door, Multi Systemic Therapy (MST), Functional Family Therapy (FFT) etc	30 October 2023
To widen the use of Mockingbird (fostering model)	Explore introducing a second Mockingbird constellation	30 October 2023
To reduce high number of referrals for unborn children demonstrating good practice in relationship with <b>early permanency</b> practice.	To develop practice standard; consult on the existing pre-birth tool and build into practice system	30 November 2023
Explore option for court work progression manager to increase oversight of care proceedings, improving grip and reducing drift and delay	To look at options for supporting Court Work Progression	30 September 2023
To review our operating model to provide locality/ teams 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	30 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	01 January 2024
To review MACE arrangements across the partnership to strengthen operational and strategic oversight	Get agreement at MACE to revise contextual safeguarding strategy - establish task and finish group (revise policies and procedures around CS)	31 December 2023
To strengthen the oversight of children who become missing from home	Clarify policy and procedure including guidance for staff. Implement revised procedures and evidence with robust reporting	30 September 2023
To strengthen the oversight of children vulnerable to exploitation.	Review, update and launch risk assessment tool - following #71	31 March 2024
<b>Judicious use of resources</b>		
For the Company to live within financial means whilst meeting children's needs.	Deliver an SCF's approved Business and Improvement Plan	31 March 2024
To gain oversight of all external placements	Put in place external placement panel in place to regularly review all external placements	30 June 2023
To reduce overall spend in Joint Legal Team space which has arisen because of high demand and lack of availability and expertise in JLT	Put in place gatekeeping to reduce reliance on legal to provide care planning advice and decisions, ensuring that they are able to advise on a well-articulated and considered plan. (social worker is the expert)	31 March 2024
To reduce cost of independent assessments in Public Law Outline cases	Explore options to create a 'bank' of ISW's to complete work Explore Court Assessment Team (CAT) options internally to reduce legal spend	30 October 2023
To delete the managed teams from the current structure	Put in place plans to exit the remaining Innovate team	30 August 2023
To identify drift, avoid high-cost placements and support children to live in appropriate accommodation.	Implement revised process, TOR, scope and chairing arrangements for Legal Gateway, Permanency Management Group and High-cost placement panel	31 August 2023

## Appendix 8 - Our Response to the Mutual Ventures Report (2022)

The Mutual Ventures report was commissioned by the DfE in mid-2022, reported in November 2022 and was agreed by SBC's Cabinet in December 2022.

The aim of this piece of work is to set out the actions contained in the report and set out and update on the work that have been taken forward and explain why others have not or could not be progressed. It will form part of the Slough Children First Business and Improvement Plan for 2023/24 - 2025/26.

Report rec. or identified issue	Mutual Ventures Report Comment	Assessed priority from MV report	Suggested current priority	Current position	Further Comments	Benchmarking/Statistics/Costs
<b>Workforce: 'The business plan rightly identifies 'stability of workforce as the key challenge for the service. It is also the key prerequisite for improving both the financial operational effectiveness of the service and the quality of outcomes for children and young people.' (MV report pg. 9)</b>						
Retention package	Salary needs to be competitive but does not address the main reason for staff leaving - i.e., staff caseloads.  Agency SW staff at 25%. Reduced in July from 41% in June due to exit of Innovate.	Low	Low	Staffing increasingly stable. Turnover reduced. 16% for all staff, 15% for case holding social workers. Highest number of agency staff in CLA. % of agency staff in CLA.  50% of agency SW staff in CLA, not including short term age assessment resource. Includes maternity cover where applicable, although mat leave in SW tends to be covered through existing staff except in fostering as smaller team. Caseloads manageable.	Caseloads monitored on a weekly basis. Model the decrease of agency staff in the Children Looked After (CLA) service (in years 2 and 3 projections).  Looking to decrease % agency from 50% to 30% by end March 24.	Early Help - 30 Assessment Service - 20.9 Safeguarding and Family Support -18.3 Looked After - 13.75 Young Person's Adviser - 29 Conference Chairs - 75.9 Independent Reviewing Officers - 56.9
Family Support Workforce - skills mix	The proposal to includes developing a family support workforce (non-social work qualified) to support social workers. This could be productive given the difficulty in recruiting and retaining social workers. We believe the attention to skill mix is a good direction.	High	High	WT 2023 supports move to Child in Need (CiN) at non-SW level. The model is to be developed further informed by national pilots. However, is likely to be case holding rather than social work support	Current planning is to model non-social work qualified staff to replace agency social work staff in the front door and social work teams. In line with Working together recommendations which are out for consultation. Opportunity for savings in 2024/25	If 10% of agency social workers were replaced by Family Support Workers - saving of £88K, if 20% - £184K, if 30% - £276K.
De-commission Innovate (managed teams)	It is concerning to see that SCF see the continued use of Innovate teams until March 2025. The senior leaders are acutely aware of the negative impact of such teams, but they feel they have no alternative in order to limit the caseloads.	High	N/A	One Innovate team left April 2023, the second June 2023. Caseloads not adversely affected, Some concern at level of practice in the innovate teams which has left more complex work needing to be progressed. This may have an impact on legal costs. In order to release the teams more quickly a Building Practice Team has been put into place consisting of one team manager and three social workers for this financial year. Costs for this team are £236k.	Complete	The full year costs of Innovate if retained through 2023/24 would be 1,474,352.57. Spend prior to release £239,683.00. Saving £1,126,951.57 (minus cost of Building Practice workers for 9 months).
<b>Early Help: 'SCF is looking the rationalise its continuum of care through investment in prevention and early help services.' (MV report pg.10)</b>						
Develop Family Information Service	<b>Cost £114k/annum.</b> Will have a beneficial effect of relieving pressures at the front door enabling other invest to save service developments however, it will probably not have much of an impact on caseloads in the safeguarding and CLA teams which has been identified as the key issue in the business plan or make direct financial savings. <b>Little financial impact.</b>	Low	Low	Unsure of rational for proposal and therefore how amount identified. The service already exists and sits in Education Services. The website's configuration and functionality are currently being reviewed by SBC education colleagues. The Early Help Services in SCF has already contributed £x using 'Strengthening Families' funding. <b>No expectation or anticipation of funding coming from SCF therefore no invest to save costs.</b>	The Early Help Partnership Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in July 2023 however there had already been a 'soft' launch and work was progressing. Governance of the Strategy is through the Children and Young People's Partnership Board, chaired by the DCS which reports to the Slough Health and Wellbeing Board. Aims to increase involvement of partners in EH before targeted EH support assessed as required. Implementation of Early Help Strategy (agreed by Cabinet in July 2023) linking with Community and Voluntary Services (CVS).	Current grant £72k

Develop Family Hubs	<b>Cost 424k/annum.</b> This may have some impact on high caseloads but as with the FIS is leaning towards universal services. Whilst the development of family hubs will undoubtedly improve the services to families and help SCF in the ambition of G2G it will have moderate impact. <b>Some financial impact.</b>	Medium	High (for Children's Services in SBC)	Unsure of rationale and therefore of amount identified. At the same time as the MV was being compiled a plan was put in place by educational services to reduce the number of Children's Centres in Slough and convert them into Family Hubs. The matter has now been presented and agreed by Cabinet, public consultation has taken place and staff consultation is in progress. <b>No expectation or anticipation of finances coming from SCF and therefore no invest to save costs.</b>	As above. This line has the highest 'invest to save cost' set out in MV report. Plus, progression of Family Hubs - led by Neil Hoskinson, Associate Director Education, and Inclusion. No timescale as yet for Family Hubs being operational. Savings from reducing the number of Children's Centres has already been identified and badged against the education directorate's budget.	
Develop Targeted Early Help	<b>Cost £99k - £255k / annum over 4 years.</b> An opportunity to strengthen the focus on multi-agency work. The service may also need social workers to oversee the higher risk cases, not included in the original design of the team. <b>Significant financial impact.</b>	High	High	Two additional teams (EH) within the service which has enabled a reduction in CIN work within social worker teams; has contributed to exiting innovate earlier and enabled caseloads to be maintained across the social work teams. Combined with move to non-qualified CiN assessment and case holding. This is funded for the year.	We envisage that this will need to be funded again next year as part of the wider approach to managing demand, caseloads and supporting staff stability (by offering manageable caseloads) and increasing stability for children by experiencing fewer changes in worker.  Model the move of 10%, 20% and 30% CiN to non-qualified staff.	
Establish Community Assessment Team	<b>Cost of £395k / annum.</b> Reducing costs requires a more holistic approach (including close cooperation with the courts). Increasing community-based assessment capacity - while a helpful initiative - is unlikely to solve care proceedings cost pressures on its own.	Low	High	Team not established. However, spend on Independent Social Workers (ISW) via Joint Legal Team (JLT) hosted by Reading is significant as are legal costs overall. Direction is in place - no ISW without HoS agreement in Legal Gateway.	We have implemented further controls with JLT on the commissioning of ISW assessments in court by using the legal gateway as the panel to approve such spend. In so doing we are concentrating on an overall reduction in JLT spend by circa £200,000 Further modelling required. Combined with the revised Legal Gateway and new Practice Standards this could reduce ISW spend. Discussions also taking place re actions to reduce the spend on Counsel which is frequently commissioned because of a lack of availability in the JLT	
<b>Edge of Care: 'The proposals focus on the Family Breakdown Prevention Team and the Adolescent Contextual Safeguarding Team.' (MV report pg.10)</b>						
Develop Edge of Care Team	<b>Cost of £360k / annum.</b> Agreement that an edge of care team would have an impact on reducing the need for children to come into care. Such teams have a proven record of helping families in crisis and enabling children to remain at home or with extended family members.	High	High	No specific provision in place.  Some pressure on areas with Serious youth Violence and Exploitation - common across most LA's in terms of unpredictable and high demand.  Options for FGC being considered: a - Employ full time FGC Coordinator (Team Manager grade) and 'as and when' facilitators b - Commission from a provider - would need to be costed c - Set FGC inside Edge of Care (EoC) team as part of that cost	Currently discussing support for 'No Wrong Door' approach with DfE. (DCS led trailblazer project in previous authority.) If it happens it will be capacity and not financial support.  Needs to be linked with Family Group Conferencing (FGC) - part of the whole EoC package. Modelling required for Edge of Care Reunification Team where children and young people will be identified via the panel process. Revisit previous business case. This to be a Year 2 savings option.	Approx. 20% of current cohort of Children in Care are UASC. In the two years from August 2021 the number of admissions to care were 267 of whom 144 were 13+ and 68 were UASC. As only 53.9% had some possibility of their admission being option is less realistic than previously appreciated.  Benchmarking shows that Slough has a high number of UASC and care experienced YP who were previously UASC.
<b>'Improving the financial outlook for SCF. Requires strong leadership. Required steps to drive practice and shift culture.' (MV report pg.12)</b>						

Review of the targeted operating model for the intervention work to ensure it is delivered at the right stage to have an impact on children and families and ensure risks and needs do not escalate.	High	High	Early Help Partnership Strategy launch and action plan in place. Early Help System's Guide submitted to DLUCH	As above.	
Further monitoring and review of thresholds to assess if there is a potential to raise them in a measured and managed way, building on work already done through the Safeguarding Partnership	High	High	Ofsted Inspection in Jan 2023 does not indicate that thresholds are inappropriate. No children identified at immediate risk of harm. Quality Assurance Framework in place which tests thresholds and reports received at Getting to Good Board on a 6-weekly basis. Staff have received initial training in auditing practice. QAF needs further embedding. Capacity being increased through DFE bid (on track for agreement).	QA role is a permanent post in the new business plan and costed (Manager grade)  QA capacity is being built and permanent team manager starts in September.  Audit framework in place and supported by Audit2Excellence (costed) on an interim basis.	
Root and branch review of open cases, prioritising families where there is risk of significant harm and supporting staff to close cases where the risk is lower	High	Medium	A root and branch review not seen as best use of time at present as caseloads are basically manageable. Weekly compliance report indicates where drift and delay in casework is possible to enable focus on individual cases and more broadly.	Review necessity of overall task if caseloads increase. This could be done service by service. Current focus, through Children's Improvement Group is a - Contacts to referrals, b - Child Protection work enquiries to Conference, c- numbers of children subject to a Child Protection Plans for more than one year d - Children in need subject to intervention for 12+ .	
Focus on growing confidence in decision making at all levels of the organisation to be consistent in demand management.	High	High	Building Practice Sessions ongoing.	Building Practice sessions continuing. Peer mentoring programme from Hampshire for HoS in place and being well received. Mentoring for Director of Operations.  Scheme of Delegated responsibility has been refreshed enabling senior managers to take appropriate decisions. (reduce single points of failure)	
<b>'Business Plan Deliverability. Specific shortfalls needing to be addressed.'</b> (MV report pg.12)					
Strengthen the Company's finance function to ensure that the Finance Director can have a more strategic role			Previous Financial Director managed business support and planning in addition to financial responsibilities however the case had already been made for a Business Planning Manager appointed on a permanent basis in March 2023. Tasks removed from FD post. New, more widely experienced, FD in post from July 2023.		
Developing a more structured approach that would allow the Company to demonstrate that the services provide value for money			Quarterly report (rag rated) provided to Audit and Governance Committee by Stakeholder Representative. (SBC lead lawyer). Significant progress made only 2 aspects remain rated red and these relate to the Business and Improvement plan. Sept 2022, Red 11, Amber	Quarterly contract monitoring meetings to review Business and Improvement plan to be reset when Plan agreed by Cabinet.  Financial reporting to SCF Board needs to be strengthened by new Financial Director in conjunction with the new board chair.	

		21, Green 14. June 2023 Red 2, Amber 23, Green 27.		
Developing an explicit list of all the core assumptions that can be stress tested and monitored		Being developed as part of Commissioner oversight and will be part of evidenced decision making around the future of the service. Likely to include a - Workforce stability, b - Strong Governance, c - Positive Ofsted feedback from focused visit, d - Voice of children and young people, e - Financial viability	Conversations regarding refining stress tests and metrics will take place between Commissioner, DCS and DfE.	
Developing robust governance and board oversight arrangements for the business plan delivery.		More robust reporting needed to Company Board. New NED has 151 officer experience. Business plan includes practice issues which are reported to a board subcommittee. Business plan will also be reported to the Getting to Good Board chaired by DfE Commissioner.	Reset with new Financial Director and new Chair of Board.	
Developing a robust business plan monitoring process with effective and insightful in year forecasting		See line 22 and 24		
Developing SMART output and outcome measures		Performance Scorecard in place for Getting to Good Board. Performance reporting to sub-committee in place.	Metrics presented to SCF Board re the Business and Improvement Plan to be reset with new board chair.	
Developing a comprehensive risk assessment process and monitoring risks on a regular basis as part of ongoing programme management		Overseen by Business Planning Manager. Risk log in place, reported to Company Board and Senior Leadership Team meetings. Links strongly with Corporate Risks which are reported to the Council's Audit and Governance Committee.	To become BAU	
<b>Key Contextual Issues. Described as mission critical. (MV report pg.13)</b>				
Leadership stability	Delivery of the improvement plan and service improvements is dependent on strong, confident. capable leadership. It is critical that the next DCS appointee is full-time and committed to a longer term of office.	Permanent experienced DCS in place and permanent leadership team.	Head of Safeguarding and Quality has left SCF. Advert going out for permanent replacement.	
Transformational capacity	Once SCF is in a more stable position, SBC and SCF should consider carrying out an options appraisal the optimal scope of services that should be discharged to SCF vs those retained by SBC. However, this becomes less relevant if the council is determined to bring services back in-house when the service is rated 'Good'.	Formal exercise not started. However, where necessary to maximise effectiveness and professional support there are 'dotted lines' of accountability across SCF and SBC. For example, the Virtual School sits in SCF, but the Head receives professional supervision from the Associate Director for Education. Restructure of corporate leadership in place and some functions are moving across to Children's Services. Although they should technically be in the company for reasons of TUPE, they will formally be based in the education directorate.	Continue to identify opportunities for cross working. The commissioner will make recommendations about the future of SCF to the minister in c 9months time.	

Relationship with SBC	Continued improvement of the relationship between SCF and SBC is vital including ensuring effective and proportionate oversight mechanisms as well as building a strong partnership of culture and trust	One Children's Service approach being embedded. Overall Council/Company relationships reported as much improved. Focus on blurring the line between the Council and the Company wherever appropriate'. Good relationship with 151 officer.	To continue to develop relationships.	
Scale and scope of children's services managed by SCF	Once SCF is in a more stable position, SBC and SCF should consider carrying out an options appraisal about the optimal scope of services that should be discharged to SCF vs those retained by SBC. However, this becomes less relevant if the council is determined to bring services back in-house when the service is rated 'Good'.	The Council's aim is for children's services social care services to move back into the Council. However, this is a Commissioner decision. The Council needs to evidence that it prioritises and champions vulnerable children in Slough.	see above.	
Partnerships across the wider system.	Areas that have made sustained progress in the quality of services for children are good at engagement and collaboration. There is an opportunity to review and streamline partnership governance arrangements across Slough and further strengthen the multi-agency collaboration.	Chief Exec of Council championing multi-agency engagement. Children's Services still has a need to improve partnership arrangements with the third sector, communities, and faith communities. Partnership Officer joining public health and working more closely with Children's Services from September (decision made as part of council restructure) to focus on this work.	Early Help services in Slough are an excellent example of strong partnership working.	
<b>Exploring partnership opportunities. (MV report pg.13)</b>				
Alternative delivery model	Exploratory soundings with potential partner local authorities confirmed that the option of engaging with a partner to support the improvement journey in Slough could be a feasible way forward for SCF. MV recommends that DfE continue engagement with potential partners to explore the opportunity in more detail.	Commissioner's discretion regarding recommendations to the Minister		

## Appendix 9 - Our Opportunities and Risks

This document is attached separately.

## Appendix 10 – Changes in Spend between 22/23 v 23/24

<b>22/23 Funding Requirement</b>		<b>37,198</b>
<b>Income</b>		
Loss of DfE Income		1,340
Increase in UASC funding		-1,146
Increase in health contribution		-207
New grants		-240
Other changes in grant income		336
<b>Salaries</b>		
Reduction in Innovate		-1,126
Pay Inflation		925
Additional SW team to allow release of Innovate		580
Additional posts funded from new grants		240
Principal Social Worker & Other practice posts		284
UASC - SW & Age Assessors		141
<b>Placements</b>		
Rate	+£35 per week	810
Volume	+11 FTE	398
<b>Care Leavers</b>		
Rate	+£4 per week	11
Volume	+13 FTE	440
<b>Other Costs</b>		
UASC Interpreting		218
Other changes		128
Other Contract Inflation		265
<b>Legal</b>		
Reductions in counsel / expert fees		-130
UASC Legal		50
<b>23/24 Funding Requirement</b>		<b>40,515</b>

Changes in spend 22/23 v 23/24

■ Increase ■ Decrease ■ Total

