

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	15 July 2024
Subject:	Quarterly Recovery and Performance Update
Lead Member:	Cllr Dexter Smith – Leader of the Council & Lead Member for Improvement and Recovery Cllr Mabu Shaik – Lead Member for Performance
Chief Officer:	Will Tuckley, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Director of Strategy, Change, and Resident Engagement
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	No
Exempt:	No
Decision Subject to Call In:	No
Appendices:	A – Phase 2 Recovery Programme B- Transformation Recovery Pillar Dashboard June 2024 C - Corporate Performance Report Q4 2023-24

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1. The council is two and a half years into its recovery journey, following the issuing of the Best Value Directions in December 2021. The council also has Directions relating to its children's services and is a partner member of the local area SEND partnership where there are also Directions.
- 1.2. The council has reflected on progress made between December 2021 and December 2023 and has subsequently undertaken a reset and the development of a Phase 2 Recovery Plan that runs from March 2024 to March 2026.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- a) Agree to adopt the Phase 2 Recovery Programme, as set out in Appendix A. The focus has been on establishing the right structure to underpin Phase 2. We are currently working on a more in-depth document that will provide more detailed and specific actions and measures the council will take as part of its recovery, including

establishing clear milestones and delivery targets to secure compliance with the best value duty.

- b) Ensure a focus on sustainable finances delivering against the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and an Asset Disposal Strategy
- c) Agree to adopt a two-year horizon for the recovery programme required to become a Best Value Council, resulting in a forward plan to deliver change activity now running through until March 2026.
- d) Note the latest updates on recovery and performance as set out in the appendices to this report.

Options

- Approve the Phase 2 Recovery Programme and two-year timescale for delivery, ending in March 2026. This is set out in Appendix A. **(Recommended)**
- Approve the Phase 2 Recovery Programme but continue with the current end point for delivery in November 2024, which was aligned to the end of the current set of DLUHC Best Value Directions.
- Do not approve the Phase 2 Recovery Programme.

Commissioner Review

Commissioners are content for this report to be considered.

2. Report

2.1. *Quarterly Improvement Update – Resetting the Recovery Programme*

2.2. This report updates Cabinet on the improvement activity undertaken between January 2024 and May 2024. During this period the council undertook a review of impact of recovery activity undertaken since the Best Value Directions were tabled in December 2021, and used that learning to refresh the recovery programme, subsequently launching a Phase 2 of the programme in March 2024. The reset was informed by the [Best Value Commissioner's Fourth Report to the Minister, and the subsequent response from the Minister to the Council](#).

2.3. At the time of writing this report to Cabinet, the Best Value Commissioners have submitted their fifth letter to the Minister setting out the need for and approach to, an additional two-year intervention, The council is awaiting the Minister's response. The council will revise our approach to reflect the Commissioners/Ministers conclusions, however, to pause to wait for those details would be wrong as we know the direction of travel that we need to take to improve things for slough residents and are confident in the new approach set out in the Phase 2 Recovery Approach.

2.4. This reset coincided with a change of Chief Executive, a change of S151 Officer, the departure of the Executive Director for Strategy & Improvement, and the initial stages of onboarding of a new cohort of Directors and Heads of Service. This senior management restructure followed on from the 4th Commissioners report. The reset was also informed by the minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting convened by the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee, which reviewed the content of

these reports, and received an update from the Leader and Chief Executive. Recommendations from CISC were subsequently agreed by Cabinet,

- 2.5. During this period, Slough Children' First and the council's Education service have received focused visits from Ofsted and the Department for Education, which were focused on progress against the children's services and SEND Directions. The company and council have received a written report from the DfE-appointed Commissioner, and a corresponding letter from the DfE Minister.
- 2.6. May was the third consecutive month where the council reported to Commissioners through a revised governance model, which includes: Finance Board, Transformation Board, and SEND Board meeting monthly, in advance of a strategic Improvement & Recovery Board. From July, the Improvement & Recovery Board will meet quarterly, to align to the reporting cycle to Cabinet. Each forum will receive the same update report. Detail on these Boards is included in Appendix A.
- 2.7. The main cross-cutting project, relevant to each of the three recovery Pillars, is the *Target Operating Model (TOM) project*, through which the council will evolve its way of delivering for residents, to improve the value delivered and to fit within the future financial envelope. The operating model describes the way the Council organises and supports services and the relationship with residents and other service providers and partners. The TOM project was given formal sign-off to proceed by the Council's Corporate Leadership Team on 8th May 2024. At the time of writing this report, the TOM is in a rapid discovery phase to understand the methods of delivery and costs for all functions across the council and children's company. The TOM project will deliver an outline new operating model by September 2024, which will then be consulted on with residents, businesses, and partners. Input from residents, businesses, and partners will inform the final chosen operating model, the design of which will inform the budget setting process for 2025/26 and the rolling Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2025/26 and subsequent financial years. Developing a fit-for-purpose operating model will remain the most significant transformation challenge until that new operating model is developed and implemented.
- 2.8. The council recognises that it has not delivered the pace and consistency required to become a Best Value council for the residents of Slough. The council now needs to demonstrate that pace and consistency or activity and of improved experiences for residents. There will be a quarterly progress update to Cabinet continuing until March 2026. At the end of Phase 2, an independent evaluation will take place.
- 2.9. *Quarterly Recovery Update – Progress Reporting***
- 2.10. *Transformation Pillar progress*
- 2.11. Appendix B includes a programme dashboard for the Transformation Pillar, as at the end of May 2024. This programme dashboard method was introduced for the first time in the May reporting cycle. The dashboard enables the Transformation Board to assure progress, and for responsible officers to develop mitigating actions. From the June reporting cycle, the Recovery Programme Office now provides a challenge and assurance function to ensure robustness and quality of reporting to Board. The progress against milestones for each workstream at the end of May was as follows:

- Amber – Strategic Commissioning, Evidence-Based Decision-Making, ICT & Digital, Culture Change
- Red – Target Operating Model, Workforce, Customer Experience

- 2.12. The workstream where the status moved from May to June was Culture Change, which moved from Red to Amber, because of a new SRO appointed, staff engagement sessions, and some 'quick win' milestones achieved.
- 2.13. The Customer Experience RAG status was being reviewed at the time of the new cycle, following the arrival of the new Head of Service. It is anticipated that the workstream will move to Amber from the July reporting cycle, as a result of new operational processes, a focus on resident comments, and enhanced use of performance data.
- 2.14. The benefits from each workstream are also tracked. Three workstreams have demonstrated some tangible benefits, resulting in an Amber rating for benefits – Scrutiny & Governance, Evidence-Based Decision-Making, ICT & Digital.
- 2.15. *Finance Pillar progress*
- 2.16. A balanced budget for 2024/25 was approved by Full Council in March 2024.
- 2.17. The council's Medium Term Financial Strategy is being further developed, alongside the development of a new Operating Model that aligns to the financial envelope.
- 2.18. Updates relating to property:
- £1.65m relating to the former Police Station, Langley – exchanged 4th April 2024 and is a Subject to Planning
 - £0.429m sale of 10-12 Wheelwrights (a former Doctors Surgery) – completed on 28th March 2024
 - £0.850m sale of Land at Sheehy Way – completed on 31st May 2024
- 2.19. *Children's Delivery Pillar progress*
- 2.20. Ofsted carried out a focused visit to Slough Children First in May/June 2024. At the time of writing the report has not been published due to election silence, but all indications are that it will note positive progress. The DfE monitors progress against the SEND Written Statement of Action (WSOA) through three monthly monitoring meetings and progress is noted, albeit from a low base. A report from the DfE Commissioner covering progress against the statutory directions for children's social care and SEND was received outlining his observations of progress which were generally positive, but particularly noting that improvements in Slough Children First need to be sustained.

2.21. The DfE Commissioner report noted that:

- History of improvement but not always sustained. Clear evidence of improvement with current leadership team which is stable supported by political leadership team which has made 'children' in the borough a priority.
- Some turbulence in the wider corporate leadership team which may impact on the pace of improvement in children's services.
- Over a decade of intervention there needs to be a clear plan going forward of the requirements need for de-escalation of the Departments involvement but only when the evidence is provided by SBC that services for vulnerable children will remain a priority and appropriate governance arrangements are in place to ensure effective monitoring.
- Company Board is showing increasing signs of stronger grip on financial management and oversight of children's social care and clearly better relationship with Council colleagues. Given the history of the relationship between the Company/Trust and the Council the closer collaboration is welcomed by regulators and staff.
- SEND and Social Care Improvement Plans are more realistic and focused, but more pace required over coming months now foundations are in place.
- The past 18 months have seen significant improvements, with an escalation of the trajectory of improvement over the past year. The focus of intervention has moved from an authority failing many children to one which needs consistency, consolidation, and stability to reach – and sustain – a standard which will warrant a consistent 'good' in inspection terms.
- The pathway to that achievement is now much clearer for local leaders; the improvements in leadership and management which were judged as inadequate at the last inspection augur well for further improvement.
- The improvement journey will need continued focus, prioritisation, and support to ensure that embedded, sustainable improvement can be achieved, but there are grounds for cautious optimism.

2.22. A subsequent Minister Letter noting that Commissioner report was received by the council and children's company. This included a request that the council and children's company consider how back-office services in SBC and SCF can create efficiencies through aligning services, and action those accordingly. At the time of writing this report, the council and company were forming a response to the Minister's Letter.

2.23. Quarterly Performance Update

2.24. The latest quarterly report available for July Cabinet is the Q4 2023/24 report. This report is included as Appendix C. This reports on the key performance indicators from the 2023/24 corporate management information scorecard, which were aligned to the strategic priorities in the new Corporate Plan 2023-2027. The overall performance position is mixed, with aspects of disappointing performance. This reflects the performance of a period that is now past, is part of the reason for the reset of the council's recovery programme, and new objectives and targets are being established for 2024/25.

2.25. The corporate performance scorecard is currently being reviewed by Executive Directors and Lead Members. The new set of Corporate KPIs will be reported against from the August Assurance CLT monthly reporting cycle onwards. In

2024/25, there is an increased emphasis on linking performance trends to action tracking. They will also be reviewed to take account of the role of the Office of Local Government (OFLOG). OFLOG is committed to ensuring the [Local Authority Data Explorer](#) presents a rounded set of themes and metrics which best reflect the roles and responsibilities of local authorities and to benchmark local government performance.

- 2.26. The council is developing recovery success measures to drive the Phase 2 Recovery Plan. These are being developed through the Target Operating Model (TOM) steering group and through a learning network with Thurrock, Croydon, and Woking. They will be reviewed and approved at Cabinet and Improvement & Recovery Board during Q2 2024/25. The current set of corporate KPIs reported against were developed with overall organisational health in mind, but not specifically focused on driving recovery. The planned, and underway, corporate KPI refresh for 2024/25 will include recovery success measures.
- 2.27. Overall, for Mar-24 the strategic performance picture remains variable. 25% (11) of the 44 key performance indicators (KPIs) are performing either at or better than target. 9% (4) indicators are performing marginally worse than target, and 32% (14) indicators are performing below the red KPI threshold. A further 34% (15) indicators are monitored for trends.
- 2.28. Compared to the previous month or similar period from last year, performance has improved for 36% (16) of the 44 KPIs, remained the same for 16% (7) and declined for 48% (21). Over the previous 12 months, the Council has not been able to see an upward trend in our performance, and steps are being taken to incorporate this within the overarching Improvement and Recovery Plan.
- 2.29. Appendix C to this report summarises progress against the Council's priorities as presented in March 2024. The report includes:
- Summary progress against the strategic outcomes in the Corporate Plan.
 - Areas for recognition, where the council can learn from promising practice - trends that indicate the council is on track for delivering its objectives.
 - Areas of improvement – trends that indicate the council is improving although performance currently below agreed target.
 - Areas that require a continued focus on improvement - trends that indicate the council is not on track for delivering its strategic objectives.
- 2.30. In Appendix C, pages 2 to 8 outline the performance scorecard trends against the 44 strategic KPIs, and the mitigating actions and action owners. Each action has an assigned Executive Director owner, who is accountable for the performance level, and who will assign responsibility for delivery to officers. Further, pages 23 to 31 include charts showing trends over time for each metric along with progress against target agreed.

2.31. Key areas of improvements:

- The business rate collection rate of 98.93% for Mar-24 is 0.08% above end of year target of 98.85% and 0.28% higher than the collection rate achieved this time last year. This is the highest collection rate to date. The council continues to take appropriate recovery action on those businesses that do not keep with their payments up to date.
- An improvement in the council tax end of year collection rate, at 94.61% for Mar-24, this is 1.01% ahead of the collection rate achieved this time last year and 0.01% ahead of the end of year revised target of 94.60%. To improve collection rates, the team are implementing additional technology that will automate high volume, low value tasks, which will free up resources to focus on collection.
- An improvement in the percentage of customer service calls answered and call waiting times over the last 4 consecutive months. An increase in customer service calls answered during Mar-24 at 91.1% (5,347) and a decrease in calls received compared to similar period last year. The average call wait time reduced to 3mins 18 secs, the lowest rate since Jul-21. To support further improvements, a tactical service plan has been introduced focussing on improving response time and customer service, to make it easier for residents to access advice and information.
- Major and non-major planning applications decisions made within timescale during 2023/24 Q3 remain consistently high. Performance trends actively monitored at management meetings focussing on identifying service improvements actions to issue decisions within timescale including regularly reviewing applications with officers, timely site visits to assess planning applications and where necessary seek amendments to developments early in the process. Slough planning service ranked in the top quartile nationally.
- An improvement in the number and proportion of children in external residential placements with 6.9% (14 children) during Mar-24 and remains lower than target of 9.1% for the last 7 months. We have also seen cost reductions for children who continue to be placed in these types of placements. External Placement Panel review all children in external placements, targeting those specifically in residential care, identifying those that specifically can be placed in fostering placements.
 - A reduction in the number and proportion of children with a repeat referral during Mar-24 at 19.0% (63 children), with performance improving beyond the target for the last 3 months. Re-referrals are continually tracked and monitored each month. Previous interventions are reviewed to explore whether the re-referral could have been avoided and to disseminate the learning. This is monitored through regular performance reports and reviewed by the internal Children's Improvement Group on a regular basis.

2.32. Key areas of improvement although performance below agreed target:

- A slight increase in the average processing time for new housing benefit claims to 22.85 days during Mar-24, this is a vast improvement from where

we were during May-23 at 56.57 days. The year-to-date average processing time for new claims of 37.45 days improved by 1.79 days from the previous month. The in-month speed of processing for changes is 3.85 days, which remains below the target of 9-days for the last 8 months and reduced by 2.49 days from the previous month. The year-to-date average processing time for changes of 11.75 days is a reduction of 1.13 days from the previous month. The Council has made a significant investment in automation, a detailed improvement plan in place to remedy existing issues and help improve processing times to an acceptable and sustainable level by the end of the financial year.

- An improvement in the number of voids reported, 94 standard voids reported at the end of Mar-24, with an average of 213 days taken to re-let 40 properties. This is an improvement from Oct-23 where we had 151 standard voids reported with an average of 200 days to re-let 6 properties. The number of voids and the re-let time will increase before improved performance occurs. New staff joining allocations team trained and set targets for nominations. Service managers for allocations and tenancy management meet weekly to review progress and drive reduction in voids. The NEC project team continues to collaborate with operational teams to overcome any issues and improve the processes.
- Although improving, 14% (17) of high priority audit actions remain overdue, with 2% (1) from 2021/22, 28% (15) from 2022/23 and 7% (1) from 2023/24. We are expecting to see the number of actions from this year and prior years to continue to reduce over the coming months with the additional focus from our management teams to action owners.

2.33. Key areas that require a continued focus on improvement:

- Following a continuing worsening of the financial position in the 3rd Quarter, the final outturn for 2023/24 shows a further deterioration in the Council's financial position. Spend is 9.4% (£14.2m) higher than budget if a draw down from reserves of £1.3m is approved. This is £3.4m worse than the period 9 figure reported to Cabinet. There are implications for the 2024/25 position, with initial estimates suggesting that the financial year starts with a £12m gap, split between Adults Services (£4.8m), Homelessness (£5.6m) and interest costs (£1.2m), despite the increased investment approved for 2024/25 by Council in March. Adults and Homelessness together represent £19.3m overspend (Adults £12.3m and Homelessness £7m), which is driven by increasing service demand outpacing service changes and cost reduction measures.
- 88.1% (£19.75m) of £22.4m savings required in 2023/24 were delivered. It is a significant achievement to deliver this scale of cost reductions against rising demand for children's, adults, and housing services. Some savings plans in Adults Services and Regeneration, Housing & Environment were not achieved, however mitigating savings were identified. Areas of non-delivery were with vacancy factors in Strategy & Transformation and in Finance; and with MRP, in line with asset sales not being achieved to original plan. In addition, a Cross Council saving of £0.75m from a proposed new model of strategic commissioning in 2023/24 is now considered unachievable. There is a further £0.75m expected from this proposed new strategic commissioning model in 2024/25.

- A reduction in the number of housing repairs completed on time during Mar-24 with over 2,612 responsive repairs to action. Housing repairs completed within timescale at 63% (1,154) remains a major issue for responsive repairs service and well below target of 95%. Manager appointed specifically to reduce the backlog of repairs and will present a plan to reduce the number over the coming months. The number of complaints received during Mar-24 reduced as well as the backlog of complaints. Void turnaround time within the month on average 5 days earlier than target.
- A reduction in the number of EHC plans completed within timescale, with 21 EHC Plans finalised in the month, of which 28.6% (6) finalised within the statutory 20 weeks' timeframe with rate remaining below target. Over 175 children waiting for a late running EHC needs assessment. SEN Team actively reducing backlog of late running EHC needs assessments. This is slower than planned progress due to capacity within the team structure. SEND team has been running at significantly reduced capacity due to resignations/contracts ended. All interim positions now re-recruited with the team back to the level of establishment, the last of these new staff due to join us in Apr-24.
- Compared to similar period last year, a decrease in the percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling or composting and remains well below the 40% target. Recycling rates cyclically decline during the winter months due to a reduction in green waste, however the rate in Slough remains low in all seasons. Green waste recycling volumes are seasonal.
- Missed refuse bin collection rates increased to 34 missed per 100,000 during Mar-24 and above target of 30 following a 4-month reduction. Guidance on the council's website on how to prevent a rejected bin collection due to overloading or contamination. Online form available to report a missed bin collection. An oversight & variation log created to tackle persistent problems or repeat occurrences. This is shared weekly with team to highlight hotspots and problem areas and for confirmation that the appropriate action has been completed.

2.34 Sustainable Finances

In ensuring that the Council's finances are sustainable it is essential that the Council adopts and then delivers against an achievable Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). As well as including a savings programme which will need to be delivered against; The MTFS will also be predicated on securing asset sales against a coherent asset disposal strategy that will pay down the Capitalisation direction that has supported the Council over the last few years.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1. Financial implications

- The financial implications relating to the achievement of the Council's Performance Plan cannot be understated. The provisional revenue outturn reported to Cabinet in June 2024 contained a service related overspend of £22.365m when allowing for

adjustments this required a drawdown from reserves of £14.182m This was in addition to a capitalisation direction of £31.575m.

- The Council is facing a challenging financial situation and the focus of moving towards a sustainable financial position is urgent and essential for the Council. The Cabinet is due to receive a comprehensive report that sets out the impact on the Council's Budget for 2024/25 and impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2025-29 following the Provisional Outturn for 2023/24 and the initial budget monitoring insight for the 2024/25 financial year. It also gives a timetable for setting the 2025/26 Budget and a formal refresh of the MTFS for the period up to 2029.
- The recovery pillars and the key performance indicators are aligned to the priorities in the Corporate Plan. The Corporate Plan articulates a commitment to delivering financial prudence and demonstrating Best Value for residents, any monies needed to achieve improved performance must be funded within the council revenue budgets.
- A separate finance report will be presented to Cabinet quarterly that shows the financial performance of Slough Borough Council but clearly links with information in this report. It is imperative that financial discipline to deliver the Corporate Plan is maintained to ensure that a sustainable financial position is obtained and maintained.
- Separate commentary is provided on business rate and council tax collection rates where in-year collection fund assumptions has adverse implications for the following year's revenue budget.

3.2. *Legal implications*

- Whilst there is no statutory duty to report regularly to Cabinet on the Council's recovery or performance, as a best value authority under the Local Government Act 1999, the Council has a statutory duty to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.
- Regular reporting of recovery progress and performance can assist the Council to demonstrate best value. The national best value framework guidance has now been published in full, following a consultation and a period where the guidance was in draft. The council now uses that national framework as a tool to consider further action.
- The Council's Annual Governance Statement for 2022/23 was approved by Audit and Corporate Governance Committee in July 2023. This included a set of actions, including an action to improve the systems in place for managing performance. This stated that the Council must ensure basic systems and controls are in place to ensure that performance is managed, and risk appropriately identified reported and monitored. Performance data should measure the quality of services for users, use of resources and value for money. Performance indicators should be set drawing on sector wide data sets from various organisations including the Local Government Association and CIPFA.
- The Government has published draft best value guidance which identifies seven best value themes. Under the theme of Service Delivery, local authority data is one of the means to identify whether services are being delivered efficiently and effectively and services should be benchmarked against comparable authorities. Performance should

be regularly reported to the public to ensure that citizens are informed of the quality of services being delivered. Under the theme of Continuous Improvement, frequent monitoring, performance reporting and updating of improvement plans is identified as a characteristic of a well-functioning authority. Under the theme of Governance, it is recommended that performance management information measures actual outcomes effectively and is frequently interrogated to allow under performance to be addressed.

3.3. *Risk management implications*

- Each recovery pillar has a programme management methodology, including risk management. Mitigating actions are in place for workstreams within each recovery pillar. Mitigating actions are also in place for the strategic performance indicators, if key performance trends require action. These actions are proposed by the responsible manager, and updates provided at CLT Assurance forum by the responsible Executive Director (or delegate).
- The monthly CLT Assurance forum considers all statutory reporting, and focuses on finance, risk, and performance to ensure that the leadership team receive a rounded picture on the health of the organisation, to inform improvement actions.

3.4. *Environmental implications*

- Strategic performance indicators aligned to priority 3 of the corporate plan retains and expands upon environmental commitments under the following strategic objective *'reducing Slough's carbon footprint, promoting active travel and sustainable forms of transport, and taking action to prevent or minimise the impact of climate change'*.

3.5. *Equality implications*

- The Equality Act 2010 sets out duties for local authorities in relation to equalities, including the public sector equality duty, which requires the Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. In relation to equality of opportunity, the legislation requires the Council to consider the need to remove or reduce disadvantage, meet the needs of people with protected characteristics and encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life and other activities. Performance data can assist the Council to identify gaps in service and consider what action is required to address this.

4. **Background Papers**

None