

Slough Safeguarding Partnership and Safer Slough Partnership

Tackling the Exploitation of children and young adults 2024-2026

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INTRODUCTION

"We recognise that too often, young people feel their choices around violence and exploitation are reduced by circumstances, including poverty, poor mental health, special educational needs, housing, family influences and peer .."

"When a young person is hurt in our town, their family and friends are also

Voices of young people from Slough collated in consultation in 2023 with the support of Together ..

"The lives of those directly affected are changed forever."

"The wider community becomes more fearful, and we feel less safe."

Every child, young person and young adult in Slough has a right to safeguarding from exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home, and to receive help and support that prevents harms caused by abuse. Slough Safeguarding Partnership and all our partners and stakeholders are committed to protecting children, young people, and young adults from all forms of exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home.

Collaboration between agencies across all professional sectors, and strong partnerships with parents, carers, families and communities are crucial to tackling and preventing exploitation, as set out in [Working Together 2023](#). All children, young

people and young adults in Slough are entitled to the support and protection of a response that puts safety and welfare first. Forming and sustaining trusted relationships is at the heart of our approach. In Slough, we are proud to be a diverse town, and we are committed to understanding and tackling structural inequalities and discrimination, which we know can both drive and be caused by exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home.

In Slough, we are committed to creating safety together to protect our children, young people, and young adults from harms outside the home, such as violence and exploitation, and to promote their welfare and agency.

This strategy sets out our coordinated approach to bringing together all professionals across agencies, sectors, and disciplines to create safety, and promote the welfare and agency of our children, young people, and young adults affected by or at risk from exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home. Our approach recognises that each agency, sector and discipline makes a crucial and distinctive contribution to safeguarding children, young people and young adults from exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out:

- **Agreed definitions** associated with exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home,
- **Our vision** for children, young people, and young adults,
- **Our ambition** for all professionals to collaborate in preventing and tackling exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home,
- **Eight evidence-informed multi-agency practice principles** for responding to child exploitation, violence affecting children and young adults, and the full range of harms outside the family and home.
- **Four priorities for action** on exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home, interdependent with and supportive of our [Slough Early Help Partnership Strategy 2023-2025](#) and our [Slough Serious Violence Strategy 2024-2027](#).
- **An action plan** to set strong foundations for a whole-place approach to change.

The development of this strategy has been led by Slough Safeguarding Partnership, including Slough Borough Council, Slough Children First, Thames Valley Police, Frimley NHS Integrated Care Board and an extensive range of our partners working together to safeguard children, young people, young adults, and those they love.

Building on learning from safeguarding practice reviews, this strategy aims to create a step change in our response to protecting children, young people and young adults who are experiencing or may be at risk of exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home.

The Slough Safeguarding Partnership Board is driving long-term change in policy, strategy, and practice for our collective response to exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home affecting our children, young people, young adults and families.

The Board acts on behalf of the Slough Safeguarding Partnership and Safer Slough Partnership, both of whom hold shared responsibility for tackling exploitation of children, young adults, and violence and other harms affecting them.

All partners consulted for developing this strategy are committed to working collectively and in partnership with young people, families, and communities to tackle and prevent exploitation and harms outside the home in Slough.

DEFINITIONS: EXPLOITATION AND HARMS OUTSIDE THE HOME

Exploitation is a form of abuse characterised by power imbalance and restriction or absence of consent. An individual or group takes advantage of the power imbalance to coerce, control, manipulate and/or deceive the child, young person, or adult. The child or adult is exploited through violence or threat of violence and/or for financial or other advantage of the perpetrator and/or for something the victim needs or wants.

Exploitation is a multifaceted and fluid form of abuse, which crosses several different categories, and is defined across different parts of UK legislation.

- **Child sexual exploitation:** an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child, young person or young adult into any kind of sexual activity. The child, young person or young adult is exploited by being offered something that they need or want. It does not always involve physical contact and can also happen through the use of technology, as defined by the [Home Office](#).
- **Child criminal exploitation:** individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, or manipulate a child or adolescent into any criminal activity. It does not always involve physical contact and can happen through the use of technology, as defined in the [Serious Violence Strategy](#).
- **County Lines:** a violent, exploitative form of drug distribution. A feature of county lines is the exploitation of children and adults who are instructed to deliver and/or store drugs, and associated money or weapons, to dealers or drug users, locally or in other local areas, as defined by the [Home Office](#).
- **Modern Slavery** – Modern slavery is the ‘umbrella term’ which relates to the exploitation of children and adults in slavery, servitude, or forced or compulsory labour.
- **Human trafficking** is the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children and adults through force, coercion, or deception for the purposes of exploitation, as defined by the [National Crime Agency](#).
- **Debt bondage:** a form of entrapment when a victim owes money to an exploiter or exploiters and is made to repay their debt, either financially or through another means such as transporting drugs, as defined by the [Home Office](#).
- **‘Cuckooing’:** criminals involved in County Lines, or other forms of exploitation take over a property, normally belonging to a vulnerable person, and use it as a location from which to operate criminal activity. This is known as cuckooing, as

defined by the [National Crime Agency](#). We recognise all activities that victimise people via home-based exploitation, including crimes that are not drug related. We recognise the wide variety of needs and vulnerabilities that can lead to exploitation including neurodiversity.

Though focused on exploitation, violence and harms outside the home, this strategy is relevant to all forms of harm that children, young people, and young adults experience. Exploitation, violence, and other harms outside the home are often overlapping, but they are not interchangeable terms. Child exploitation can include harm that is both intra- and extra-familial in nature, and harm outside the home can include types of harm that are not classified as child exploitation (TCE 2023).

SCOPE

Children, young people and young adults, ages 0-25

This strategy focuses on safeguarding children, young people and young adults from exploitation, associated forms of abuse and harms.

Our approach fully recognises:

- Children (0-17) and young adults (18-24) have safeguarding needs that continue at least until the age of 25, where contextual and developmental factors combine.
- our role as corporate parents who keep connected with our care experienced children, young people, and young adults.
- we know that children and young adults with additional needs, such as special educational needs and disabilities are more likely than other children to be abused, neglected, or exploited.
- young people in their mid-teens to mid-twenties can fall through gaps of support, protection and safeguarding services designed for either young children or adults.

In Slough, we aspire to develop a more fluid safeguarding approach and a prevention offer across the developmental stages in response to young people and young adults. Such an approach, known as transitional safeguarding, 'builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children's and adults' safeguarding practice and prepares young people for their adult lives' ([Holmes and Smale 2018, p3](#)). This strategy applies to all children, young people, and young adults in Slough, because any one of them can experience exploitation, violence and harms outside the home. Those who are affected by these harms are due the same rights, support and protection as any child, young person, or young adult in Slough.

This strategy lays the foundations for system change, so that all our young people and young adults are protected from harms.

Types and contexts of abuse, harms, and risks

As children develop through adolescence, they are more likely to be exposed to risks and harms outside of the home and family context. Our approach to child abuse, harms and risks is based in our understanding that children, young people, and young adults may have had adverse experiences during childhood, may be affected by different forms of trauma, and may have family links to exploitation and violence.

We recognise the problem of separating harms that happen within the family and home from harms that happen outside and seeks to respond to all opportunities to protect children and young people from abuse and harms.

We also recognise the interconnected conditions of abuse and harms. We are committed to responding effectively to both the needs of the child, young person, or young adult, the protective structures around them, to any sources of harm, and to the influence of wider contextual factors, such as harm from inequalities, racism, and discrimination.

Our vision, ambition, and commitments

Our vision: ***all children, young people and young adults in Slough are protected from exploitation, and are Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving.***

Our ambition: ***we will forge collaboration across all professional sectors in Slough, working in partnership with our families and communities to create safety together, to tackle structural inequalities, and to promote the welfare and agency of our children, young people, and young adults.***

We recognise the crucial role of law enforcement and of disruption of individuals and groups who perpetrate abuse, and of places and spaces where harms happen.

Our key priorities for the next two years involve the following commitments:

- We will strive to avoid criminalisation of children, young people, and young adults, to put their safety, welfare, and agency first, and to take an intersectional and systemic approach to understand and tackle the effects of structural inequalities, adversity, and trauma on children's outcomes.
- We will actively seek and celebrate the voice, lived experience and influence of our children, young people, and young adults in Slough.
- We will create effective insight, communication, and professional learning opportunities that support us to develop our understanding and take action to tackle exploitation and harms outside the home.
- We will seek and promote multi-agency solutions to create safety in places and spaces where harm is happening.

National data

51 Children killed in England and Wales, April 2022 and March 2023

14,420 Children in need assessments in England recorded criminal exploitation as a risk of harm between April 2022 and March 2023.

7,432 Referrals of children to the National Referral Mechanism in 2023

15,623 People (adults and children) arrested through the County Lines Programme in England and Wales between 2019 and 2023

[**The Jay Review of Criminally Exploited Children**](#)

Local data

Young town:

40% of Slough's population ages 10-24

Hyper-diverse town:

64% from global majority ethnic groups
29.4% of are of Muslim faith.

Help and protection.

Of 192 child protection plans
(six months to April 2024)

- 67% neglect
- 4% physical abuse
- 28% emotional abuse

Child in care or care experience

Looked after – 204 (April 2024)

Care leavers – 332 (April 2024)

Rising rates of children in absolute and relative low-income families.

Why this matters: children in need of support and protection, and those with care experience are vulnerable to become victims of exploitation or violence.

[The Jay Review of Criminally Exploited Children](#)

PRIORITIES FOR 2024-2026

[N.B. Approved by Slough Safeguarding Partnership Board June 2024]

Our (four) priorities for 2024 to 2026 (approved by the Slough Safeguarding Partnership Board in June 2024) are designed to lay the foundations to achieve our vision and ambition.

We have identified these priorities through local safeguarding practice reviews, consultation with partners, and through reflection on national research and evidence. The priorities will apply to all strategic leaders, managers, and direct practitioners across all our partner agencies.

Each of these priorities is set out in more detail in our action plan and delivered through our whole-system approach.

1. Put the safety and welfare of children, young people and young adults first:

we commit to developing organisational cultures and services where we everyone puts first the safety and welfare of children, young people and young adults. We will prioritise multi-agency workforce development, learning opportunities, and quality assurance to drive local implementation of this priority. We will decriminalise our response to children, young people, and young adults. and recognise the impact of inequalities and poverty on families and communities, and recognise the responsibility of professionals to collaborate in

Measuring success: workforce development and quality assurance plans that focus on developing safety and welfare responses are implemented across all organisations in our partnership by 2026. This plan will increase application of evidence-informed, relational, and trauma-informed approaches, to support young people affected by risks and harms outside the home.

2. Seek and centre the voice of children, young people and young adults: we commit to embedding participatory practice across our strategic, operational and practice responses to exploitation, in single agency settings and across our local partnership. We will create meaningful opportunities for children, young people and young adults to influence change at the level of partnership governance.

Measuring success: voice and participation of children, young people and adults has direct and evidenced influence on our implementation of this strategy. There is an increase in the active involvement of children, young people and young adults who have a direct influence on design and delivery of services.

These activities improve trusted relationships and improve the perception of families and communities.

3. **Improve our insight, communication, and learning:** we commit to using data and intelligence to identify, analyse and communicate the patterns of exploitation, violence, and harms in Slough. We will seek to understand how, where and when harm is happening, to which individuals and groups, and its impact. We will develop effective communication of insight and action plans. We will provide professional development opportunities to support multi-agency learning and sustain continuous improvement of our collective response to exploitation.

Measuring success: audit and evaluation of weekly, monthly, and strategic exploitation and violence arrangements, and Team around the School demonstrate improved use of insight to strengthen local response to exploitation, violence and harms outside the home. We improve adherence to data-driven practice through Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) and violence arrangements. We improve our use of collective resources to create safety and promote welfare of children, young people, and young adults.

4. **Collaborative leadership and relational approach to tackling exploitation:** we commit to create a culture of collaboration, with strength-based and relational approaches to multi-agency partnership working. Leaders and senior managers will set and promote clear expectations that exploitation and violence are understood contextually, and all responses focus on actions to make spaces and places safer for children and young adults. Leaders across professional sectors will collaborate to raise awareness of exploitation and violence with our communities.

Measuring success: one year review report better coordination of information sharing and multi-agency action to manage harm and risk of exploitation. We improve welfare and agency of children, young people and young adults, who connect with positive activities that divert them from risks and harms.

MULTI-AGENCY PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR TACKLING EXPLOITATION, VIOLENCE AND HARMS OUTSIDE THE HOME



Our vision, ambition and four priorities have been informed by [eight practice principles](#). Research in Practice, the University of Bedfordshire and The Children's Society developed these practice principles below by drawing on national evidence and research, practice wisdom, and the expertise of those with lived experience.

Slough Safeguarding Partnership has consulted with local partners and stakeholders to test these multi-agency practice principles. We have shared and applied the eight principles during collaborative learning events in support of a recent safeguarding practice review on violence and exploitation affecting our children and young people.

[Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#) sets expectations for multi-agency working to protect and promote the welfare of children. The guidance expectations apply to police, local authorities, health services, probation, youth justice, education settings, and voluntary and community sector organisations. The expectations are structured for direct practice, senior management, and strategic leadership.

"Each of the eight principles is interdependent with the others. No one principle is more important than any other, and none can be considered in isolation from the others. None are the domain of any one person or any particular role." [Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme](#)

The practice principles below support all partners in Slough to fulfil the expectations of Working Together 2023 and will inform our shared approach to exploitation. All partners in Slough will work together to adopt the eight practice principles across our work to safeguard children, young people, and young adults from exploitation. The principles are consistent with [Slough Early Help Partnership Strategy 2023-2025](#).

Depending on any professional roles, and the different responsibilities of agencies, the priorities will have 'core business' alignment with different partners in different ways. For example,

- a police officer for Thames Valley Police is more likely to implement disruption tactics and to create safer places in Slough.
- a youth justice practitioner for Slough Children First may feel confident to form trusted professional relationships in direct work with young people to prevent harms outside the home.
- a social worker may feel more skilled in carrying out strength-based practice.

Putting children and young people first.

- Responding to the needs of individuals and groups of children, young people, and young adults, and to the realities of their lives.
- Keeping the child at the centre when making decisions about their lives and promoting their agency and control over help and support they receive.
- Working in partnership with families and communities.
- Prioritising the best interests of children and young people.
- Recognising and promoting the rights of children, young people and young adults, and their strengths, hopes, and potential.

Recognising and challenging inequalities, exclusion, and discrimination.

- Understanding inequalities faced by children, young people and young adults, their families at individual and structural levels.
- Challenging the forms of discrimination, disparities and disproportionality faced by different cohorts of children, young people, and young adults.
- Creating inclusive cultures for professionals and for everyone they work with, where everyone is respected, regardless of characteristics.

Respecting voice, experience, and expertise of children and young people.

- Collaborating with children, young people, and young adults rather than watching over them or *doing to* them.
- Hearing children, young people, and young adults from marginalised groups, and seeking the voices of those who are sometimes overlooked or ignored.
- Involving children, young people and young adults in decisions that affect their lives and creating opportunities for open conversation about decisions.
- Using participation to challenge manipulation associated with exploitation

Being strengths-based and relationship-based.

- Understanding children, young people, and young adults by identifying strengths and positives in their lives rather than defining them by risks and harms.
- Developing and sustaining trusted relationships with children, young people, and young adults, striving for collaboration and power-sharing.

- Using relational skills to support growth in confidence, agency and self-efficacy of children, young people, and young adults.
- Applying strengths-based and relational practice between professionals in multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working.

Recognising and responding to trauma.

- Working together to understand how trauma can affect development, relationships and responses to different settings and situations.
- Recognising how decisions, use of language and processes can reinforce trauma, and affect the ability to develop trusting relationships.
- Developing services that support children, young people and young adults to use their voice, influence decisions and have control in their lives.

Being curious, evidence-informed, and knowledgeable.

- Gathering and making use of all appropriate sources of data and intelligence to support holistic understanding of exploitation, violence and related harms.
- Inviting diverse views and expertise from professionals, children, young people, young adults, and their families, being open to creativity and new perspectives.
- Using reflective practice, critical thinking, learning and evidence at all levels.
- Challenging assumptions, stereotypes, and ways of working that do not deliver positive outcomes, questioning gaps and attending to what is not known.

Approaching parents and carers as partners, wherever possible.

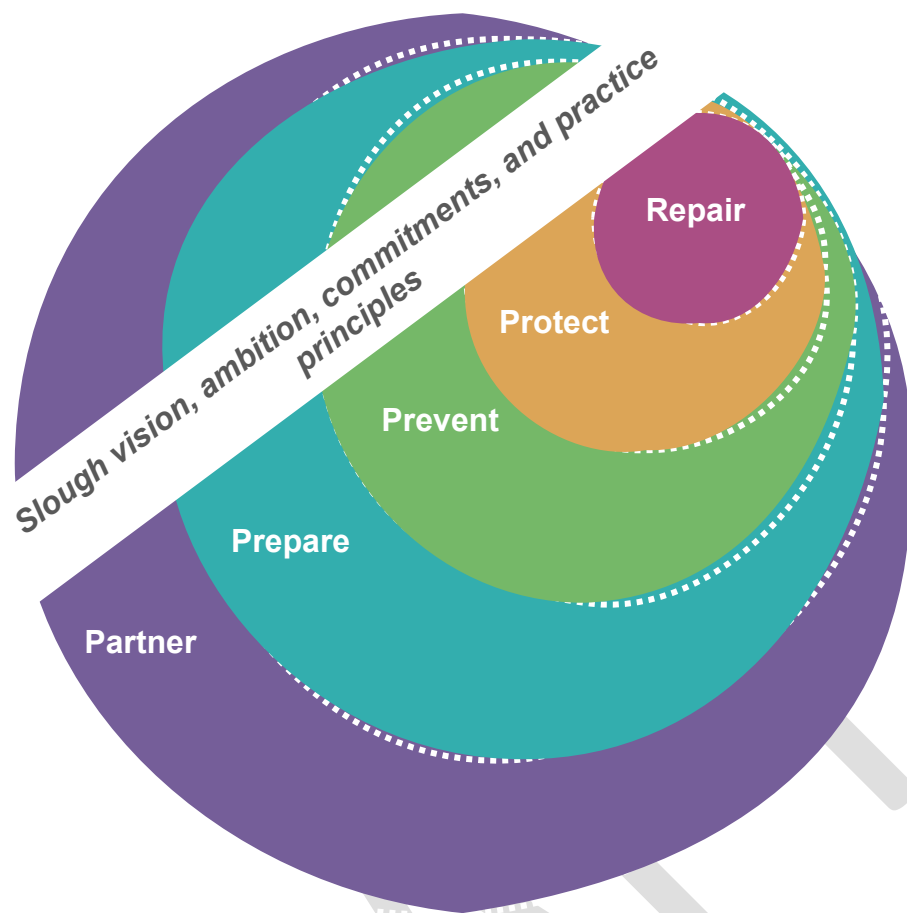
- Seeking to work in partnership with parents, carers, family members and networks to create safety with children, young people, and young adults.
- Seeing parents, carers, and family members as sources of protection, support, and love unless there is evidence to suggest otherwise.
- Respecting parents, carers, and family members, valuing their contributions, and being sensitive to distress they may be experiencing.

Creating safer spaces and places for children and young people.

- Understanding the different spaces, places, and contexts in the lives of children, young people and young adults, including the risks and harms.
- Move beyond responses that focus only the behaviour of the individual to consider the contexts and patterns of risks and harms.
- Move beyond responses that focus only on physical safety, and use relational practice to create safety in relationships, spaces, and places.

WHOLE-SYSTEM APPROACH TO TACKLING EXPLOITATION

Our whole system approach to tackling exploitation and violence is focused on how strategic leaders, operational managers and direct practitioners can keep welfare, safety and agency of children, young people, and young adults at the centre of their work. The approach features five interconnected layers, which are complementary with our [Slough Serious Violence Strategy 2024-2027](#).



- **Partnership and collective leadership:** taking a whole place approach to means actively involving partners and stakeholders from voluntary, community and faith sector, wider public and private sectors. Our work on exploitation, violence, and related harms will be in partnership with and for our communities. Our approach is not constrained by organisational boundaries or professional sector and discipline.
- **Preparation and insight:** responding to the complexity of exploitation, violence and related social harms by applying critical thinking and analysis, committing to reflection, and learning from insight. Applying evidence synthesis and data analysis, making use of multiple sources of information and intelligence to build an accurate picture of exploitation and violence in our local area, and to understand what is happening in the lives of children, young people, and young adults. We will use insight gained to better identify and act on pressures facing our communities, including inequalities and structural harms, such as poverty and housing issues.
- **Prevention and early intervention:** creating opportunities in all direct practice for developing trusted relationships with children, young people, and young adults, and working in partnership with their families. Developing the knowledge, skills and confidence across all partner agencies for prevention approaches to exploitation and violence with children, young people, families and communities (consistent with the [Slough Serious Violence Strategy 2024-2027](#)).

- **Protection and intervention:** integrated support and protection services with evidence-based and trauma-attuned responses to children, young people and young adults who are exploited and to those who are at risk of harming others. Prioritising safety, and promoting welfare and agency, we will commit to shifting away from criminalisation of children, young people, and vulnerable young adults, toward addressing needs, including SEND, mental health, and social harms.
- **Repair, disruption and recovery:** improving our multi-agency response to disrupt exploitation and violence and provide evidence-informed support and trauma-attuned treatment for repair and recovery. We will continue to develop our contextual and cross-border arrangements to stop those who harm others and who exploit children, young people, and young adults for their own gain.

ACTION PLAN: RESPONDING EFFECTIVELY TO HARM FROM EXPLOITATION, VIOLENCE AND HARMS OUTSIDE THE HOME

To deliver our vision and ambition, we need to evidence that the practice principles are being adopted, and that we know the difference we are making in the lives of our children, young people, and young adults.

- ⇒ We will use a range of sources of data and evidence about the delivery of our priorities, to understand how the multi-agency practice principles are being put into practice and how this has an impact in the lives of children and young adults.
- ⇒ We will use insight from this data and evidence to show how our action plan is making a difference for children, young people, young adults, and their families.
- ⇒ We will draw together data, the output from audit and quality assurance activities, and our voice and participation work, to understand our practice.
- ⇒ We will continue to develop new sources of evidence to demonstrate the impact of our action plan.

See appendix 1 for our joined-up action plan.

STRUCTURE

Slough Children First Adolescent Support Service

Our collective response to exploitation and harms outside the home will be bolstered by the **Adolescent Support Service**, which will be led by Slough Children First, in collaboration with partners. The service brings together our offers for young people aged ten upwards, in response to child exploitation, missing, youth justice, and edge of care. The aim of the service is to prevent and reduce the risk to young people from harms outside of the home. Co-ordination of these teams and improved partnership working will lead to more effective responses to promote safety and welfare with young people. This service will collaborate with all relevant partners.

Governance structure: MACE and Slough Safeguarding Partnership

The development of the strategy has been led by Slough Safeguarding Partnership. The strategy receives oversight, scrutiny, and challenge from the Partnership's strategic Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) group. This group reports to Slough Safeguarding Partnership Board and Executive. Slough Safeguarding Partnership Board incorporates the statutory functions of the Safeguarding Children partnership and Safeguarding Adult Board.

A performance framework has been developed and includes data analysis as well as multi-agency audit. Slough Strategic MACE group will produce an annual report on progress made. Implementation of this strategy is the responsibility of the Slough Strategic MACE group, which will drive the whole-system approach to tackling exploitation, focused on how strategic leaders, managers and direct practitioners can keep welfare, safety and agency of children, young people, and young adults at the centre of their work.

Links to other strategies and plans

Safeguarding children, young people and young adults from exploitation is part of a complex set of arrangements, including local and national strategies. This strategy complements and is interdependent with a range of local strategies and plans:

- [Slough Serious Violence Strategy 2024-2027](#)
- [Slough Early Help Partnership Strategy 2023-2025](#)
- [Thames Valley Police and Criminal Justice Plan 2021-2025](#)
- [Children First Children and Young People's Participation Strategy 2024](#)
- [Slough Children First Business and Improvement Plan 2023-2026](#)