

**Subject**

Appendix A

Progress Update on Improvement and Recovery – November 2023 to September 2024

## 1. Overview

This report provides an update on the progress the Council is making towards becoming a Best Value Council. Progress has been reviewed against the Best Value standards and intervention guidance<sup>1</sup>. The report highlights progress since the last formal update was provided to Cabinet in October 2023, whilst highlighting the significant challenges and risks Slough Borough Council continues to face. The report recognises that the statutory directions that are within the children’s directorate are overseen by the DfE’s Commissioner, and a substantive update on this is therefore not provided.

The progress update covers the timeframe from the last update to September 2024, but focuses primarily on the progress made in response to the fourth commissioners report in February 2024. On 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2024, the Council was advised that the Secretary of State was minded to issue new Directions to extend the intervention until November 2026, with an opportunity for the Council to respond in writing. This was accompanied by the Commissioners’ fifth report, dated 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024 and update letter, dated 9<sup>th</sup> September 2024. At the time of writing this report, the Council had not formally responded to this letter, but had widely communicated via formal channels and with quotes from Leader and Chief Executive that this intervention was welcomed. It has not been possible for this progress update to reference and take account of this most recent correspondence. A refreshed improvement and recovery plan is under development and will fully take account of the most recent findings and new directions.

At the end of the report is an assessment of the Council’s current position against the specific MHCLG directions in place, which were issued in [2021](#) and [2022](#).

## 2. Background to improvement and recovery

In June 2021 the Communities Secretary announced an external assurance review of Slough Borough Council's (SBC) financial position and the strength of its wider governance arrangements, following its request for exceptional financial support. The two reviews found that the council had failed to comply with its best value duty of continuous improvement and that it was unable to become financially self-sustaining without considerable Government support.

The Council was subsequently placed under intervention by the Minister of State for Equalities and Levelling Up Communities in December 2021, and Commissioners were appointed to oversee the council's recovery and improvement, alongside a set of Directions under the Local Government Act. The council and children's company are also under Directions regarding children's services improvement and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities service improvement. The latter is a local area-wide recovery programme.

Delivering Best Value is a core theme within those aspects of the council's recovery. In response to the Directions, the council published its recovery and improvement plan – 'Doing Right by Slough' in May 2022. The plan included a framework of seven key themes for its transformation programme, to create 'the right council for Slough' capable of providing value. In September 2022, a further set of directions were issued.

The last full update was taken to Cabinet in October 2023. The recovery programme was refreshed in response to the Commissioners' fourth letter published in February 2024. This refresh was published in July 2024. Progress was reported under three "pillars"- Financial Improvement, Transformation and Childrens Improvement. The publication of [this report](#) and the [progress update dashboard](#) was acknowledged by external auditors in their [Value for Money report published for the 31<sup>st</sup> October Audit](#) and Corporate Governance meeting as positive progress. The Council committed to a more detailed update and refreshed action plan extending to a longer timeframe.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2024, the Council was advised that the Secretary of State was minded to issue new Directions to extend the intervention until November 2026, with an opportunity for the Council to respond in writing. This was accompanied by the Commissioners' fifth report, dated 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024 and update letter, dated 9<sup>th</sup> September 2024. At the time of writing this report, the Council had not formally responded to this letter, but had widely communicated via formal channels and with quotes from Leader and Chief Executive that this intervention was welcomed.

This report provides a detailed update of progress under the first two pillars – Transformation and Financial Improvement. So that the assessment is focused on towards becoming a best value council, the report is now fully aligned to the best value framework.

### 3. Update against 7 Best Value Themes

#### 3.1. Continuous improvement

##### **Embedding a corporate and service performance framework to support continuous improvement**

Update:

- **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2024/25, linked to the corporate plan were agreed jointly by corporate leadership and Lead Members.** Progress against these KPIs is reviewed by CLT Assurance on a monthly basis, and by Cabinet on a quarterly basis. This has been in place since the start of 2024/25. **To support benchmarking, the Council has joined LG Inform, which is a benchmarking tool.**
- **An initial set of Management Information (MI) dashboards have been established utilising PowerBI for corporate and service** (Adults, Education, Housing, Complaints and Casework, SEND, Public Health) reporting and insight. Executive Directors, senior managers, and team leaders can use data to understand trends and to take corrective action. For example, children’s social care teams can see caseloads and action changes in practice for children, and public health teams can see local level inequalities and adapt commissioning and delivery models.
- **Dashboards also offer a new method to engage Lead Members in understanding performance and developing policy.** The performance measures link to the corporate plan priorities and Executive Directors have kept these under review to ensure appropriateness.

Next steps:

- **Undertake transformational work to improve data quality, to ensure management information feeding into performance reporting is consistent and reliable.**
- **Ensure performance reporting is based on appropriate trends and reporting intervals and is consistently being benchmarked** against national indicators and statistical neighbours, as well as focusing on outcomes, using LG Inform (this is also identified in the Annual Governance Statement).

- **Improve the quality of service level commentary** about what is driving poor or good performance and of what corrective actions are needed.
- **Align the Council and Slough Children's First performance teams to improve performance management and evidence based decision-making.**
- **Develop the Council's approach to data**, including investing in data technologies to bring the councils' data technology up to sector standard, which will enable timely, accurate, and reliable reporting and insight for decision-makers.

### **Establishing a transformation programme to drive improvement and change.**

Update:

- **The absence of a resourced and well-planned overall transformation programme was highlighted** in the fourth commissioners' report in February 2024 and in the Value of Money External Audit in October 2024.
- Following the fourth report, immediate project capacity was created to support the three pillars of recovery – under a Transformation Programme, Financial Improvement Programme and Children's Improvement Programme, as reported to Cabinet in July 2024. Transformational capacity was also created directly in Adults, Children's, Governance and Organisational Development.
- The Council has been more proactively engaging with other councils, via the LGA sector support for transformation, including joining the Transformation Network and successfully becoming a Transformation Partner that has been matched with other Councils going through change and transformation – West Berkshire, Croydon and Westminster. Regular engagement continues with other intervention councils- Woking, Croydon and Thurrock.

Next steps:

- The Council is now establishing a more comprehensive programme office and transformation function that drives continuous improvement, keeping both corporate and improvement plans under review, under one permanent Head of Service for Change and Programmes. The functions will support all the associated programmes of change, transformation and re-organisation that will ultimately enable Slough Borough Council to achieve sustained financial stability and improved public services and to adopt a new operating model.
- Engage more systematically with other Councils on improvement and recovery and transformation, building on existing work, and also making better use of the full offer of support from the LGA and from other subscriptions including LGIU.

### **Developing a scrutiny function that is challenging and robust.**

- A full update on the development of Scrutiny is provided later in this report. More work is needed to ensure that the scrutiny function is integral to recovery and improvement. This will require further development of the leadership of Scrutiny, as well as the function being given higher corporate priority. There is a need for clarity around the statutory duties regarding health, crime and disorder and education scrutiny so that these are fully met. Development plans are fully set out in a next phase of governance development.

### **Ensure the Council's Annual Governance Statement is an honest review of its governance and control framework and environment**

Update:

- **The 2023-24 Annual Governance Statement** (AGS) was presented to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee in July 2024. It is an honest self assessment, that highlights areas for development in bold, as well as summarising the learning from external reviews and internal audits.

Next steps:

- The AGS will continue to drive development of the governance and control framework and the Council's refreshed improvement and recovery plan will take account of this.
- The AGS summarises all the existing peer reviews that have been undertaken and the improvement and recovery plan will also cross reference these into one plan.

### **Working with external auditors and ombudsman to identify systemic issues and learning points to inform transformation and improvement.**

Update:

- **The statutory and corporate annual complaints report for 2023-24 went to Audit and Corporate Governance Committee** on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023. The report included figures and a narrative on the root cause for complaints as well as a section on learning and improvement. The housing ombudsman self assessment was included as an appendix as well as being published on the Council website as required. The council is currently non-compliant with the code and plans are in place to address this.
- **Audit and Corporate Governance Committee undertook a self-assessment using the CIPFA toolkit to inform its Annual Report.** The Report was presented to Full Council in July 2024 and has informed the forward work programme and training plan.

Next steps:

- The main themes of non-compliance are around policy and procedure and the need to develop a complaint handling culture across all sections of the Council. The focus will be on achieving greater consistency of quality, customer experience and responsiveness and compliance with regulation, and that the root cause analysis feeds into continuous improvement and transformation. This work forms part of developing the Customer Access aspect of the Target Operating Model. This needs to be enabled by the culture change work outlined later in this report, so that the Council develops a leadership culture that invites continuous feedback, learning, and improvement to be embedded within our new ways of working and help build trust with resident

### **Developing resident engagement to inform improvement**

#### **Update:**

- There are pockets of good practice in **how the Council uses resident insight to support continuous improvement**, in Adults, Children's and Housing. For example, a regular co-production network in adults engages on commissioning and operational issues and will help inform the preparation for the CQC inspection.
- **Housing's Resident Involvement Strategy sets out the need to strengthen the Board's influence in key housing services decisions**, with clear structure that involves working more closely with senior officers and councillors. These were acknowledged in the recent LGA Peer Review into Equality.

#### **Next steps:**

- This all needs to be more systematically developed into a comprehensive approach to resident engagement, building on the good work and links that are already established and identifying and addressing the gaps. More details about plans to develop this are provided under the Partnerships and Community Engagement section of this report.

### **Embedding professional development, performance management and appraisals as integral to continuous improvement.**

#### **Update:**

- **Making appraisals and one to ones more routine has been a priority. The recent 2023/24 appraisal cycle closed at 79% completion.** This is a significant improvement on completion rates from previous years that averaged at 15%.
- **It is important, however, that the focus is not just on completion rates but on making this as meaningful as possible.** Since then, work has been undertaken to make the whole process of objective setting, review and one to

one recording more streamlined, working closely with the Council's Our People Forum.

Next steps:

- Drop in workshops will support managers to use these new tools, as well as taking on board feedback so that a more full suite of support and guidance can be in place by March 2025, ahead of the next appraisal cycle.

## 3.2 Leadership

### **Supporting the Leader and Cabinet to set a clear vision for community and place**

Update:

- **Cabinet and Cabinet/CLT away days took place in July. This helped with building effective working relationships and setting a strategic direction.** A longer-term vision for community and place was set out by the leader.

Next steps:

- This is now being used to inform the future operating model for the Council and wider place shaping work.

More consideration of this is provided under Partnerships and Community Engagement.

### **Ensuring the Council's corporate plan is evidence based and realistic and tied to the medium term financial strategy, and enables performance management and accountability.**

Update:

- **The Slough Insights Pack informed the Corporate Plan 2023-2027**, which was refreshed following the all-out elections in 2023. The Corporate Plan helped frame new Equality Objectives, which were adopted in April 2024, following consultation. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2024/25 are linked to the corporate plan.
- **The ownership of the corporate plan and improvement, recovery, transformation and the medium term financial strategy is being supported through regular sessions** which bring together senior leaders and managers. This has enabled sessions on improvement and recovery, the operating model and medium term financial strategy.

Next steps:

- The Council is now working to re-introduce a Corporate Delivery Plan and service planning for the 2025/26 financial year, so that it is also more closely

linked to the medium term financial strategy. The delivery plan and service plans will capture how key activities will deliver against equalities objectives. The focus will be on measuring progress towards corporate plan outcomes, and the measures that are driving best value and continuous improvement, tied to the refresh of the Recovery Plan.

- Linked to this work, the Council has approved a number of high-level strategies. As identified in the Annual Governance Statement, whilst these have strategic aims and in some cases measures for success, there do not always have detailed action plans sitting beneath them. An oversight of strategies has been refreshed and shared with the Corporate Leadership Team, with the aim of developing this as a published oversight of strategies and of progress against outcomes. This will also highlight where delivery plans are required.

### **Upholding statutory duties and speaking truth to power**

Update:

- **Monitoring Officer, Head of Paid Service (CE) and S151 officer meet on a weekly basis** with the Head of Internal Audit for a regular structured session to review issues and risks and identify actions.
- **The Corporate Leadership Team holds month “assurance meetings”** which focus on statutory duties and performance, and involve a wider range of senior officers.

Next steps:

- Ensure Corporate Leadership enables the wider group of officers with statutory responsibility to work collaboratively to uphold statutory duties.

### **Developing leadership roles- Administration and opposition**

Update:

- **The Leader and Cabinet Members are committed to developing their leadership role**, and the leadership role of all Members, 18 months into a new administration. In this time, there have been two cabinet reshuffles, which has meant new Lead Members have had to be onboarded and supported to develop into their role.
- **With support from the LGA, the majority of cabinet members and Committee Chairs have been matched with experienced Members from other Councils as mentors.** The administration leadership is also committed to a training programme with the LGA. The Chair of Audit and Corporate Governance Committee’s mentor has attended meetings to offer feedback and support to the chair in managing member dynamics within the meeting.



## Developing leadership roles – Members

- **Member induction and development programmes have been devised with input from elected members.** Particular areas of focus were the training commissioned from Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) for scrutiny members. It is important to note that earlier in 2024, an Independent Group was formed from 7 former Labour Party Members. One former Conservative Members stands as an independent, not in any group. This needs consideration as part of Member Development.

## Developing leadership – officers

- **The restructure of senior leadership (Executive Directors and Directors) has been completed.** All the tier 2 director vacancies are now filled with permanent appointments. The Corporate Leadership Team has a stable team, and following recently appointments, all but one will filled by permanent roles (with recruitment underway for the vacant post – the Director of Adults Social Care). CLT is expected to be led by the Management Director Commissioner proposed (at the time of writing this was in the representation stage). This means that the Council expects to move into a period of leadership stability as the 2024-26 improvement and recovery plan is being drafted.
- **In September 2024, the Council participated in an LGA Peer Review looking at Equality.** The Peer Review reported back that the Council's new leadership were committed to equality. The Peer Review also highlighted the impact that the senior leadership restructure had had on staff, and this needs to be considered further as part of improvement and recovery and equality plans.
- **A successful introductory managerial leadership meeting in June launched of a year-long programme of quarterly sessions for tier 1-3** (Executive Directors, Directors and Heads of Service) across the Council and Slough Children's First. The first session was launched in September and focused on the Medium Term Financial Strategy, Operating Model and a development session examined leadership styles which was well received and is helping new Directors focus on building cohesive teams.
- **Each Executive Director is now receiving a monthly HR Metrics dashboard to support directorate leadership teams to discuss their key people issues in relation to recruitment, development, and case work.** Whilst the product is still under development and the data needs to be refined, it will allow for a people-centric angle to leadership meetings, grounded in data.
- **Management development support has started** – in response to a survey that 48% of line managers responded to, a programme of bite size sessions was delivered to upskill in the areas of Change , Performance Management, Finance and Coaching others.

Next steps:

- Develop leadership of Members further and Member Officer working (see Governance)
- Develop the leadership level of the Council and ensure all are focused on improvement, recovery and changing the operating model.
- Design and deliver the Line Managers and Leaders Development Programme.
- Build on strengths and areas for development for leaders identified in the Equality Peer Review

### 3.3 Governance

#### Developing fit for purpose governance-systems and processes

Update:

This continues to be driven as a key workstream of the Transformation Programme. Progress is also reported through the Annual Governance Statement last updated in July 2024. Key progress points to highlight in this report are summarised below:

- **The Member survey was conducted** and reported to Standards Committee meetings in October 2023 and March 2024.
- **The Member officer relations protocol** was updated, based on a good practice model code, and approved by Full Council in January 2024 and is being actively promoted by the Monitoring Officer.
- **The Members' register of interests was published** and the refreshed and a report on this was presented to Standards Committee in March 2024, including follow up actions to a previous internal audit report. The staff survey includes questions about culture and whistleblowing.
- **The Local Code of Conduct for Employees and Corporate Code of Governance** (based on CIPFA / Solace framework) were revised and approved as constitutional changes at May Annual Council 2024.
- **The Council's Contract Procedure Rules**, last updated in January 2024, confirm that all procurement activity must be undertaken with regard to high standards of probity and in accordance with the ethical framework in the Constitution.

#### Developing fit for purpose governance- developing Members

- **A cross-party Member Development Working Group has agreed a programme of all-member training sessions** to be provided by a mixture of

LGA and in-house providers, in line with the Member Development Plan agreed by Standards in March 2024.

- **To build a more cohesive Council**, group leader meetings have recently been re-instated.

Next steps:

- Develop Lead Members' role and ownership of decision making
- The governance programme has been comprehensively re-set and will include more focus on developing the culture- councillor-councillor and councillor-officer relationships, behaviours, power dynamics and organisational culture.
- Develop Members community leadership role, tapping into Members knowledge and understanding of local communities, as part of the development of resident engagement work
- Standards Committee will keep under review whether member development should be assessed against the LGA Member Development Charter.
- The Council is currently reviewing its Contract Procedure Rules to take account of new procurement legislation. This will provide a further opportunity to ensure that ethics and values are embedded into procedures.

### **Effective decision making**

- **Although some reports are still dispatched after the statutory deadline for publication of papers, use of urgency procedures has been limited** and where call in is waived, reports have been submitted to Full Council.
- **To address this Corporate schedule reviewed weekly by the Corporate Leadership Team** to ensure forward planning and clearance deadlines met. Clearance processes include sign off by finance and legal officers and s.151 officer and Monitoring Officer.
- **A corporate governance group** has reviewed the governance processes and brings in wider input from relevant service areas. More input from a wider group of staff is required to ensure corporate ownership.
- **Governance learning programme** has covered a range of topics to assist managers with public law decision-making, with regular attendance from senior officers.
- **Contractual performance** needs to develop, but good examples include:
  - Cabinet agreed new contractual performance indicators for Slough Children First in December 2023, including an indicator on effective governance and culture leading to outcomes focused improvements.

- o an options appraisal for the Councils' repairs, maintenance and investment contract, recommended a model of insourcing the customer call centre to ensure appropriate control over service levels.

Next steps:

- Contractual performance indicators for some externally provided services needs to be reviewed and improved
- Employee code of conduct will be embedded further in staff communications and management practice
- Further work is required on the Council's corporate anti-fraud policies and procedures, to ensure the practise is appropriately preventative and proactive in approach.
- Corporate and Political Leadership will be supported with horizon scanning, and a more proactive approach to forward planning and deliberation, which is intended to lead to more effective executive decision making and the timely production of reports, as well as responses to legislation, regulation and external drivers.

### **Scrutiny and internal audit is challenging, robust and valued**

Update:

- The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) **undertook a review of Scrutiny** from January to February 2024. The report found that Scrutiny was steadily improving after a fairly slow start, contributed to by new members, lacking experience of the role of scrutiny. Members are supported by a specialist officer to be better equipped and ready to function, and the new Chair had the key skills and capacity to effectively lead the committee, with commitment from committee members.
- **The report also found that the Council's leadership, in principle, recognised the importance of a collaborative and constructively challenging relationship**, but that the relevant cabinet member should be at the scrutiny meeting and be the focal point of scrutiny questioning and accountability.
- **The Chair of Audit and Corporate Governance Committee's mentor has attended meetings to offer feedback and support** to the chair in managing member dynamics within the meeting.
- **This the first year of the internal audit team being in-house, after many years of an outsourced arrangement.** There is significant work to do to recruit and stabilise the team and review the annual audit plan. It is likely a decision that the original plan to commission an external review this municipal year will not

be progressed, as the focus needs to be in building the internal capacity and delivering on a new plan.

Next steps:

- Further develop the leadership of Scrutiny, the way scrutiny takes place in meetings, and ensure this is being given higher corporate priority.
- Ensure clarity and focus on the statutory duties regarding health, crime and disorder and education scrutiny.
- Develop internal audit programme, oversight of assurance levels and recommendations and oversight role of Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.

### **Improving company governance**

Update:

- **There has been a renewed focus on improving company governance, with the oversight of a companies specialist.** An update on progress was reported at Cabinet Committee in September 2024. An initial desktop exercise has been undertaken to set out the current position on each company and a 'traffic light' system had been put in place to assess key activities relating to company governance, oversight and financial governance.
- **As reported then, the position, risks and reporting arrangements of each company are different.** The significant weaknesses identified for James Elliman Homes were also set out in a separate report.
- **There had been more progress already made to strengthen governance and improve reporting of some other companies,** particularly Slough Children First.

Next steps:

- Work to address the identified weaknesses was being prioritised and regular updates will be provided to Cabinet Committee and external auditors.

## **3.4 Culture**

### **Developing a more engaging culture that improves confidence in leadership**

Update:

- **Following the staff survey which was undertaken last year that revealed very low confidence in the leadership (44%) and that staff were not being**

empowered to implement change (46%), workshops were carried out to better understand the culture in winter 2023.

- **Following this and engagement with staff involved in championing the culture change, a reset was undertaken**, under the direction of an Executive Director. This narrowed the focus based on the assessment that the scope may have been too broad and that the conditions were not right. **The reset focused on Leading from the top / Governance, Organisational Change and Staff Communication and Engagement.**
- **The Our People Forum was formed to grow staff engagement** in the Culture Change Programme so they can champion this in the wider workforce. The forum has met monthly since the programme was rest in May, and has representation from all areas across the business and at different grades. The forum has been pivotal in user testing new/revised HR products such as the revamp of the Diversity capture page on Agresso and the new 1:1 and end of year appraisal forms and helping design the staff engagement survey.
- **Alongside this, three staff engagement networks are also being supported** – for Disability, Race and Women. These were highlighted as positive developments in the Equality Peer Review.
- **Staff Talkabout sessions**, which are “roadshows” with the Chief Executive and Leadership, were relaunched over summer (late July and August), with over 150 attendees for the two held. Over 90% of responses said they found it “very or slightly useful”. The session was led by the Chief Executive and covered updates on the financial picture, led by the Section 151 officer, as well as the operating model, and culture. Challenging questions were asked and responded to directly.
- **Introducing staff engagement networks, equality commitments and culture change** is now a permanent item on corporate induction sessions. The Staff Equality Networks have also started a dialogue with the Corporate Leadership Team as part of formalising their role.
- **Since the introduction of the Hybrid Working Policy in November 2023, the average daily use of OH has risen from 250-300 people per day to 300-350 people per day.** The peak use is around 450 people on Wednesdays, reducing to 150-200 on Fridays. However, the Wednesday peak remains around 50% of the potential total occupancy of Observatory House and not all staff are adhering to the Hybrid Working Policy. This requires a continued improvement focus.
- **The Staff Survey is taking place in October.** The survey builds on last year’s questions, to enable trend analysis but also includes more standardised questions that be benchmarked. It will also include a scorecard for each Director so that specific actions can be progressed as well as corporate actions. The staff survey in 2023 evidenced very low staff morale and satisfaction and a response

rate of 47%. A concerted effort is being made to increase this rate. It is expected that staff morale and satisfaction will still be relatively low but should give a more nuanced assessment of issues and actions needed.

Next steps:

- The Our People Forum debriefed about the Talkabout and made suggestions for how Talkabout sessions could be developed to invite even more open feedback that can support continuous improvement. This was part of a wider discussion about staff communications and engagement.
- Getting the basics right is needed to help culture change. Improvement is needed across services and corporate support and staff are facing gaps in capacity and capability to work at the pace required. Unless it is addressed, only so much can be achieved through stand along culture change work.
- Creating the right culture and working behaviours between officers and Members is key to developing the right culture. Progress on this is reported under Governance.
- The Council has more work to do to develop a culture of compliance with regulation, strategies and policies. This needs to start with a more robust approach to horizon scanning and a more proactive approach to forward planning and deliberation, which is intended to lead to more effective executive decision making and the timely production of reports, as well as responses to legislation, regulation and external drivers.
- The Culture Change Programme will be reset to take account of this, and as a cross cutting enabler of the change and transformation needed across the Council to be able to improve and recover.

### **3.5 Use of resources**

#### **Human Resources**

Update:

- **HR has been an issue highlighted in commissioners' reports.** The permanent Director of HR and OD, appointed earlier this year has progressed a number of areas in a short period of time:
- **A new recruitment platform has been launched and a revised induction programme** has been launched made up of an in-person monthly event for all new starters.
- **This increase in attendance has also been supported by a revised onboarding programme** featuring a personalised service by the recruitment

team ensuring the incoming employee is welcomed with relevant emails and access to the correct systems upon arrival.

- **As reported above, the recent 2023/24 appraisal cycle closed at 79% completion - a significant improvement on completion rates from previous years that averaged at 15%.**
- **By working closely with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager** we are revising Agresso's functionality and the way in which it captures Diversity Data.
- **A positive trend has been observed in employee turnover**, from 19.5% to 15.6%, a reduction of 4 percentage points. Career progression is the highest driver for employees leaving.

Next steps:

- Develop the workforce strategy- called the "People Strategy", aligned to the Target Operating Model and Improvement and Recovery Plan.
- Embed recommendations from on workforce diversity from the Equality Peer Review into the People Strategy

### **Modernising Digital, Data and Technology**

Update:

- **The Modernisation Programme was launched in March 2022.** In December 2022, following its mobilisation stage, it was reported to Cabinet that the programme comprised 40 projects, across four workstreams:
  - Cloud migration of line of business applications
  - Cyber security and resilience
  - End user computing
  - Replacing aged infrastructure
- **In March 2024, the Council received the LGA's Digital 360 review. A Digital 360 is a funded improvement tool**, managed and delivered by the local government sector. The team was asked to explore the question "How are the goals and vision for Slough's people, place and organisation supported by digitalisation, now, next and future?" with a particular focus on the operating model, pace of change, roles and responsibilities and risks. The review found that the Council had made some progress in improving its core infrastructure and technology, leading to it being more resilient and some progress in developing core IT processes. The review recommendations are being substantively considered by the new Director and Corporate Leadership Team.



- **As of September 2024 (when the current Director of Digital, Data and Technology joined), 43 further projects had been completed** (making a total of 75 completed since inception), but a further 53 projects had been added, bringing the total portfolio size to 141. Key examples of progress include;
  - The corporate data centre was migrated from a Slough location to a Crown Commercial Services hosting site in Hampshire, reducing organisational vulnerability (because of geographical distance) and saving £80k pa.
  - A migration to new Wide Area Network technology (SD-WAN) has saved £140k pa and provides greater performance and resilience for access to many cloud-based applications (by avoiding the need for connections to pass via the data centre).
  - Work on translation capability and on the accessibility of our website has moved Slough from being in 250th place for accessibility amongst UK councils in September 2023 to 19th place in October 2024 (source: [Slough Borough Council - Silktide Index](#)).
  - The Astro Hub physical support centre, coupled with wider Astro branding, has improved staff satisfaction, as reported via a number of staff engagement channels.

Next steps:

- Five important projects from the original programme have not yet been completed:
  - Procurement and implementation of Disaster Recovery as a Service and Backup as a Service – critical for Council resilience
  - Procurement and Implementation of a Security Incident and Event Monitoring service – a key cyber countermeasure relevant for both detecting and rapidly responding to attack
  - Migration of one of our most important line of business systems which is currently hosted on servers with an end-of-life operating system, with a cloud-based SaaS solution being preferred
  - Obtaining Public Sector Network security certification (primarily dependent on the preceding point)
  - Completion of Microsoft 365 deployment, with migration of data from file servers to SharePoint being the principal outstanding matter, coupled with the need to drive adoption and effective use of collaborative technologies such as SharePoint. The communications and training programme required for this will do much to bolster the digital skills, awareness and engagement of staff.

- A detailed planning, resource scheduling and prioritisation exercise is underway (as was recommended by the LGA review).
- The review had findings which need to be owned by the wider leadership team as part of the new operating model which has a workstream looking at customer access and digital inclusion.

## **Financial Improvement**

Update:

- On the 18th of September 2023 Cabinet agreed a refresh of the Council’s Finance Improvement Action Plan. As of June 2024, the Council aligned the Finance Improvement Plan with the Financial Management Code (FM Code) which is designed to support good practice in fiscal management and to assist local authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. **The Council continues to develop an approach to self-assess against the seven Best Value themes** and the reporting of the progress of the Finance Improvement Plan is being aligned to the self-assessment. The primary focus however will be on the attainment of professional financial standards as set out in the CIPFA FM Code.

To date the Council has 35 projects, which are summarised below.

### **1.1. List of Finance Improvement Headline Actions by RAG and SRO**

CIPFA Financial Management (FM) Code - Principles	Prior Status June 24	Direction on prior period	Current Status July 2024	Direction Current Period	Financial Improvement Quick Reference Name	SRO
Accountability	Amber	↑	Amber	↑	Completion of Statement of accounts	Dir Corp and Strat Finance
	Amber	↑	Amber	↔	Financial Reporting and best practice	Dir Corp and Strat Finance
	Red	↓	Red	↑	Companies Reporting	Dir Property & Assets Peter Hopkins
Adherence to professional	Amber	↑	Amber	↑	Fixed Asset Register	Dir Corp and Strat Finance

CIPFA Financial Management (FM) Code - Principles	Prior Status June 24	Direction on prior period	Current Status July 2024	Direction Current Period	Financial Improvement Quick Reference Name	SRO
standards	Amber	↑	Red	↓	MTFS ensure balanced / agreed including engagement all	Dir Corp and Strat Finance
	Amber	↔	Red	↓	Reserves – level needs addressing (with a clear plan to recover)	Dir Corp and Strat Finance
	Amber	↔	Amber	↑	Review Finance procedures Annually	Dir Corp and Strat Finance
Assurance	Amber	↑	Amber	↔	Capacity and skills for recovery (Corporate, Governance/Audit/Risk, Fin Mgt)	Dir Financial Mgt
	Green	↔	Green	↔	Capacity and skills for recovery - Transactional Services	Dir of Financial Transactions
	Amber	↑	Amber	↔	Financial Reporting of Budget Management - best practice	Dir Financial Mgt
Assurance	Amber	↔	Amber	↔	Savings are monitored and managed and regular reports	Dir Financial Mgt
	Red	↑	Red	↔	Risk management system - strengthen and underpin integrate with other info for decision making	Head of Audit, Risk and Insurance
	Amber	↑	Amber	↔	Internal Audit – o/s actions	Head of Audit, Risk and Insurance

CIPFA Financial Management (FM) Code - Principles	Prior Status June 24	Direction on prior period	Current Status July 2024	Direction Current Period	Financial Improvement Quick Reference Name	SRO
	Amber	↓	Amber	↑	Procurement - New legislation and as Key Driver to Success	Dir Corp and Strat Finance
	Amber	↔	Amber	↔	Annual Governance Statement (AGS) align to Statement of Accounts.	Head of Governance
	Amber	↔	Amber	↔	Training programme – members and (non) finance officers	Dir Financial Mgt
	Amber	↔	Amber	↑	Finance Business Partnering strengthened	Dir Financial Mgt
	Red	↔	Red	↔	Anti-fraud and corruption culture	Head of Audit, Risk and Insurance
	Red	↔	Amber	↑	Grants Register Maintaining the register and actively seeking grants that are applicable to the council	Dir Financial Mgt
	Red	↔	Red	↔	Adequacy of Insurance Assurance	Head of Audit, Risk and Insurance
			NEW		NEW Internal Controls	ED Fin & Commercial Annabel Scholes
Organisational Leadership	Amber	↑	Amber	↑	Reconciliations key systems – cred and debtors and Balance Sheet review regular and reported on	Dir Corp and Strat Finance

CIPFA Financial Management (FM) Code - Principles	Prior Status June 24	Direction on prior period	Current Status July 2024	Direction Current Period	Financial Improvement Quick Reference Name	SRO
	Amber	↑	Amber	↑	Debtors Invoices and audit trail for improved Debt Collection	EDs of Services generating
	Green	↔	Green	↔	Debtors & Income Systems	Dir of Financial Transactions
	Amber	↔	Amber	↔	Debt Reporting and Performance	Dir Financial Mgt
	Amber	↑	Amber	↑	Disposals Review & Monitoring	ED RHE
	Blue		Blue		Housing benefit – process benefits and changes time to process	Dir of Financial Transactions
	Amber	↑	Amber	↑	Charitable Trust governance and monitoring	Dir Property & Assets Peter Hopkins
	Amber	↑	Amber	↔	Being Up to date - Legislative, CIPFA FM Code and other changes reviewed and implemented	Dir Financial Mgt
	Green	↑	Green	↑	Revenues and Benefits Transformation work	Dir of Financial Transactions
	Amber	↑	Amber	↑	Development of Agresso system to be fit for purpose	Dir Corp and Strat Finance
	Green	↔	Green	↔	The transactional service – single view of debt and maximise collection	Dir of Financial Transactions
Sustainability	Amber	↔	Amber	↔	Value For Money	Dir Corp & Strat Finance

CIPFA Financial Management (FM) Code - Principles	Prior Status June 24	Direction on prior period	Current Status July 2024	Direction Current Period	Financial Improvement Quick Reference Name	SRO
	Amber	↑	Amber	↑	Treasury Management -ways of working for oversight and reporting	Dir Corp and Strat Finance
	Amber	↑	Amber	↑	The general awareness of our financial sustainability and everyone's part in management of our resources	ED Fin & Commercial
	Amber	↔	Amber	↔	Identifying Current and Future Liabilities	Dir Corp and Strat Finance
Transparency	Amber	↔	Amber	↑	Resident and stakeholder engagement	Dir Corp and Strat Finance

### 3.6 Service delivery

#### Ensuring the golden thread from corporate plan to service delivery

Work to ensure that there is a golden thread from strategic plans to service delivery is outlined under 3.2- Leadership.

#### Evidence based, customer and citizen focused service delivery

Update:

- **The Council has now established a Public Health Team for Slough, under the direction of a permanent Director of Public Health**, having previously had a shared service across Bracknell Forest Council and Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. This includes a Public Health Intelligence Unit. **Along with the officer who works on Slough Insights Pack, this brings much needed additional analytic and strategic capacity** to enable the Council to focus on

ensuring service delivery impacts on long term outcomes, with performance data that helps us understand what is making an impact. The Public Health Intelligence Unit has developed ward health profiles to inform evidence based planning, decision making, commissioning and delivery.

Next steps:

- Bring performance data, resident and customer insight, complaints data and scrutiny findings together to identify recurring trends in customer experience, satisfaction and outcomes and actions needed.
- Develop a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Slough- a joint collaboration between Strategy and Public Health.

### **Developing more responsive services**

- **The Customer Services department provides the “front door” for residents contacting Slough Borough Council.** The channels of contact are by telephone (68.7%), face-to-face (3.7%), and email/e-forms (27.6%)<sup>2</sup>. Since May 2024, residents can now also access the chatbot SARA which sits on the website and provides answers to the most frequently asked questions. The chatbot allows for translation into several different languages, which is in addition to the translation already offered on the website via google translate. The team offer digital assistance for service users who are digitally excluded or struggle to use technology to access services. This service is delivered through a call back service or an appointment at any of our Customer Hubs. Customer services have achieved a reduction over the last 4 months in call centre wait times to 4m 29secs, In addition, 100% (953) of customer facing enquiry box emails are answered within 5 working days.
- **In Housing, the Resident Involvement Strategy and associated action plans (March 2024) has been adopted to ensure that the housing service is responsive to the diverse needs of our residents.** Equality questions are being integrated into involvement forms and surveys. This is helping to gain a better understanding of the residents engaging, identify gaps in service delivery, and respond accordingly.
- **Adult Social Care have set out how they will support specific groups and provided updates this year** – for enabling autistic adults to live a good life as independently as possible, for supporting and empowering carers and older people.
- **Environment:** A weekly food waste collection trial was launched in five areas of the borough from July 2024 – bringing food waste collections to Slough for the first time. It is hoped if the trial is successful the scheme will be rolled out across the borough.

Next steps

- Develop more consistent approach to service design as part of operating model and service planning

### **3.7 Partnerships and community engagement**

Update:

Shared vision for local area

- **Both Members and corporate leadership are involved in the Berkshire Prosperity Board which is helping position Slough in the wider regional economy**, to help ensure benefits can be secured for Slough. There is also a focus politically and corporately on encouraging growth, shaping the town centre and securing the economic benefits from the very significant business base in Slough. The Single Planning Zone consultation, town centre plans and work to bring in higher education providers are all examples of this place leadership.

Next steps:

- **There is however more to do to play the convening role with partners from all sectors** that we are starting to identify will be a key condition of success in the operating model. The Council's partnerships are based on the statutory partnerships needed around community safety, safeguarding and health and wellbeing. There is an opportunity and imperative to provide more leadership setting shared priorities and bringing partners together to work on long term outcomes and place shaping.
- **The Health and Wellbeing Board is being developed further, and Health and Wellbeing Priorities are being developed that are preventative and outcome focused**, and will help embed public health approaches across the system. These will be explored through informal workshops over the course of the next 9-months. There is the opportunity through this to help the Council, and wider system focus more on the long term outcomes in the corporate plan.

#### **Developing meaningful consultation and resident engagement**

Update:

- **Currently, the council uses the Citizen Space platform for online consultations, survey and other online engagement.** As of July 2024, the council has completed 41 consultations on Citizen Space (29 public and 12 private, with 2 more that are currently open).



- **The responses to consultations have been considered during final decision making**, for example in the decisions about Children’s Centres and Equality Objectives. The “We Asked, You Said, We Did” feature on Citizen Space, has been used which then uploads a summary of the responses and outcomes from closed consultations once the final outcomes/decisions have been made. The first of these was uploaded for the Equality Objectives consultation in May 2024. These summaries can be viewed on the [individual consultation pages](#) and on a [dedicated page](#).
- **The recent LGA Equality Peer review identified that there was also some really good practice around service user engagement** in Adult Social Care (ASC), Adult Social Care Commissioning and Education which could serve as models for other services
- **A more proactive and systematic resident engagement framework** is being developed in collaboration with leads from across the Council.

Next steps:

- Developing an overarching strategic communications plan that will frame our internal and external communications and engagement work – linked to our corporate plan, refresh of our recovery plan, future operating model and political aspirations
- Develop a stronger focus on the story and narrative for Slough the place, working closely with partners so that this is a collective approach
- Develop a proactive and systematic resident engagement framework that guides the way we communicate and engagement with residents, in a more segmented and sophisticated way
- Develop a gateway to ensure greater consistency in consultation –with support and approval managed corporately
- This work will also help us to define what is needed in the long term from a communications and engagement function.
- Commission a Residents Survey for March 2024 and also start work to engage and then consult residents on the medium term financial plan and operating model.
- The initial mapping of resident engagement has shown that there is a lot of good practice in co-production and community engagement across the Council and led by partners, and an opportunity to harness this, and value this more corporately and strategically.
- Identify ways to maintain and build cohesion.

#### **4. Children’s intervention (update as at end of August 2024)**

A recent update to the Improvement Board, chaired by the DfE Commissioner, detailed the activity taking place with the improvement programme delivering a good level progress overall with tangible supporting evidence of positive impact. Some delays were noted in the previous Board report in May however the recently published report from Ofsted's last focused visit positively highlighting:

*The senior leadership team has a sound understanding of the further progress that is needed to achieve its vision of a sustainable and resilient service for children, and it has a strong focus on continuous service development. A comprehensive improvement plan is underway.*

This is a significant step forward to where the service was in the ILACS early in 2023. The foundations are robustly in place and what is needed to do next very clear. The opportunity for reflection has been taken and SCF are considering the priorities and how this process will evolve as they move confidently into the next phase.

They have refined or added actions where it has been identified that the needs have changed or developed. What still needs to be done is being looked at closely and the detailed more nuanced requirements needed to successfully move forward in previous challenging areas are being captured.

The Improvement plan has been captured by themed workstreams rather than service area. This has succeeded in creating a strong and directed system wide leadership approach to improvement which will continue to be developed. The plan will also capture areas of specific improvement against each service, encouraging ownership of the growth and development of each service area by the respective HoS.

## **SEND Intervention**

Progress has been made in the past year, with improvements across the SEND & Inclusion services. However, challenges remain, particularly in terms of data management, capacity building and consistent communication. The Council is committed to maintaining the momentum of this transformation, ensuring that the services provided are of the highest standard and that they effectively meet the needs of CYP with SEND and their families.

The improvement of SEND services and outcomes for CYP in Slough has always received strong support from the Leader of the Council and the Lead Member for Children's Services. The service reports to Cabinet on a three-monthly basis, to the Children's Services Improvement Board on a six-weekly basis, to Finance Board on a

three- monthly basis principally on developments in Slough's engagement with the Safety Valve programme and has been subject to scrutiny from the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee. In addition, the DfE conducts meetings on a three- monthly basis to assess progress against the SEND Written Statement of Action.

The presence of a stable SEND leadership team has been instrumental in driving the progress achieved. This leadership has renewed the Council's ambitions for SEND services, resulting in more realistic engagement with schools and gradually improving outcomes for CYP with SEND. Discussions are taking place to emphasise to partner agencies that outcomes for CYP with SEND are a Local Area responsibility and do not belong solely to Slough Borough Council.

Emphasis has been placed on early intervention within inclusive educational settings. Improvement strategies have increasingly been informed by the lived experiences of CYP and their families. This approach ensures that service development is grounded in real-world experiences, leading to more effective and responsive services. Improving sufficiency planning, commissioning, and capital planning are all being prioritised. These efforts, in partnership with health and social care, aim to ensure that the necessary resources and services are available when needed.

Progress has been assessed through multiple channels, including:

- **Lived Experience Evidence:** Gathering direct feedback from CYP and their families to inform service improvements.
- **Ofsted's Inspections of Schools.** Positive feedback from Ofsted inspections of schools in Slough recognising their good level of practice with pupils with SEND.
- **Special Voices Engagement:** Surveys and feedback from parent/carer forums have provided valuable insights into service performance and areas for improvement.
- **Data Dashboard Utilisation:** Implementation of a regional good practice data dashboard, aligned with health and social care data, to monitor progress and outcomes.

The next phase of this journey will focus on embedding the changes made, continuing to build capacity and ensuring that the services are sustainable and capable of delivering long-term positive outcomes. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration, Slough Borough Council is dedicated to creating a SEND & Inclusion service that is truly 'fit for the future'.





## 5. Update on progress against directions (Updated as at end of August 2024)

	Direction	Update
1	<b>In the first three months [following the Direction] undertake an assessment of the functional capability of all service areas identifying the gaps in capacity and capability, and within the first six months prepare and agree action plans to the satisfaction of the Commissioners.</b>	<p>Functional Capability Assessments (FCAs) were completed by all service areas in May 2022 with an overarching document drawing out key themes that sit alongside other summary documents produced by Executive Directors. A costed action plan was derived from these and all these assessments were used to inform the Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan at the time – the Doing Right by Slough Corporate Plan which was approved by Full Council in 2022.</p> <p>These FCAs have recently been revisited to inform the "As Is" picture for the development of the Target Operating Model. It has been useful to revisit this analysis of capability, although there is significant variation in the way targets were defined and set at the time. As we develop the "To Be" direction of travel for the target operating model, we will draw on this work again so that we have an up-to-date analysis of capability and of gaps that will need to be addressed in the refreshed Improvement and Recovery plan.</p>
2	<b>To undertake in the exercise of any of its functions any action that the Commissioners may reasonably require to avoid as far as practicable incidents of poor governance or financial mismanagement that would, in the reasonable opinion of the Commissioners, give rise to the risk of further failures by the Authority to comply with the best value duty.</b>	This has been, and continues to be, done.
3	<b>In the first three months prepare and agree an Improvement Plan to the satisfaction of the Commissioners (which may</b>	Improvement Plans have been prepared, agreed, revised, and relaunched since 2022. Progress has been made and reported on, particularly to some of the foundational improvements needed, but some areas

	<b>Direction</b>	<b>Update</b>
	<p><b>include or draw upon improvement or action plans prepared before the date of these Directions), with, resource allocated accordingly, and as a minimum, the following components:</b></p>	<p>have lacked any momentum or pace, as the fourth commissioners' report identified. Overall, it is not yet possible to point to the improvements that had been expected at this stage and for that translate into an improved experience for residents of place or services.</p> <p>With a change in Chief Executive now alongside key personnel leading recovery, as well as changes to the whole of the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier of leadership, it is important to understand what has worked and why and what the blockers have been to improvement, beyond the obvious factors, including officer turnover and a change of administration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new refreshed improvement and recovery plan is under development.</li> </ul>
3a	<p><b>An outline action plan to achieve financial sustainability and to close the long-term budget gap identified by the Authority across the period of its Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).</b></p>	<p>A Finance Improvement plan (FIP) has been mapped against the 6 principles of the professional standards of the CIPFA FM (Financial Management) code incorporating 34 initiatives. The code was designed to support good practice in fiscal management and to assist LAs to demonstrate their financial sustainability and therefore gives a secure framework for the improvement work. Aligning to the code has given the FIP a wider, more detailed scope with progress against the plan reported on monthly to the Finance Board.</p> <p>A July Cabinet report<sup>3</sup> forming part of the rolling MTFS was recognised by Commissioners to represent phase one of the MTFS refresh process, providing a forecast outlook allowing the Council to identify and respond to issues early and to aid timely robust and methodical planning. This report contains significant information on the work undertaken to achieve financial sustainability and to close the long-term budget gap,</p>

	Direction	Update
3b	<p><b>An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of democratic services, to include rapid training for council officers, a revised term of reference for the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee, and the agreement of an Annual Governance Statement for 2020-21, AND</b></p>	<p>These subpoints are being addressed together through the Scrutiny and Governance workstream of the Transformation programme. The project has delivered three phases of critical work over the past two years, mitigating against governance risks arising from the repeated and ongoing shocks and challenges to the good governance of the authority during that time, while looking to enable progress towards an improved and recovered Council. As with many aspects of the Council's recovery, improvement has not been linear, and pace has been variable. However, it has been recognised as one of the stronger areas of the Council's overall recovery progress.</p>
3c	<p><b>An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of the scrutiny function, to include a review of the Authority's strategic risk register to make it fit for purpose.</b></p>	<p>Three previous phases were each designed based on the changing circumstances and needs of the organisation at the time, informed by a series of external and internal reviews - including a continuous feedback loop with commissioners. Some deliverables have been a repeated or constant feature in each phase (such as member and officer training &amp; development or improving compliance with basic governance around formal reports and decisions).</p> <p>Good governance is not a 'one time' task and requires constant maintenance and development especially while major organisational upheaval is underway which is why governance is seen within the recovery programme as an enabler underpinning all the other workstreams. Other completed deliverables such as constitution review with new committees, changing the electoral cycle or overhauling the scrutiny function have been more linear. A next phase of work has now been scoped out that is able to focus more on the culture that enables good governance.</p>



	Direction	Update
		<p>Separately the Council’s risk management methodology is being revised alongside the development of a risk appetite statement for Members to approve to provide the basis for their acceptable level of risk. This will underpin and drive the work to develop key risk indicators and risk reporting to help inform decision-making. Planning also includes identifying and training departmental risk champions and hosting workshops for risk horizon-scanning.</p>
3d	<p><b>An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of internal audit, which addresses outstanding management actions and includes the commissioning of an independent review of the internal audit contract and a fully costed plan for establishing an internal audit function that reflects best practice.</b></p>	<p>Since the Directions were put in place, the internal audit function was moved back in-house in March 2023 but turnover in staff since then has meant expected progress has not been made. With a new team currently being put in place, positive movement is being seen again on the reduction of outstanding audit actions.</p>
3e	<p><b>An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of the procurement and contract management function, which includes an independent review.</b></p>	<p>An in-house team was recruited following the end of outsourcing arrangements for the procurement and contract management functions. This team have since introduced improvements made through an action plan including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• embedding best practice and learning – the training programme continues with knowledge drops and communications on SBC insight. The training ensures those who are involved in procurement are aware of the Transforming Public Procurement reform.</li> <li>• development of the corporate contract management framework and toolkit to ensure there is a co-ordinated and consistent approach to contract management. The toolkit includes a</li> </ul>

Direction	Update
	<p>tiering/risk assessment tool to ensure we prioritise the highest risk contracts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The team is currently leading a process to re-validate the information contained within the central contracts register, collate copies of the associated agreements (Terms &amp; Conditions), and reconcile this with spend transactions. This will give us a better understanding of overall spend and of what we are purchasing, which is also key baseline data for the target operating model.</li> <li>• The Berkshire procurement network has started up again and the network has started to focus on regional collaborative opportunities and sharing best practice including the opportunities and implications of the procurement act.</li> <li>• including social value to form part of evaluation criteria in all procurements and captured in data sets.</li> <li>• engaging with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) at SME events to ensure they have visibility on how to do business with the Council and oversight of its procurement forward plan.</li> </ul> <p>embedding key performance indicators in the service that are regularly reported to strategic procurement review board and the number of exemptions is reported as a corporate health indicator.</p> <p>As focus has been on building the in-house team, we have not progressed with an independent review. We would like to work to Corporate Peer Challenge that we will be introduced within evidencing progress made on the revised recovery plan.</p> <p>The impending introduction of the new Procurement Act will introduce significant changes to the UK's public procurement regime, aiming for greater efficiency, transparency, and alignment with national needs. There will be a major revision of the</p>

	Direction	Update
		<p>contract procedure rules in response to the Act as key is promoting more openness in decision-making, ensuring fairness and accountability, but also encouraging healthy competition amongst suppliers – which is seen as crucial for delivery of better outcomes – but may increase risk.</p> <p>In July, the corporate leadership team also approved a practical guide to commissioning, co-produced by SBC and SCF, that sets out the technical steps that should be followed and adopted.</p>
3f	<p><b>An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of the Authority’s IT.</b></p>	<p>The ICT&amp;D service has undergone a significant improvement in the delivery of its services over the two and a half years since the directives were issued. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent recruitment to management team and ICT&amp;D TOM – at director, head of service and team leader levels permanent staff are in place.</li> <li>• Improved governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Monthly service report – comprehensive monthly service performance report socialised with key elected members, commissioners and CLT</li> <li>○ Technical design authority – implemented and embedded a single technical design authority for ICT and technology within the council</li> <li>○ Modernisation programme – effective programme and project management of a running portfolio of ~150 projects covering seven themes of: cloud migration of applications, cyber security and resilience, digital transformation, end use compute, professional and sustainable service delivery and replacing aged infrastructure.</li> <li>○ Audit and risk management – recognised as having effective measures in place to track, monitor</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	Direction	Update
		<p>and address audit and risk <u>recommendations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procurement savings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Significant savings generated with key procurements such as: mobile telephony and data, software defined wide area network, corporate and contact centre telephony, data centre relocation, Agresso cloud hosting. Aggregated annual procurement savings of £850,000.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Improved internal communications – rebranded ICT&amp;D service with weekly Astro Announcements and meet the team</li> <li>• Supported internal technology adoption through tech champions’ network</li> <li>• Service desk delivery – launch of Astro Hub, drop-in service for staff, improved proactive problem resolution.</li> <li>• Improved cyber security and resilience – three remaining projects due to complete by FYE with seven projects addressing audit findings already complete</li> <li>• Improved service desk and adoption of ITIL service management leading to a more consistent service</li> <li>• Establishment of Slough CSI – internal to ICT&amp;D, a continuous improvement programme documenting and reviewing practices, policies and processes</li> </ul>
3g	<p><b>A suitable officer structure and scheme of delegation for the Authority which provides sufficient resources to deliver the Authority’s functions in an effective way, including the Improvement Plan and its monitoring and reporting, prioritising permanent recruitment and/or longer-term contract status of interim positions.</b></p>	<p>As reported to the Employment Committee, a Senior Management restructure consultation was completed in Q4 of 2023/24 with new permanent Directors and Heads of Services taking on their roles during Q1 and Q2 of 2024/25. Inductions have been prioritised for this cohort and new Leadership groups have been set up with the overarching aim for a collective ownership of the improvement plan and the work necessary to drive the Council forward. A review of the new structure will take place in September 2024 in line with</p>

	Direction	Update
		<p>organisational change policy and taken back to Committee.</p> <p>A clear Scheme of Delegation is in place for SCF, owned by the Company's Board and supported by a stable leadership team.</p> <p>A review of the Workforce transformation work has been completed by the new Director of HR and OD and it has been identified that there is a lack of ability to offer strategic value due to poor processes, lack of data insights and poor audit trails (re decisions). These are being addressed through several initiatives but foremost is understanding the gap analysis to inform a new Workforce strategy and reviewing HR policies.</p> <p>A Scheme of Delegation was approved at Council in April 2024 and underlying that is a system in place to review periodically to keep up to date including a legal review and comparison with other schemes. The sub-delegations are impacted when there is a change in personnel, and these are mitigated through linking in with the induction process i.e. a separate induction session is held with new Directors/Heads to ensure they are aware of their duties and similarly that the correct names are then in place.</p>
4	<p><b>To report to the Commissioners on the delivery of the Improvement Plan at six monthly intervals, or at such intervals as the Commissioners may direct, and adopt any recommendations of the Commissioners with respect to the Improvement Plan and its implementation.</b></p>	<p>Progress on workstreams within the Improvement Plan are given at the monthly Transformation Boards with an overarching dashboard produced to provide an overview of the highlight reports. Further work is being established to have a robust programme management oversight on this. CLT's recovery board will function as a programme board where project leads will be able to raise by exception any reds reported, and agreement made on how to address these.</p>

	Direction	Update
		<p>The now quarterly Improvement and Recovery Board will receive regular progress reports against the new Recovery Plan alongside the Council’s quarterly update on performance and improvement.</p> <p>The refreshed recovery and improvement plan will break down actions into six-month milestones and establish critical success factors that can be reported on, on a six-monthly basis, to indicate if we are making progress towards operating as a best value authority.</p>
5	<p><b>In the first six months devise and then implement a programme of cultural change to rebuild trust between officers and members, to the satisfaction of the Commissioners. This should make sure both Members and Officers understand the scale of the challenge and their respective roles in driving improvement and the way in which the Authority and its activities are regulated and governed and the way in which this is monitored, and breaches rectified.</b></p>	<p>This direction has been split across two transformation workstreams. The governance and scrutiny workstream have undertaken the remit of improving the relationship between Members and Officers, implementing clear protocols, providing combined training and development including induction events for new members to sit down with officers from all areas (including SCF) to understand their services.</p> <p>It is recognised that the original Culture Change project did not deliver the expected behaviour change needed for the Council. It has undertaken an in-depth analysis of staff views from workshops aided by the LGA and a revised plan has been built directly from that feedback. It has been recognised that trust needs to be rebuilt and although early in the new approach, initial feedback from staff has been positive (this will be addressed further in the report).</p> <p>A comprehensive reset of the work is now underway as part of the refresh of the Improvement and Recovery Plan.</p>
6	<p><b>Following the review by the Authority of their companies within six months consider the roles and case for continuing</b></p>	<p>Since the last Commissioners’ letter, significant evidenced progress has been made within SCF. Ofsted have recognised the differences made by the new Board and</p>

	<b>Direction</b>	<b>Update</b>
	<p><b>with each subsidiary company of the Authority (except Slough Children First). For those companies that it is agreed to continue, make sure that the Directors appointed by the Authority are appropriately skilled in either technical or company governance matters to make sure each Board functions effectively under the terms of an explicit shareholder agreement and a nominated shareholder representative. For those companies which it is determined not to continue with in this form, to establish a plan to internalise, close or sell as appropriate.</b></p>	<p>the permanent leadership team. Strategic Commissioning Group meetings have also been reestablished with SCF which give a place for reviewing performance, contract monitoring and skills evaluation for Board members.</p> <p>The Monitoring Officer is currently undertaking a review of the governance arrangements of all Council-owned companies (excluding SCF) to assure compliance, and secretarial functions are being delivered appropriately. This will be taken to future Finance Boards.</p>
7	<p><b>In the first six months take steps to enable better and evidence-based decision making, including enhancing the data and insight functions to enable better evidence-based decision making.</b></p>	<p>In June 2024 it was agreed with Commissioners to merge the separate evidence-based decision making workstream with the scrutiny and governance one. The rationale was that by doing this it would embed ongoing assessment against Best Value Standards guidance into corporate governance processes. It would also allow the use of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) as an improvement tool, using the LGA Improvement and Assurance Framework to test that the basics are in place. This only relates to the programme governance side of the piece of work and prevented double working on the same objectives.</p> <p>The provision of insight on corporate and service performance has been a key focus for recovery with key enablers achieved such as a Lead Member and CLT joint review to set strategic KPIs for 2024/25. The development of a first phase of management information (MI) dashboards utilising PowerBI for corporate and service</p>

Direction	Update
	<p>(Adults, Education, Housing, Complaints and Casework, SEND) reporting also including building new ward health profiles.</p> <p>To drive further improvements, SBC and SCF have agreed in principle an alignment between their separate performance teams to enable greater convergence between them and improve evidence for decision-making. Final options will be reviewed and agreed by the end of October.</p> <p>In September, we invite an LGA peer team to review our approach to equality and diversity. One of the two areas we are inviting feedback on is how we design more responsive services. Slough is a superdiverse town, where residents experience inequalities in both access to services and outcomes. The articulation of the key inequalities faced by diverse groups is underdeveloped and cannot then inform decision making and prioritisation. We need to become more confident about presentation of data by key inequalities and building the insight about understanding the root causes for these inequalities.</p> <p>This work can also help us develop more systematic ways to collate resident insight, qualitative and quantitative, as this will provide a more rounded understanding of issues to further to support decision making. This is heavily dependent on improving our approach to communications and engagement, and work has begun, which is outlined below.</p> <p>The collection and management of the data itself has not seen the same progress. A data strategy is under review which will mandate data management platform and team decisions. Until a strategic direction has been agreed the Council remains low on a Data Maturity Model and data is unable to underpin a new operating model. Senior</p>



	Direction	Update
		<p>responsibility for this function has been changed to further drive the changes required.</p> <p>Work has started to develop a new integrated forward plan to ensure CLT is able to take a planned approach to decision making and reporting to commissioners and to Council meetings. The forward plan will look across CLT, commissioner governance and the cycle of Council meetings. This will support creating the right space and time for deliberation and for iteratively working through more sensitive decisions. A standard template will also be introduced to support CLT discussions so that the purpose and direction of travel of papers is clear. The intention is for this to be in place by October.</p>
8	<p><b>To allow the Commissioners at all reasonable times, such access as appears to the Commissioners to be necessary: a) to any premises of the Authority; b) to any document relating to the Authority; and c) to any employee or member of the Authority.</b></p>	<p>This has been and continues to be done.</p>
9	<p><b>To provide the Commissioners, at the expense of the Authority, with such reasonable amenities and services and administrative support as the Commissioners may reasonably require from time to time to carry out their functions and responsibilities under these Directions;</b></p>	<p>This has been, and continues to be, done.</p>
10	<p><b>To pay the Commissioners' reasonable expenses, and such fees as the Secretary of State</b></p>	<p>This has been, and continues to be, provided.</p>

	<b>Direction</b>	<b>Update</b>
	<b>determines are to be paid to them;</b>	
11	<b>To provide the Commissioners with such assistance and information, including any views of the Authority on any matter, as the Commissioners may reasonably request;</b>	It has been acknowledged that information for Boards for example has not always been provided sufficiently in advance and a review of monthly reporting cycles is being carried out to ensure this is improved. The recent change of date for the Finance Board for example will help facilitate this.
12	<b>To co-operate with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in relation to implementing the terms of these Directions.</b>	This has been, and continues to be, done.