

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	20 January 2025
Subject:	2024-25 Q2 Corporate Performance Report
Lead Member:	Cllr Mabu Shaik - Lead Member for Performance
Chief Officer:	Will Tuckley - Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Sonia Khan - Director of Strategy, Change, and Resident Engagement
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	No
Exempt:	No
Decision Subject to Call In:	No
Appendices:	A - Corporate Performance Report 2024-25 Q2 B - First phase of the Data Improvement Plan: assurance of key performance measures from the corporate performance scorecard

1. Summary and Recommendations

This corporate performance reporting cycle is a key component of the council's Performance Management Framework and Approach. Embedding a corporate and service performance framework enables the administration and Council to identify and take action where there is poor performance against the outcomes that can have the greatest impact on residents. The need to improve the approach taken is identified by external auditors and in the Annual Governance Statement and by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and MHCLG Commissioners. This has now been in place since the beginning of 2024/25.

Further improvement actions have now been identified to ensure that the data collated by services that feeds into the performance reports is of a consistent data quality. This report sets out the actions needed to put this improvement in place. This was also highlighted by the Commissioners in the Cabinet report in October 2024. This also supports a new Direction relating to evidence-based decision making, that focuses on data quality of key service data, insight and need for benchmarking.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- a) Note and comment on the Council's current performance and mitigating actions as measured by the key performance indicators within the corporate management information report and scorecard.
- b) Note the improvement actions outlined in the first phase of the data improvement plan as set out in Appendix B, for the collection and assurance of key performance measures from the corporate balanced scorecard informing the corporate performance reporting framework.

Reason:

To ensure the data collected by services which feeds into the corporate performance report is of a consistent data quality and enables more impactful decision-making and benchmarking.

Options considered

- To continue quarterly reporting of corporate performance report to Cabinet without any improvements to the process. This is **not recommended** as it would fail to address the need to improve data quality and provide assurance to Cabinet on reporting of the key performance measures in the council's corporate balanced scorecard.
- Adopting the first phase of the data improvement plan as set out in Appendix B, to provide a level of 'check and challenge' into the collection and reporting of key metrics reporting into the corporate performance scorecard. The **recommended approach** addresses the actions highlighted by Commissioners in the Oct-24 Cabinet report and supports the new Direction relating to evidence-base decision making focusing on data quality of service data.

Commissioner Review

"Commissioners acknowledge and welcome this report as part of the ongoing focus on delivery. Commissioners are pleased to see recognition of the need for improving data availability and quality and encourage the Council to maintain its focus. The focus on addressing performance issues is referenced in this report and Commissioners will be keen to monitor its effectiveness in addressing performance issues".

2. Report

- The latest quarterly report available for Cabinet is the 2024-25 Q2 report which is included as Appendix A. This is the second report to Cabinet on the key performance indicators from the 2024/25 corporate balanced scorecard aligned to the strategic priorities in the Corporate Plan 2023-2027. The report aligns to reports on risk, finance, and audit in the monthly corporate assurance model, reporting to the Council's corporate leadership team. The corporate performance data is available to view in Power BI, as part of a first phase of development of corporate and service dashboards.
- The council's performance framework embeds benchmarking as a tool for assurance and decision-making. The monthly performance report includes a benchmark, where available, for each KPI. The framework also reviews insights published by the Office of Local Government (OFLOG), as well as benchmarkable regulatory and statutory

releases from council services, such as the recently published [Safeguarding of Adults at Risk Measures](#).

- Further performance insight will become available during the autumn, The 2023/24 statutory service return benchmarks will be published by government departments in stages during November, and December. Insights from those publications will be reported to the respective Executive Director, Lead Members, Assurance CLT, and will also be made available in future quarterly Cabinet reports. Alongside this, OFLOG is developing its [Local Authority Data Explorer](#) over time to present a rounded set of themes and metrics which best reflect the roles and responsibilities of local authorities and to benchmark local government performance.
- The council is committed in improving data quality and providing assurance to Cabinet on the reporting of the key performance measures in the council's corporate balanced scorecard. Work is underway to scope out a data quality exercise for key measures in the corporate balanced scorecard. Appendix B to this report summaries the first phase of the data improvement plan which was reviewed and approved by the Council's corporate leadership team in Nov-24. The aim is to complete the review by the end of financial year 2024-25. The work is intended to provide a level of "check and challenge" into the collection and calculation of the key metrics feeding into the corporate balanced scorecard.

Latest insights on corporate performance:

- Overall, at the end of Sept-24 the strategic performance picture remains variable with 28% (13) of the 47 key performance indicators (KPIs) performing either at or better than target, 11% (5) indicators are performing marginally worse than target, and 28% (13) indicators are performing below the red KPI threshold, and 32% (15) indicators are monitored for trends. A further 2% (1) metric in development.
 - Priority 2: Percentage of refuse bins collected on time.
- Compared to the previous month or similar period from last year, performance has improved for 36% (17) of the 47 KPIs, remained the same for 17% (8) and declined for 34 (16). A further 11% (5) are metrics with no previous trends and the remaining 2% (1) metric is in development.
- Appendix A to this report summarises progress against the Council's priorities as presented in September 2024. The report includes:
 - Summary progress against the strategic outcomes in the Corporate Plan.
 - Areas for recognition, where the council can learn from promising practice - trends that indicate the council is on track for delivering its objectives.
 - Areas of improvement – trends that indicate the council is improving although performance currently below agreed target.
 - Areas that require a continued focus on improvement - trends that indicate the council is not on track for delivering its strategic objectives.

- In Appendix A, pages 2 to 9 outline the performance scorecard trends against the 47 strategic KPIs, and the mitigating actions and action owners. Each action has an assigned Executive Director owner, who is accountable for the performance level, and who will assign responsibility for delivery to officers. Further, pages 15 to 25 include charts showing trends over time for each metric along with progress against target agreed.

Key areas of improvements:

- The business in year rate collection rate of 57.41% for Sept-24 is ahead of in-year target of 56.60% and better than the collection rate achieved this time last year of 56.59%. The council continues to take appropriate recovery action on those businesses that do not keep with their payments up to date. During 2024/25 there is an extra £11m business rates to collect, in cash terms we collected an additional £7.360m by Sept-24 than we did this period last year.
- An improvement over the last three months in the percentage of customer service calls answered to 88.7% (4.9k) and call waiting times to 4mins 29secs during Sept-24. In addition, 100% (953) of customer facing enquiry box emails answered within 5 working days. To support further improvements, a service improvement plan in place focussing on improving response time and customer service, to make it easier for residents to access advice and information.
- A continuous high level (100%, 447) of SBC emergency housing repairs completed within agreed timescale as well as a reduction in responsive repairs to action to lowest level (1,288) during Sept-24 which is less than the average number of repair requests received in a month. Improvement in housing repairs completed on time to 80.8%, however this remains below the target of 95%. Housing repairs completed within one visit at 85% remains above target of 75% indicating Cardo remains consistent in completing straight forward repairs. Regular management meetings scheduled with senior management to discuss critical issues including complaints and to meet ongoing demand. Kitchen, bathrooms, windows, doors, door entry and roofing programmes are all in progress. External works at Brammas Close/Spackmans Way is nearly completed, roofing and window replacements are in progress at Maryside, roofing works at Spinney and Newchurch Road commenced. Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) grant funded carbon reduction programme, first phase of 18 properties to commence shortly.
- A reduction in safeguarding concerns recorded resulting in improvements in the percentage of safeguarding referrals that meet section 42 from 26.8% (26) during Q1 to 34.2% (13) during Q2 which is now better than the latest published national average for 2023/24 of 28.7%. The improved performance reflects changes in the safeguarding referral triage process. Safeguarding data regularly reviewed with trends and appropriate actions presented at monthly Adults Leadership Team and with Slough Safeguarding Partnership.
- The percentage of decisions made on major planning applications within agreed timescale remains high with 100% (6) completed during Q1 2024/25. However, the percentage of decisions made on non-major planning applications within agreed timescale reduced to 72.5% (although the number of decisions made increased 132).

Performance trends actively monitored at management meetings focussing on identifying service improvements.

- Although the rate has increase, compared to the national average, fewer 16–17-year-olds in Slough not in education, employment, or training (NEET) or whose activity is not known during Aug-24 (Slough 5.9%, national average 8.6%, ranked 77th nationally). The NEET rate usually rises from July through to October when the September Guarantee is underway, as this involves detailed tracking of all current year 11's and 12's to ensure that they have an offer of education or training for September. All NEET young people are offered practical support and guidance through 'face to face' information advice and guidance (IAG) positioned in community building across Slough as well as drop-in sessions and telephone support. All NEET are regularly contacted offering continued support and encouragement.
- During Aug-24, 6.6% (14 children) are in external residential placements. Over the last 12 months, performance has been better than the highest percentage we would consider acceptable of 9.1%. There has also been a reduction in cost for children that continue to be placed in external residential placements. External Placement Panel review all children in external placements, targeting those specifically in residential care, identifying those that specifically can be placed in fostering placements.
- During Aug-24, 20.4% (32 children) with a repeat referral within 12 months. This is an improvement from the previous month of 29.8% (75 children). Re-referrals are continually tracked and monitored each month. Previous interventions are reviewed to explore whether the re-referral could have been avoided and to disseminate the learning. This is monitored through regular performance reports and reviewed by the internal Children's Improvement Group on a regular basis.

Key areas of improvement although performance below agreed target:

- An improvement over the last three months in standard voids reported, with 81 reported at the end of Aug-24 of which 51 ready to re-let. This has resulted in an increase in the time taken to re-let voids as the team are specifically targeting long-term voids. During Sept-24, 260 days taken to re-let 36 properties, an improvement from 17 properties re-let during Jun-24. This should reduce in the future with less total and long-term voids. Weekly management task force meeting held to review progress on reducing the overall number of voids, ensuring works are completed and nominations made to properties. There is an officer led fortnightly review of voids, to track progress and to ensure all voids are actioned and monitored.
- An improvement in the percentage of children achieving a good level of development at aged 2 to 2.5 years old (child development) from 65% during Q1 to 69% during Q2 2023/24 however the rate remains below the latest published national average for 2022/23 of 79.2% and South-East regional average of 79.8%. A new health visiting and school nursing (up to 25 for SEND) provider Health Care Resourcing Group appointed, new contract to commence 01-Oct-24. They will work with the Council to support more children to meet the development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage by implementing a school readiness pathway, particularly focusing on fine and gross motor skills, communication skills, as well as support the 'Good Level of Development'

attainment programme in schools and collaborate with the early years sector and family hubs for integrated reviews.

- An improvement in the recently released 2022/23 smoking prevalence rate for adults in Slough from 15.2% during 2021/22 to 8.3% during 2022/23, the rate statistically in line with national average of 11.6%. We will continue to monitor and analyse data to ensure that this trend is sustained and improved upon. We also recognise that inequalities in smoking prevalence persist, particularly among routine and manual workers. To address these disparities, we are implementing targeted campaigns and collaborating with local stakeholders to focus our efforts on these high-risk groups. During Stoptober (October), we are organising a coordinated campaign across various media platforms, including digital, print, and radio, to maximise our reach and raise awareness about quitting smoking, particularly in communities most affected.
- A reduction in interim staffing costs from £6.341m during Q1 to £6.275m during Q2. Work continues to address our interim recruitment, namely ensuring we offer the opportunity to become permanent, negotiate better day rates where an interim has been here for over a period of 12 months and better negotiate the agency fees, so the overall day rate is lower. This work will continue over the coming quarters.
- Positive trends in reducing the staff turnover rate from 13.1% (rolling year to Sept-23) to 11.3% (rolling year to Sept-24) consisting of 7.5% for voluntary staff resignation rate (decision made by employee) and 3.8% involuntary staff turnover rate (decision made by the employer). The staff turnover rate is nearing closer to the considered healthy rate of 10% or less. The new Applicant Tracking System (Talos) embedded in the business with the recruitment team offering a partnering approach to the business to fill gaps. Staff leaving are encouraged to have an exit interview and have now introduced the concept of 'onboarding' interviews, to assess how we can better understand and record how staff felt when applying and joining SBC.

Key areas that require a continued focus on improvement:

- Council tax in-year collection rate of 54.26% for Sept- 24 is lower than the collection rate achieved this period last year of 55.04% and below in-year target of 55.50%. To improve collection rates the team continues to implement additional technology to automate high volume low value tasks to free up resources to focus on collection. We are live with technology that automates outbound text messages, emails and phone calls targeting accounts already in arrears, those that may move to this stage soon and those that might be entitled to Council Tax Reduction. Work to date has resulted in starting the new financial year with less work outstanding than previous years improving the resident's experience i.e., 30% reduction in council tax calls received. Residents continue to struggle with the cost-of-living increases, we are supporting those who require longer to pay. Collection is expected to improve as we progress through the remainder of the year.
- 73.2% (£8.921m) of the £12.183m savings required in 2024/25 are forecast to be delivered, with £1.037m (8.5%) of savings reported as already being delivered. A £1m saving on Business Rates has been acknowledged as undeliverable in year, as due to the rules around Collection Fund accounting the success of the actions taken will show up in the 2025/26 financial year. Mitigating savings of £0.050m are being reported in

Regeneration to make up for non-delivery against the original plan, and a further £94k of savings have been reported in Adults Services.

- The variance between revenue budget and full year forecast reduced during period 6 (Sept-24) to 1.3% (£2.092m). This is predominantly due to one off reductions in the contract fee for Slough Children First. There are movements elsewhere which mostly cancel each other, with further new pressures emerging in Adult Social Care (£0.494m), offset by a reduced forecast overspend in Children's Services and an increased underspend in Corporate Services. As reported previously, the main pressures the Council is facing are for Adult Social Care and for Homelessness, and there are significant mitigating actions in place, of both a permanent and one-off basis, to reduce the overspend; without those the overspend position would be £13.515m.
- Similar to the previous month, 19.3% (121) of audit actions remain overdue at the end of Sept-24. Of these, 14.0% (17) are high risk and 86.0% (104) are medium/low risk. Three overdue medium/low risk recommendations closed within the month however a further 4 medium/low-risk recommendations became overdue in the last month. Overdue actions are shared with each Directorate and with the monthly Assurance CLT. Evidence of actions completed is obtained and quality assured by the Internal Audit Team. Audit & Governance Committee Members have suggested attendance by officers to explain challenges in closing overdue actions.
- The SEND Case Tracker shows during Sept-24 a reduction in EHC plans completed within the month with 24 EHC Plans finalised with none completed within the statutory 20 weeks' timeframe. The level of Plans finalised remains below the monthly target of 35. A reduction in the completion of plans during Sept-24 is not unexpected due to the non-availability of contributing agencies over the summer holiday period. A short-term interventions team started in Sept-24 to focus on clearing the backlog of late running EHC needs assessments with the aim of improving EHC plan timeliness.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

Financial implications

- The strategic performance indicators are aligned to the priorities in the Corporate Plan. The Corporate Plan articulates a commitment to delivering financial prudence and demonstrating Best Value for residents, any monies needed to achieve improved performance must be funded within the council revenue budgets.
- A separate finance report has been presented to Cabinet quarterly that shows the financial performance of Slough Borough Council which clearly links with information in this report. It is imperative that financial discipline to deliver the Corporate Plan is maintained to ensure that a sustainable financial position is obtained and maintained.
- Separate commentary is provided on business rate and council tax collection rates where in-year collection fund assumptions.

Legal implications

- Whilst there is no statutory duty to report regularly to Cabinet on the Council's performance, as a best value authority under the Local Government Act 1999, the

Council has a statutory duty to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

- Regular reporting of performance can assist the Council to demonstrate best value. The national best value framework guidance has now been published in full, following a consultation and a period where the guidance was in draft. The council now uses that national framework as a tool to consider further action.
- The Government has published best value guidance. This emphasises the need for local authorities to be open to challenge and support, including using performance indicators, benchmarking performance against other local authorities and operating in a transparent manner. The guidance identifies seven best value themes. Under the theme of Service Delivery, local authority data is one of the means to identify whether services are being delivered efficiently and effectively and services should be benchmarked against comparable authorities. Performance should be regularly reported to the public to ensure that citizens are informed of the quality of services being delivered. Under the theme of Continuous Improvement, frequent monitoring, performance reporting and updating of improvement plans is identified as a characteristic of a well-functioning authority. Under the theme of Governance, it is recommended that performance management information measures actual outcomes effectively and is frequently interrogated to allow under performance to be addressed.

Risk management implications

- Mitigating actions are in place for strategic performance indicators where key performance trends require action. These actions are proposed by the responsible manager, and progress updates provided at Assurance CLT forum by the responsible Executive Director (or delegate).
- The monthly Assurance CLT forum considers finance, risk, and performance to ensure that the leadership team receive a rounded picture on the health of the organisation, to inform improvement actions.

Environmental implications

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

Equality implications

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

assist the Council to identify gaps in service and consider what action is required to address this.

4. Background Papers

None