Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Audit and Corporate Governance Committee
Date:	10 September 2025
Subject:	Improvement & Recovery Plan – Political Leadership & Governance Update
Chief Officer:	Sukdave Ghuman - Monitoring Officer
Contact Officer:	Dave Burn – Democratic Services SME
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	NO
Appendices:	None

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report provides an update on progress with the Political Leadership and Governance workstream, as it relates to the Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan.

Recommendation:

To consider the report and to provide comments as appropriate.

Reason:

On 10 December 20024, Audit and Corporate Governance Committee requested regular progress reports with the Political Leadership and Governance workstream, of the Recovery Programme. This is the second update since that meeting.

Commissioner Review

Commissioners have reviewed the report and made no comments.

2. Report

Introductory paragraph

2.1 This report provides an update since 30 April 2025, on progress with the delivery of the Council's recovery plan, as it relates to the Political Leadership and Governance workstream.

2.2 Since the Council was placed under intervention by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in December 2021, the Council has put in place a recovery programme to assist the Council in its recovery journey. As was reported in April 2025, it is important that progress as well as impact is continually measured. The Committee has a key role to play in that activity both in terms of challenge and through validation. Other Council bodies are also playing an active, including Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee.

2.3   Audit and Corporate Governance Committee is seen as the member body with overall oversight of the programme given its key remit in terms of corporate governance. It is in that context that the update has been prepared. The Committee will note that whilst progress has been made, it is important that momentum is maintained to ensure progress becomes embedded.

Options considered

2.4   As the Committee will be aware, the Council has been involved in a number of activities to help with its recovery. The Improvement and Recovery Plan has been reported to Cabinet as well as Full Council. Given intervention has been extended to 2026, the remedial actions were developed with that in mind. A range of improvement measures in relation to governance, have been introduced. These will be kept under regular review and updated to take account of organisational requirements whilst drawing on best practice from elsewhere. As was discussed at the last meeting, the various workstreams that underpin the Recovery Plan are inevitably aligned and overlap. Measures that have been put in place under the Political Leadership and Governance workstream will benefit those other workstreams, and vice versa. Initiatives such as the Targeted Operating Model, Evidence Based Decision Making and Listening to our Residents are examples of this. The report provides a summary of key achievements, future activities and identifies some of the risks.

Progress to date

2.5   As a helpful reminder, the Political Leadership and Governance objectives are as follows:

- Build a strong, self-sustaining culture of good governance by focusing on high-quality councillor leadership, and governance behaviours (across all councillor groups and roles).

- Build a strong, self-sustaining culture of good governance amongst members and officers, by focusing on high quality officer-member relationships and behaviours.

- Build a strong, self-sustaining culture of good governance amongst by focusing on high quality officer governance behaviours.

- Develop fit for purpose governance-systems and processes.

2.6   The purpose of these objectives is to deliver the following benefits:

- Increased level of understanding of good governance principles amongst members and officers and a culture that encourages review and improvement.

- Improved decision-making arrangements to encourage and promote good governance.

- Strengthened officer and member relations with a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

- An organisation that is committed to the highest standards of conduct and behaviour.

2.7 Since the last meeting there has been good progress. As can be seen from the information below, the activities include improvements, such as the work around the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), as well as support to drive improvement - the key thrust of the Member Development Work Programme and officer support programme. The key achievements since the April meeting are summarised below:

- Implemented a revised AGS assurance framework
- AGS assessment informed by directorate assurance statements and head of internal audit opinion and all member training workshop held to engage members in the action plan
- Audit & CG Committee conducted self-assessment in April and draft annual report with work programme and training plan
- Member pledge inclusive leadership discussed and approved at annual council
- The implementation of governance support for members, officers and Cabinet
- New policy and budget framework rules approved in constitution following learning from budget setting process in 2025
- New connected entity protocol approved for inclusion in constitution setting out guidance and framework for company and trust governance
- Annual council - resize committees and agree nominations including chairing and vice chair arrangements
- Amended council procedure rules approved in April 2025 picking up on issues in previous meetings
- Closer collaboration with Party Leaders to assist in the successful delivery of the Member Development Programme
- Revised performance measures to monitor late reports and attendance at development sessions
- Review of Lead Member and Director briefings completed with findings to be fed into officer support and member development sessions

2.8 In terms of actual improvement, what does this all mean? As was highlighted in the last report, a lot of the activity that falls within the Political Leadership and Governance workstream relates to culture. Whilst work is well underway, there is still more to be done given the continuing nature of this programme of activity, which is cyclical in nature based on the election cycle. As was reported in April and also highlighted above in paragraph 2.7, considerable work has been undertaken on ensuring that systems and procedures are fit for purpose, including regular review of the constitution, and systems for report clearance. Clearly, the systems and processes alone will not improve governance. It is therefore necessary to ensure that officers and members understand the processes and adhere to them. Hence the emphasis on support and training.

2.9 Some challenges have been experienced with attendance at the support sessions provided. Whilst it is accepted that there are significant demands on Member's time, officers are working with Group Leaders to ensure the sessions are relevant and attendance maximised. With that in mind, new targets have been devised. Progress, in terms of attendance, has been steadily improving. In May, June and July attendance was 66.5%, 73.5 and 93.5% respectively. This is against a target of 80%. Attendance is only one part of the jigsaw. Monitoring of feedback from the sessions will be used to inform future sessions as well as to highlight changes in approach and behaviours.

2.10   A similar approach is being undertaken for officers, with governance support being provided across the organisation. This has been supported by the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). Again, the purpose is to help increase the level of understanding of good governance principles. As well as a programme of activity, Democratic Services colleagues are currently visiting Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) for the respective Council departments, offering lunchtime sessions for queries as well as day to day support upon request.

2.11   The third strand relates to officer and member relations. In order to embed greater understanding, the Council has actively utilised the support of the Local Government Association (LGA) to assist with the delivery of the Member Development Programme as well as dedicated support for Cabinet. Furthermore, a specific session to promote good member and officer relations is scheduled to be held on 9 September. This will be delivered internally.

2.12   A key challenge is to monitor and highlight progress. Whilst targets have been implemented to assist, feedback is actively being sort not only to help inform future sessions – the Member Development Programme is business as usual – but also to tease out what difference the sessions have made to those individuals who attend those sessions, both members and officers. Members support with this is imperative if we are able to evidence improvement and also identify gaps.

3.   Implications of the Recommendation

3.1   Financial implications

3.1.1   The key financial implications relate to the Member Development Programme, training and support. A modest budget is available for individual members to attend external training and/or to bring in external trainers during the year, any activity commissioned will be undertaken within budget. The budget is managed and administered by Democratic Services and the Head of Democratic Services has the authority to determine payment from this for external providers of any courses mentioned in this report, without the need for a councillor decision.

3.1.2   Support for officers will be provided internally. Support is also available through the intervention, and discussions are ongoing with the LGA to ensure the support provided meets the Council's needs and compliments the activities being arranged internally.

3.2   Legal implications

3.2.1   The Council has many different statutory functions and duties. When making decisions members must comply with these legal duties, including making decisions in a fair, lawful and transparent manner. Members must comply with the Member Code of Conduct and understand their obligations to register and declare interests and the sanctions regime for failing to comply with the Code of Conduct.

3.2.2   The Council has been found to have failed to comply with its best value duty under the Local Government Act 1999. The statutory guidance sets out seven best value themes, including characteristics of a well functioning authority. The following are particularly relevant to political leadership and governance:

    (a) Continuous improvement

The authority's scrutiny function is challenging, robust and contributes to the efficient delivery of services.

The Annual Governance Statement, prepared in accordance with CIPFA / SOLACE Framework, is the culmination of a meaningful review designed to stress-test both the governance framework and the health of the control environment.

(b) Leadership

Members provide quality leadership by setting a clearly articulated, achievable and prioritised vision for officers to follow that puts place and local people at its heart.

Members and officers uphold their duties and speak truth to power.

The Monitoring Officer is sufficiently supported and protected to allow them to enforce regulations and codes of conduct without fear.

Members and senior officers maintain constructive relationships and engage effectively with external stakeholders and the wider local community.

A demonstrable commitment to leadership and member development, including specialist training for key roles.

(c) Governance

Effective procedures are in place and followed to ensure members and all officers comply with the Nolan Principles, relevant codes of conduct and policies, including procurement.

Full Council, alongside the Audit Committee, reviews governance arrangements and takes an effective overview of the systems of control, audit and governance.

Committees and individuals charged with governance have the appropriate information, support, experience and expertise to perform their role.

Proper member oversight (as shareholders) of companies and partnership bodies, in accordance with the Local Authority Company Review Guidance, and their existence is regularly and independently reviewed

(d) Culture

Members and officers promote and demonstrate the highest ethical standards and appropriate working behaviours through established shared values and ways of working.

A culture of cooperation, respect and trust between members and officers, and between departments exists, along with a commitment to transparent decision-making.

Civil working relationships (and communication) between Group Leaders despite political disagreements.

Respect for a councillor's need to know and enquire.

3.3   Risk management implications

3.3.1   Similarly with the legal comments, the purpose of the activities highlighted in this report will not only help ensure legal compliance but mitigate against the risk of poor decision making through enhanced governance practices. Furthermore, progress with this workstream is being monitored with risks identified and mitigations highlighted.

3.4   Environmental implications

3.4.1   There are no specific environmental implications arising from this report.

3.5   Equality implications

3.5.1   The Council has a duty under the Equality Act 2010, to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity for those with a protected characteristic and those without. The member development programme, and the way it is delivered, will continue to take account of members' protected characteristics and consider any adjustments needed. This will be undertaken on a session-by-session basis. Additionally, the requirements of the Equality Act, is included in the Member Development programme. Work is currently away to assess and to identify the equalities activities within the Recovery and Improvement Plan.

4.   Background Papers

None