

## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	Audit and Corporate Governance Committee
<b>Date:</b>	12 November 2025
<b>Subject:</b>	Finance Improvement Programme update
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Ian O'Donnell, Executive Director Corporate Resources
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Vicki Palazon, Finance Consultant – FIP and Companies
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Exempt:</b>	NO
<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 - Deliverables October 2024 – September 2025

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report provides an update on the Finance Improvement Programme.

#### **Recommendation:**

Committee is recommended to note the progress made on the Financial Improvement Programme.

#### **Commissioner Review**

The Council's financial improvement programme, which is integral to the Council's financial recovery has evolved and expanded over time. The overall picture from the Council's self-assessment of its progress in delivering the programme, highlights a commitment to improvement despite a reduced pace and significant challenges remaining, in getting the basics right, achieving long-term financial stability and fulfilling its best value duty. Commissioners would recommend that the programme is reprofiled and prioritised into deliverable goals over a longer timeframe, focusing on strategic realignment with core business goals, maximising value and impact and resource availability for practical execution.

### 2. Report

#### **Background**

2.1 A reset and refresh of the council's Finance Improvement Programme was last reviewed formally by Cabinet on 18 September 2023 with updates since then forming part of the update on the overall Recovery and Improvement plan. The last update to Cabinet was on 15 September 2025. Internally, more frequent updates have continued to be provided though the Finance Improvement Board (previously Finance Board). On a quarterly basis, the corporate leadership team and Finance Improvement Board are provided with an assurance report measuring evidence led progress on the financial improvement journey including internal and external audit recommendations and against current finance related Directions.

2.2 The refresh led to a number of actions that were centred around the following themes:

- a) Getting the basics right
- b) Governance and Decision Making Support
- c) Financial Culture and Awareness
- d) Medium Term Planning
- e) Transformation and Automation
- f) Deep dive projects

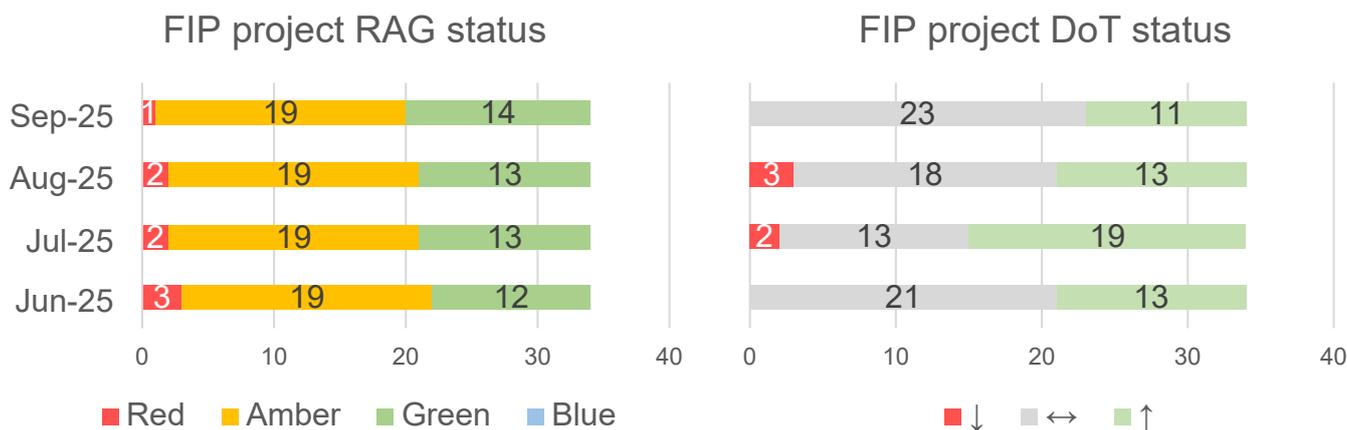
2.3 By September 2024, there were 37 discrete projects within these themes. A programme manager joined in May 2024, a consultant in August 2024, a project manager in October 2024 and a further finance specialist in April 2025 forming the core project team. Additional resources for clearing the backlog accounts worked alongside operational teams and additional projects resources are in place for systems development.

2.4 The Finance Improvement Programme was formally paused for two months during Q4 2024/25 to enable all resources to concentrate on budget and MTFS activity. Whilst the overall programme was paused, other significant projects that continued, included:

- Completion of the backlog of the accounts
- Implementation of the Procurement Act
- Scoping the internal controls activity for Unit 4 – the council’s HR and finance system

2.5 Following this pause, the project team reviewed governance and implemented appropriate project governance. The governance sets out the scope, objectives, deliverables and benefits of each project, cross referencing to the CIPFA FM self-assessment completed in May 2025, the outstanding internal and external audit recommendations and Directions. To date, there are now 34 projects, 17 with formal project management in place, 10 in final drafting and the remaining still to be completed. There is a further opportunity to condense these projects into appropriate themes and is currently under review by the Corporate Resources management team.

2.6 The current position for all projects is shown below for both the RAG status of the project and direction of travel. Implementing project governance has enabled only one project remaining at Red status being addressing the level of reserves at an appropriate level.



### 3. Implications of the Recommendation

#### 3.1 Financial implications

3.1.1 There are no direct financial implications included within this report. The Finance Improvement Plan is part of the council's overall improvement plan. The plan and its resources for 2025/26 are funded through the council's budget smoothing reserve which has £1.373m set aside and the transformation reserve.

#### 3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution confirmed in a written statement that the council would remain under intervention until 30 November 2026, with the reappointment of the Commissioner team and appointment of a Managing Director.

3.2.2 Within the government issued Directions issued by the Minister under the Local Government Act 1999, the council was required to undertake [actions](#) which include the improvement of financial resilience and sustainability. The Finance Improvement Programme is therefore an essential part of the council's improvement journey.

#### 3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 The council's corporate risk register includes CR09 – Failure to achieve financial sustainability and a balanced MTFs. A sub risk reported within this risk is regarding the Finance Improvement Programme. This risk is reported quarterly to the council's leadership team and the Q1 2025/26 position is shown in the next table.

Ref	Status	Risk title	Change in period / outlook	Management Review/ Explanation of movement
09.06	Impact – Very low Likelihood – Probable	Failure to deliver the FIP which include internal controls, an effective finance system both through tech and business processes		Improving position with Project Initiation Documents development in progress. Q1 2025/26 assurance report discussed with leadership team for onward discussion at July 2025 Finance Improvement Board. Several reports have now been developed to support budget holders in undertaking their roles and responsibilities including reports to support corporate dashboards. System roles and responsibilities project commenced and due to complete end September 2025. Resource plan funding approved.

#### 3.4 Environmental / Equality implications

3.4.1 There are no environmental or equality implications.

### 4. Background Papers

Cabinet report 18 September 2025 – [Refresh of the council's Finance Improvement Action Plan](#) and [Appendix A Finance Improvement Action Plan](#)

## Appendix 1 – Deliverables October 2024 – September 2025

Project Number	Project Name	Project Stage	RAG	Direction of Travel	Deliverables achieved in reporting period October 2024 - September 2025	Public Report	Assurance / Internal Reporting	Systems and Process	People & Resourcing
1	Review Finance procedures Annually	Live	Amber	↔	90 procedures have been identified which are in the progress of being reviewed and updated in line with best practise			X	
2	Completion of Statement of accounts	Live	Amber	↑	Published 2019/2020, 2020/2021, 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 Final (Audited) Statements of Accounts	X	X		
	Value For Money	Live			The 2023/24 draft accounts are awaiting final sign-off from the CFO, and CFO/commissioner approval of the CD request letter. 2024/25 accounts have got to TB status, with auditors on site from November 2025		X		
3	Value For Money	Live	Green	↔	External auditors VFM report to 2023/2024 was considered by full council in November 2024	X			
					An updated AGS has been included in the published 2022/2023 accounts	X			
					Statutory, key, and improvement external audit recommendations have been mapped to the FIP and monthly reporting has commenced with the external auditor		X		
4	Capacity and skills for recovery (Corporate, Governance/Audit/Risk, Fin Mgt)	Live	Amber	↔	GT Vfm report issued an interim report which was presented to September Audit and Corporate Governance Committee	X			
					CIPFA FM code self-assessment (Baseline including Q1 2025/26 update on progress)		X		
5	Capacity and skills for recovery - Transactional Services	Live	Amber	↔	2 Finance Directors commenced September 2025. Number of candidates appointed across Finance (1 Strategic Finance Manager, 4 Finance Managers (2 internal candidates) and 1 Finance Accountant. The next stage of the recruitment campaign has commenced				X
6	Financial Reporting and best practice	Drafted for sign off	Green	↔	Finalisation of the Revenue and Welfare services restructure for launch of consultation on 1 December 2025				X
					Q2 and Q3 Budget Monitoring Reports demonstrate incremental progress towards improved financial reporting as published in the Cabinet reports	X			
					Treasury management outturn 2024/25 completed for September Full Council	X			

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7	Budget Management - best practice	Drafted for sign off	Green	↔	The 2025/2026 Budget Report and Section 25 Statement have been prepared in accordance to recommended practise	X			
					Mapped the As Is process for Monthly budget monitoring. Timetable and associated returns 2025/26 issued April 2025			X	
					New budget holder monthly system generated reports issued from P1 2025/26 including guidance	X			
					HR and salary forecasting tool now automated, sent monthly to respective budget holders. Guidance has been issued and drop in sessions arranged during October for both budget holders and finance staff. HR management team also provided with a dedicated session			X	
					Budget build and budget holder system reports for 2026/27 developed and awaiting final sign off			X	
8	Companies Reporting	Live	Amber	↑	Desktop review of each entity which was reported to September 2024 Cabinet Committee	X			
					Constitution updated - Part 5.9 Company / Connected Entities' Protocol in May 2025 setting out the expected reporting cycle for Council companies. Shareholder Panel established with ToR and meetings diarised		X		
					JEH filed 2022/2023 accounts before Companies House take strike off action. September 2024 Cabinet Committee an update on Governance and Risks was provided for JEH . JEH 2023/24 accounts filed 2 July 2025. Debenture lodged at companies house. Governance workshop held 22 July 2025. JEH business plan 2025/26 approved March Cabinet.	X		X	
					JEH initial options report drafted and Commissioner feedback received for next steps			X	
					GRE 5 business plan approved November 2024 Cabinet. Appointments to two Directors for GRE 5 have been made. Once appointed, the Directors will be formally updated on Companies House	X		X	
					2024/25 audits underway for DISH, GRE 5 and JEH			X	

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9	Savings are monitored and managed and regular reports	Live	Green	↔	The savings tracker is in place to monitor financial risk exposure to the council on savings delivery;		X		
10	Reconciliations key systems – cred and debtors and Balance Sheet review regular and reported on	Drafted for sign off	Amber	↑	External consultants project completed on suspense reconciliation with a particular focus on 2022/23. Monthly review of key reconciliations accounts now provided as a dashboard to DLT		X	X	
11	Improving the Council's Debt Management (P11,12,13 and 34)	Live	Green	↔	Debt reporting framework agreed. To be presented to Cabinet. Includes current debt and arrears across all debt types	X			
14	Fixed Asset Register	Drafted for sign off	Amber	↑	Fixed asset register for 2023/24 was finalised for preparation of the 2023/24 accounts to committee. Work is continuing to prepare these for loading onto a FAR system, and to update for 2024/25			X	
15	Disposals Review & Monitoring	Live	Amber	↔	Asset disposal plan monitored monthly by Asset Disposal Board and reported into Finance Improvement Board			X	
16	Treasury Management -ways of working for oversight and reporting	Live	Amber	↔	Mapped the As Is process. Roles and responsibilities defined			X	
					PS Live (IT system) now live			X	
					Treasury management strategy approved. 2025/2026 and 2028/2029 agreed and approved at 6th March Full Council	X			
17	Housing benefit – process benefits and changes time to process	Drafting	Green	↔	Phase 1 transferred to BAU - process improvement to processing times			X	
18	Charitable Trust governance and monitoring	To Close	Green	↑	All Trust accounts have now been filed with Charity Commission			X	
19	Risk management system - strengthen and underpin integrate	Live	Green	↔	Corporate and Directorate risk templates reviewed and implemented. Quarterly reporting on corporate risks presented to Audit and Corporate Governance Committee	X	X	X	
					Risk Management Framework drafted		X		

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	with other info for decision making								
20	Internal Audit	Drafted for sign off	Green	↔	Audit and Corporate Governance meeting 10 September 2025 report - Internal Audit Progress Report provide an update on progress of the Internal Audit function. The report outlines progress against the Internal Audit Plan, a self-assessment against the Global Internal Standards Self-Assessment and an update on the redesign of the function Internal Audit progress report submitted to Audit and Corporate Governance Committee	X	X	X	X
21	Procurement - New legislation and as Key Driver to Success	Drafted for sign off	Amber	↑	New processes developed to align with the Procurement Act 2023 Contract register data cleansing update continuing ECP process refreshed (2024/25) Procurement compliance update	X	X	X	
22	Annual Governance Statement (AGS) align to Statement of Accounts.	Drafted for sign off	Green	↔	Audit and Corporate Governance Committee 23 July 2025 - Annual Governance Statement 2024/25, Provisional statement of accounts 2023/24 Audit and Corporate Governance meeting 10 September 2025 – AGS Q1 2024/25 update	X			
23	Training programme – members and (non) finance officers	Drafted for sign off	Amber	↔	A range of finance related training offered to Members and non finance officers including introduction to Local Government and Finance. Audit Committee provided with finance and audit related training. Training programme developed for 2025/26				X
24	Finance Business Partnering strengthened	Drafted for sign off	Amber	↔	Mapped as is process for month end reporting as part of the development of the business partner service offer			X	
25	The general awareness of our financial sustainability and everyone's part in	Drafting	Amber	↔	Budget Report (inc. S25 statement) have been published, highlighting the challenges that the Council faces. Budget holders will be asked to sign-off their budgets for 2025/2026 and agree to living within their allocated budget envelope Held Budget scrutiny task and finish group as well as public scrutiny meetings on the budget	X		X	X

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26	Resident and stakeholder engagement	Drafted for sign off	Amber	↔	management of our resources				X
					Periodic Talk about sessions/ All staff briefings on the budget and councils financial position delivered				X
					Quarterly Senior Leadership sessions and CLT have been briefed and discussed the financial position				X
27	Anti-fraud and corruption culture	Live	Green	↑	Consultation and engagement process delivered to support 2025/26 budget process				X
					Counter Fraud quarter 1 update	X			
					Fraud Awareness and Training - Now included in corporate induction packs, next step will be to include as an e-learning module ideally by January 2026. Reminder to be set monthly to staff reminding of fraud awareness using various Council communication platforms				X
28	Being Up to date - Legislative, CIPFA FM Code and other changes reviewed and implemented	Live	Green	↔	Implementation of Fraud risk champions and include as part of the network of risk champions on track				X
					Updated Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and Policy - Strategy and policy document drafted, waiting for legal review. On track for November completion			X	
					Issue of CIPFA FM code guidance to leadership team and Finance Improvement Board		X		
29	Identifying Current and Future Liabilities	Live	Amber	↑	External consultants completed a risk based assurance review on 2023/24 balances	X			
30	MTFS ensure balanced / agreed including engagement all	Drafted for sign off	Amber	↔	Cabinet 21 July 2025 - 2023/24 Restatement and 2024/25 Provisional Outturn and 2026/27 MTFS update incorporating emerging issues. The latter report includes approval of the 2026/27 budget setting timetable	X			
31	Reserves – level needs addressing (with a clear plan to recover)	Drafting	RED	↑	Reserves were presented in the budget report to Full Council on March 2025 including further analysis within the S25 statement	X			

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32	Revenues and Benefits Transformation work	Live	Green	↔	Revenue and Welfare automations - Live - Enforcement agent returns, enforcement agent returns indexing, terminations and suspensions and single person discount. Council Tax New claims is in testing; -Terminations was completed; Council Tax Moves and Council Tax Arrangements are with the software providers (MRI); Student exemptions is live. Completed; Historic credit is live but just one query pending. Historic credits completed			X	
33	Development of Agresso system to be fit for purpose	Live	Green	↔	System generated reported developed and in BAU			X	
					Helpdesk moved to Astro helpdesk			X	X
35	Grants register- Maintaining the register and actively seeking grants that are applicable to the council	Drafted for sign off	Amber	↔	Successful migration of live HR and finance system from third party hosted servers to Unit4 earlier than planned			X	
					Creation of grants register			X	
36	Adequacy of Insurance Assurance	Live	Amber	↑	2025/26 insurance coverage provided		X		
37	Internal Controls	Drafted for sign off	Amber	↑	ECP process implemented using Microsoft Forms (ceased April 2025, refreshed and implemented again October 2025)			X	
					System controls - cost centre ownership mapping. Changes to procurement hierarchy rules and establish relationship with cost centre hierarchy structure			X	
					Internal Audit Advisory Report – Financial Controls over Procurement and Payments (Audit reference: 12.2526) issued 3 October 2025. Report notes positive developments and improvements have been made but weaknesses still remain - the latter is all captured within the FIP			X	
					Retrospective purchase orders as part of the internal controls and monitoring	X		X	