DRAFT & WORK IN PROGRESS

Slough Council: Operating Model

CLT

23 JULY 2025

Slough Borough Council

Context

- We are running a 6-week project to assess & develop recommendations for Slough's Operating Model
- We are 2 weeks in, and have focused on 'how SBC works today'
- This document is to capture our early findings. It is informed by:
  - Interviews with SBC leaders
  - Discussions & surveys of residents
  - Reviews of SBC core documents
  - Analysis of public data

Objectives

- Share observations on the 'as-is' operating model
- Discuss the areas we think are most important to resolve
- Agree next steps
- Agree how to involve you & your teams in the next four weeks of work

Agenda

- Background to this work
- External context
- As-is model
- Key observations
  - Residents are proud of Slough, but dissatisfied with the council
  - SBC needs to focus on 'fixing the basics'
  - There is a lack of strategic cohesion (top to bottom alignment)
  - Change fatigue and scepticism could frustrate transformation
- Design questions and next steps

Background | Operating model re-design part of SBCs long term recovery

July 2021 — Section 114 notice issued

SBC's S151 Officer issues a Section 114 notice, freezing non-statutory spending — a formal admission of financial instability. This is the Council's first such notice.

Sept 2021 — Independent Reviews commence

Governance and finance reviews begin, led by Jim Taylor (governance) and CIPFA (finance). Findings describe "systemic failures" in SBC's financial oversight and corporate control

Jan 2022 — Commissioners appointed

DLUHC formally appoints Commissioners to oversee and support Council recovery. Commissioners' remit includes finance, governance, and transformation.

March 2023 — Direction to redesign operating model

Commissioners formally instruct a redesign of the Council's Operating Model, citing poor delivery of the 2019 transformation framework

Autumn 2023 — Direction of travel update released

SBC shares a public update outlining the strategic shift under way in operating model design, including demand reduction and digital focus

April 2024 — Diagnostic workshops begin

More than 70 hours of workshops held across SBC directorates to inform model design

Feb 2025 — Cabinet reviews merger options

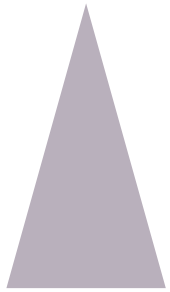
Cabinet considers the implications of the Devolution White Paper; merger with another Council flagged as increasingly likely by the Managing Commissioner

March 2025 — Improvement and Recovery Plan Adopted

This outlines a plan for Slough to become a Best Value Council

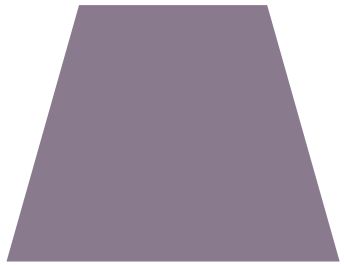
1. BCG Analysis, 'Operating Model Design Diagnostic'

An operating model describes "how work is done" to deliver council services



Why work is done (council Vision & Purpose)

Sets out an aspirational vision for why the council exists, and what it will achieve



What work is done (council Service Model)

Includes what services SBC offers, which residents can access them, the expected levels of service and effectiveness, how they can be accessed, etc.

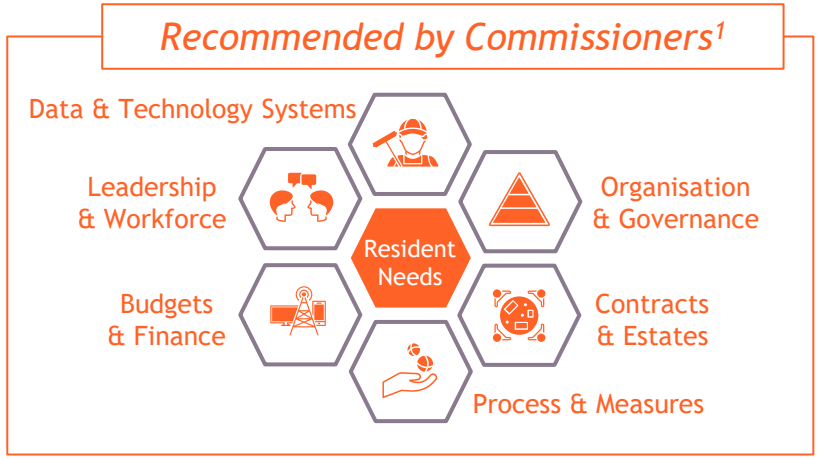
Our focus

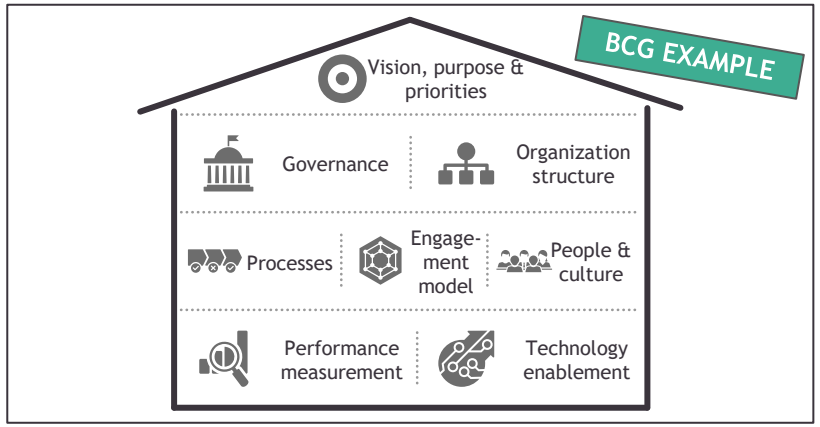
How work is done (council Operating Model)

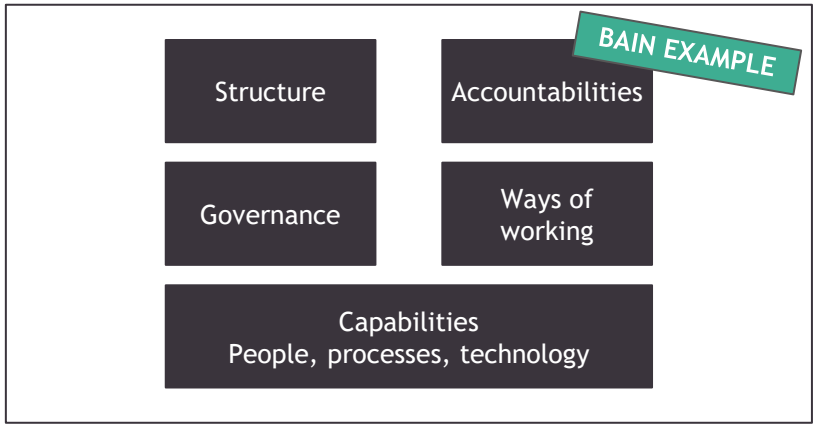
Includes how decisions are made, the expected behaviours and culture of the organisation, how services are managed, etc.

Many different operating model frameworks, but all try to answer the same question: how could we work better?

Selected examples of target operating model 'frameworks'







1. Framework selected from Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) – part of the PRINCE2 framework

Multiple different frameworks for an operating model – which can seem abstract or overly theoretical

They are helpful if they can help us to articulate "how could we work better"

This includes questions like:

- Could we make processes simpler?
- Could we make decisions better?
- Could we collaborate better?
- Could we deliver more efficiently?

In this context, the objectives of this six-week piece of work are to…

Focus today

1. Develop a **shared understanding** of the most important **challenges** faced by SBC today
2. Understand how **'the way things are done'** in SBC today **contributes to those challenges**

Focus in later Steering Committees

3. Develop a set of medium- and long-term **actions** to improve how SBC works
4. Set out **'what it would take'** to deliver those actions – including financial implications
5. **Develop a plan** – putting actions in a sequence, to be owned by Slough's leadership

This document shows the emerging output of the baselining phase

Project week: 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6

Set-up | **Baseline & Develop Options** | **Develop detail for preferred option** | **Handover**

Activities

0. Set-up
- 0.1 Introduce teams
- 0.2 Agree team norms and ways of working
- 0.3 Submit document request
- 0.4 Spend time understanding Slough as a place
- 0.5 Meet political& officer leadership
- 0.6 Agree locations for immersive
- 0.7 Sign-off resident survey questions
- 0.8 Sign off scope

1. Test core assumptions & principles
- 1.1 Work with commissioners, leader & CLT to understand assumption on strategic questions
- 1.2 Confirm design principles are appropriate

2. Engage residents
- 2.1 Conduct immersive research with 100 residents in ~12 locations
- 2.2 Run a rapid survey of 250 residents
- 2.3 Run resident focus groups

3. Strengthen understanding of as-is
- 3.1 Review existing One-Council map
- 3.2 Issue & analyse a bespoke activity survey
- 3.3 Benchmark performance in key service areas

4. Develop & analyse high-level options
- 4.1 Long-list potential options for Slough
- 4.2 Test each against design principles
- 4.3 Agree preferred route forwards

5. Co-develop the blueprint for the preferred option
- 5.1 With CLT sketch-out the future operating model on a page
- 5.2 Identify the main strategic-shifts this implies, from 'as-is' to 'to-be'
- 5.3 Identify what this could mean the Council stops

6. Develop & size the long-list of initiatives needed
- 6.1 Long-list the initiatives to move from the current to the future state
- 6.2 Develop high level estimates (benefits & investment) with owners
- 6.3 Prioritize and sequence initiatives, into a programme of work
- 6.4 Test with director level initiative owners

7. Develop the strategic narrative
- 5.1 Strengthen the narrative for the Slough's overall transformation
- 5.2 Develop products to explain main changes in the future model
- 5.3 Develop a plan for engagement with main groups

8. Handover
- 8.1 Run 1:1 sessions with CLT, programme leadership, initiative owners
- 8.2 Document all work, and transfer to Slough share-points

CLT	Wed 2nd Jul (intro); Wed 23rd Jul; Thu 31st Jul; Wed 13th Aug
Leader/ Dep	Thurs 24th Jul; Thu 7th Aug; Thu 21st Aug
Cabinet	TBC
Commiss-ioners	Wed 2nd Jul (intro); Wed 30th Jul; Wed 6th Aug; Thu 28th Aug

Agenda

Background to this work

External context

As-is model

Key observations

Residents are proud of Slough, but dissatisfied with the council

SBC needs to focus on 'fixing the basics'

There is a lack of strategic cohesion (top to bottom alignment)

Change fatigue and scepticism could frustrate transformation

Design questions and next steps

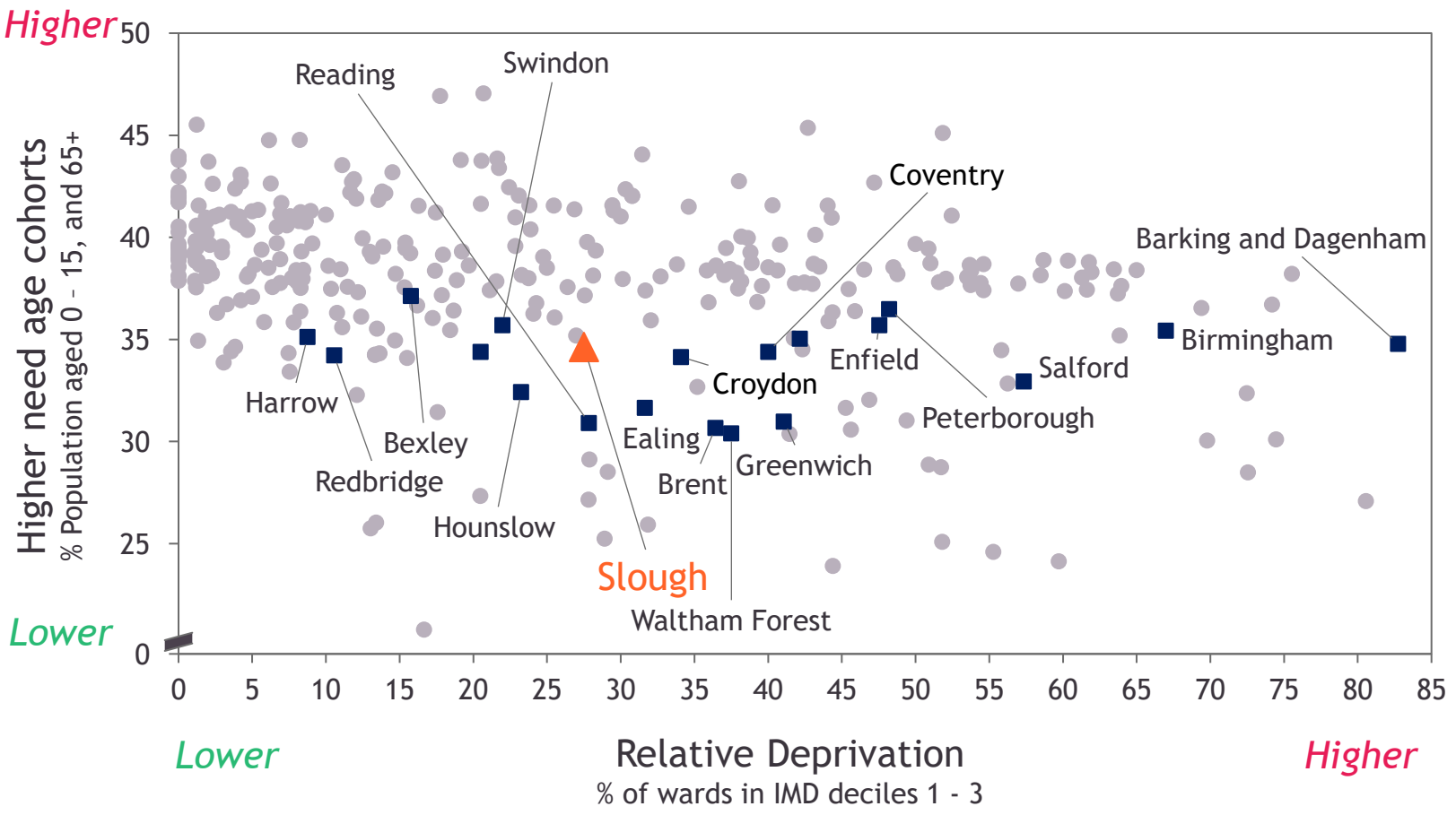
Key insights from benchmarking analysis

- SBC has a **structural challenge** - while underlying demand is not exceptional, **core spending per capita is low**
- The structural challenge is **compounded by** three factors: **debt, small scale, and wider public investment**
- However, Slough's **performance falls below its nearest statistical neighbours**, indicating scope to improve in CSP[1]
- Nearest statistical neighbours are operating with **deficits of ~0 - 26% of CSP (median 3%)** vs. ~10% in Slough
- In the medium term, a **merger could help overcome** the structural challenge – but this is **not likely immediately**

1. CSP = Core Spending Power

Slough appears 'middle of the pack' for underlying demand

Excludes County Councils & District Councils



● Other ■ Nearest Neighbour ▲ Slough

1. ONS Census 2021 – Age by Single Year, LTLAs
2. English indices of deprivation 2021

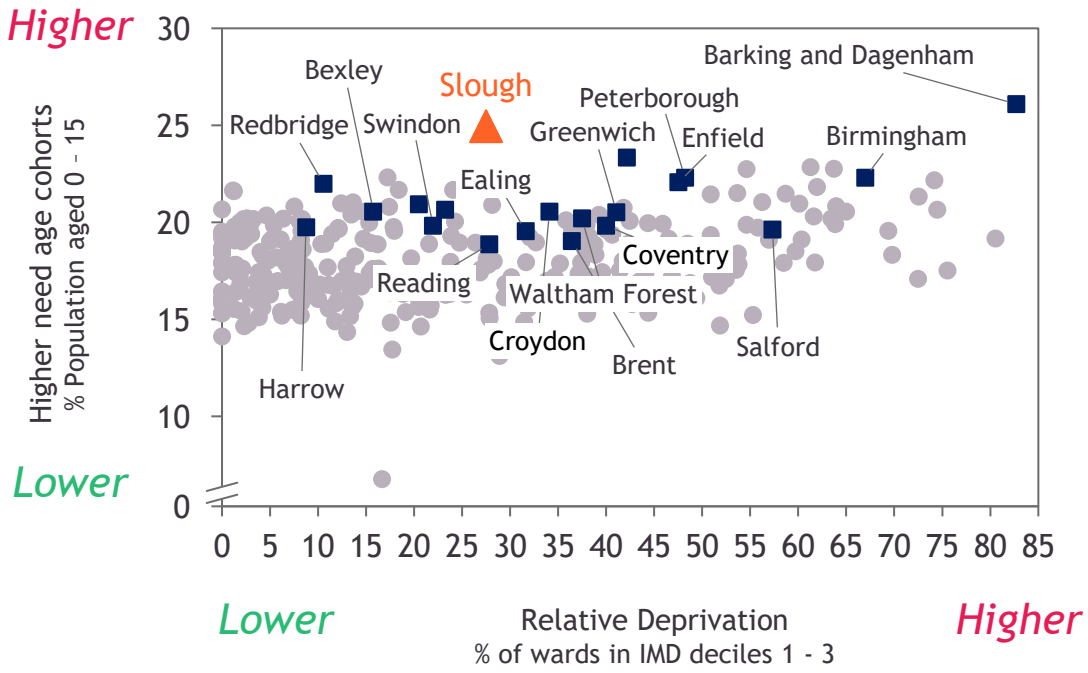
Observations

- Expect higher demand for higher cost statutory services (e.g., ASC, CSC) when (i) eligible population is larger, (ii) underlying needs are higher
- We have used age (younger people 0-15, and older people 65+) and relative deprivation ranking of the local authority as a 'proxy' for underlying demand
- In this comparison, Slough appears in the middle of the pack and does not stand out among comparator councils

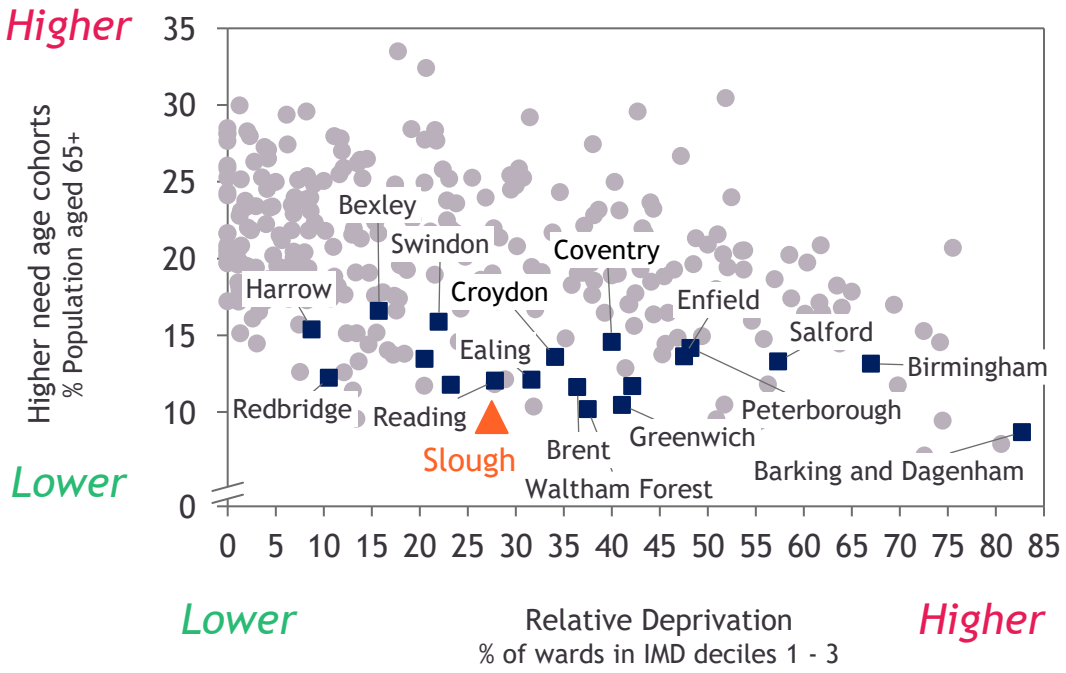
Backup | Slough has higher proportion of young people than peer councils

Excludes County Councils & District Councils

Ages 0 - 15 | Slough has a higher proportion of people aged 0 – 15 than peer councils



Aged 65+ | Slough has a lower proportion of people aged 65+ than peer councils



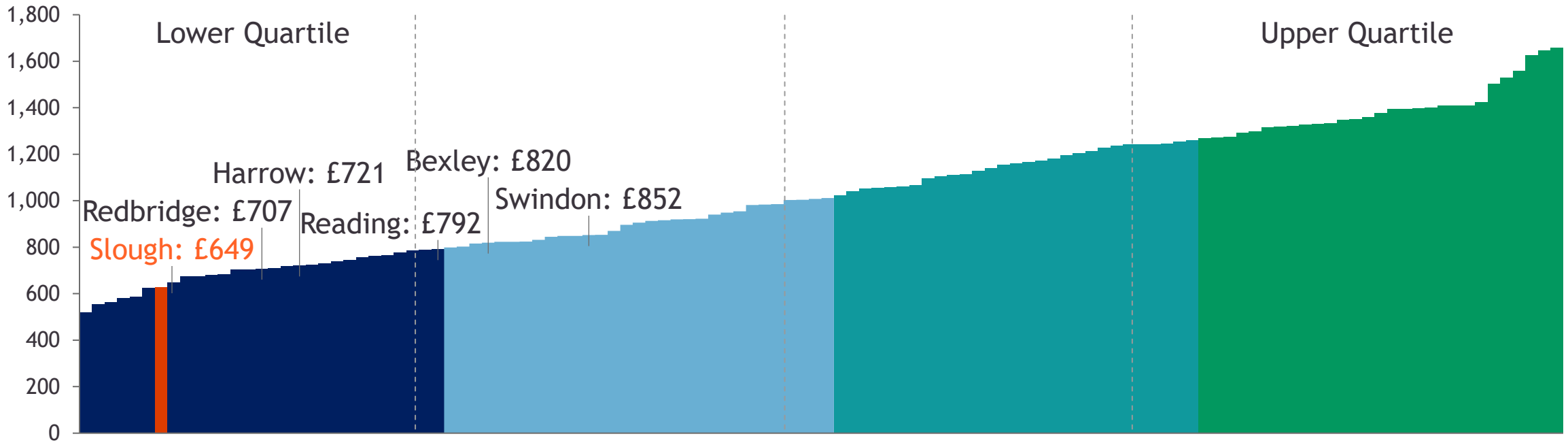
● Other ■ Nearest Neighbour ▲ Slough

1. ONS Census 2021 – Age by Single Year, LTLAs
2. English indices of deprivation 2021

SBCs adjusted Core Spending Power (£649 per capita) is in the bottom quartile

Excludes County Councils & District Councils

Core Spending Power per Capita (£), accounting for Area Cost Adjustment



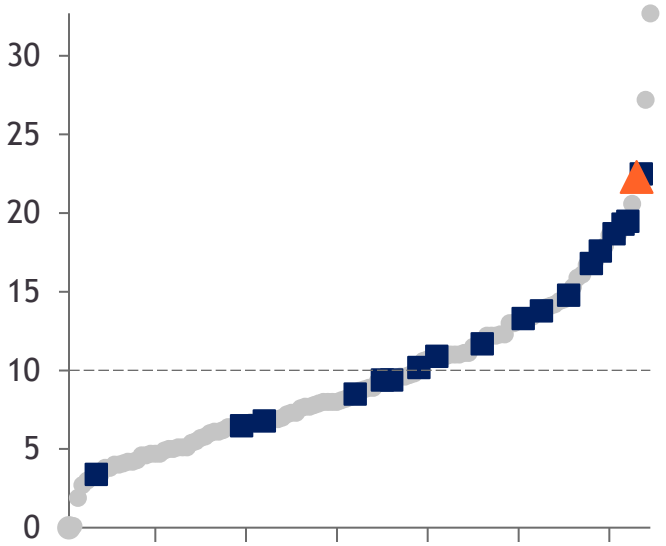
1. Council Taxbase: Local authority level data for 2024
2. DLUHC Core spending Power per dwelling '24/'25, adjusted using DLUHC 2021 Area Cost adjustment for councils

In addition, three compounding factors: debt; scale; wider public sector spend

Excludes County Councils & District Councils

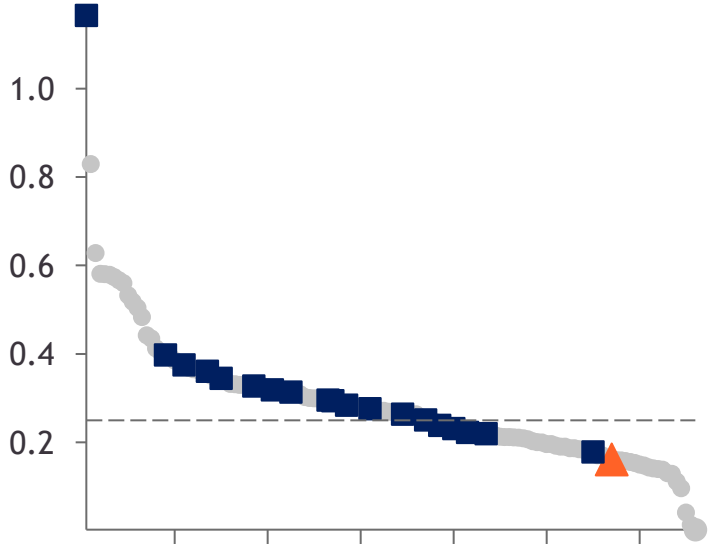
Debt | Debt servicing erodes Slough's core spending power

Debt servicing as a % of Core Spending Power[1]



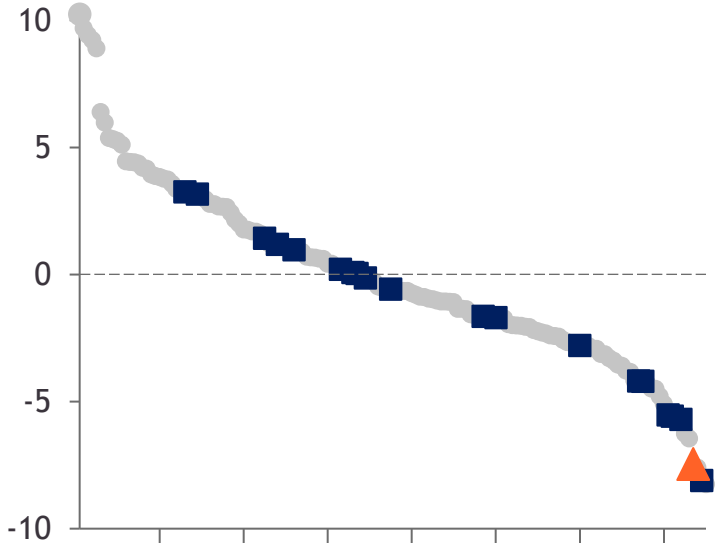
Scale | Small scale reduces buying power & scale economies

Population (M) of local authorities in England



Wider Public Sector | Lower public spend, relative to need

% Difference between funding per capita and estimated need, all public services[2]



Other ■ Nearest Neighbour ▲ Slough

Note: analysis includes excludes county councils and district councils.
1. Excludes Thurrock (131%), and Westmoreland and Birmingham (no data available). Data from 2023/24 (OFLOG)
2. % difference in funding available per capita for NHS, Local Government, Police and Public Health services, relative to needs of population. Based on IFS analysis (2024), which compares funding and updated RNF assessment

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Councils appearing most similar based on underlying demand

Performance across key services appears to fall below peer councils

ONS Nearest Neighbours

		Hounslow	Hillingdon	Green-wich	Slough	Ealing	Redbridge	Harrow	Enfield	Brent	Reading	Waltham Forest	Bexley	Luton	Croydon	Barking and Dagenham	Swindon	Peterbo-rough	Coventry	Birming-ham	Salford
Financial Measure	CSP per resident (ACA)	£581	£586	£646	£649	£705	£707	£722	£748	£768	£790	£813	£817	£820	£820	£845	£850	£918	£1,067	£1,105	£1,265
	Deficit 25/26 (% CSP)	£28m (12%)	£4.2m (2%)	£27m (9%)	£13m (10%)	£11m (3%)	£10m (4%)	£3m (1%)	£10m (3%)	£16m (5%)	£3.9m (2%)	£9m (3%)	0	0	£98m (26%)	0	£15m (8%)	£20m (11%)	£10.8m (3%)	£47m (4%)	£6.8m (2%)
Services Measure	ASC - Quality of Life/24	18.7	18.6	18.1	18.5	18.2	19.2	18.3	18.7	17.8	19.2	18	18.2	19	17.8	18.5	19.3	19.2	18.6	18.9	19
	CSC Ofsted rating '22/'23	Good	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvem ent	Requires improve-ment	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good	Requires improve-ment	Good	Outstanding	Requires improvem ent	Good	Requires improve-ment	Inadequate	Inadequat e	Good	Good	Good
	Housing Satisfaction	59%	59%	67%	45.1%	60%	66%	59%	54%	51%	65%	61%	53%	70%	62%	70%	54%	92%	66%	59%	78%
	% Planning apps decided on time	88.3	90.1	93	81.3	98.5	91.9	87.5	82.6	87	87.9	85.9	95	98.2	87.6	100	89.2	82.7	95.8	82.4	93.7
	Bins rating	5	5	5	3	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	3	5	4	4	4	3	4	3

1. DLUHC Core spending Power per dwelling '24/'25, adjusted using DLUHC 2021 Area Cost adjustment for councils
2. Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework '22/'23, Scores out of 24
3. Bins number given on the basis of frequency, and number of services provided - eg Hounslow was awarded 2 points for weekly recycling, 1 for fortnightly waste, 1 bonus point for food waste, and 1 bonus point for garden waste collection
4. ONS nearest neighbours chosen due to wider statistical base, as well as ONS statistics authority

Key: Performance ranked in quintiles (i.e., 20th percentile bands)

Lowest/Worst 1-4	5-8	9-12	13-16	Highest/Best 17-20

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Design questions and next steps

Baselining has been informed by interviews, document review and analysis

30+ senior leaders
1:1 interviews with the council's leadership, service leads, and finance team. Further 1-1s scheduled

350+ residents
Immersive sessions, direct engagement & a resident poll to understand local sentiments

Elected members
Discussions with Leader, Deputy Leader, Cabinet. Opposition members to be arranged

34 staff completed
Heads of Service survey to understand their experiences, opinions, and work patterns[1]

90+ council documents
Analysed to help assess current services, finances, and governance structures

1. c.16 more surveys expected to be returned

Recap: Operating model baselining has 6 elements, centred around residents

Data & Technology Systems

The digital tools and data needed to deliver and improve services *(e.g. case management systems or reporting platforms)*

Leadership & Workforce

The skills, and behaviour of leaders and staff delivering services (e.g. how leaders motivate teams and support frontline staff)

Organisation & Governance

How decisions are made and overseen
(for example: who has accountability for what, and how performance is governed)

Budgets & Finance

The financial planning and resources allocated to services *(for example: how funding is prioritised across programmes and monitored over time)*

Contracts & Estates

The external providers and physical assets used to support delivery
(for example: outsourced maintenance providers or community buildings used for service access)

Process & Measures

The key processes and metrics used in delivery *(e.g. how applications are handled and success measured)*

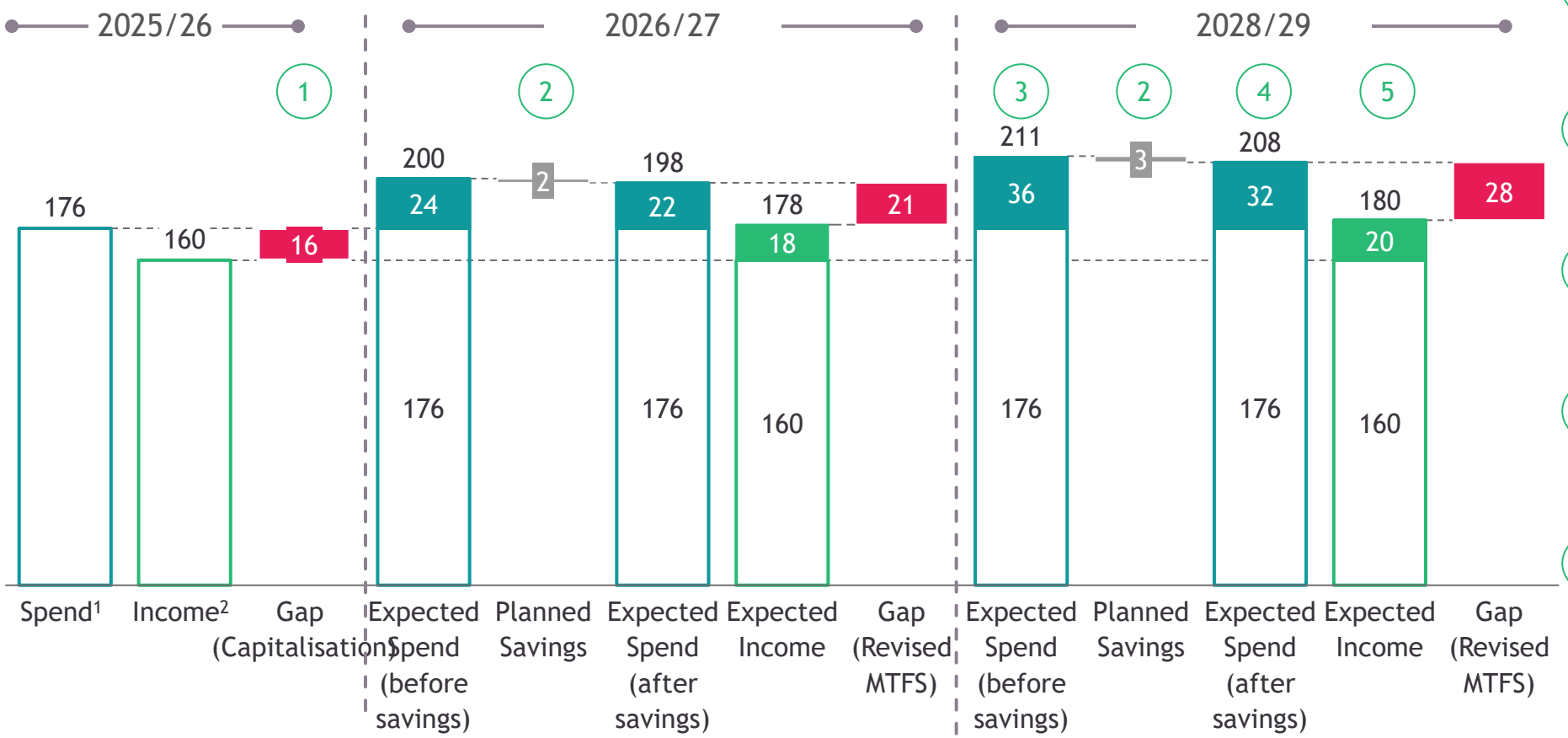
Regen, Housing & Environment is the largest directorate, whilst Adults has the highest spend

	Adults Services	Children's services	Regen, Housing & Environment	Corporate resources	Law and governance	Public Health & Public Protection	Chief execs Office
Roles (FTE)	279	293	467	268	31	97	106
% interim	22%	25%	10%	21%	10%	13%	14%
% vacancies	20%	19%	24%	15%	23%	18%	11%
£Xm spent in 24/25 (*General Fund*)	45.8	46.0	22.2	15.8	2.1	1.0	5.1
£Xm budget in 24/25 (% variance vs. spend) *(General fund)*	35.2 (30%)	49.5 (-7%)	14.6 (52%)	13.3 (19%)	2.2 (-1%)	1.7 (-42%)	4.0 (26%)
Owned service locations[1]	2	15	Not enough survey responses yet	25	Not enough survey responses yet	8	Not enough survey responses yet
Top 2 contracts	• £4m Soln. 4 Health • £1m Turning Point	• £7m QeD - Contracted Services • £2m Manor Green School	• £11m Osborne Services – Repairs • £6m Grundon Waste – Contracted Services	• £25m Matrix SCM - Agency Staff • £2m Marsh – Insurance	• £2m London Borough Harrow • £25k Monterpoint	• £300k Hestia • £200k Sports Leisure Management	• £60k Canon • £40k Human Engine

Notes: For heads of service survey covering 34 responses as at 21/07 c.17 director level positions
Slough Children First FTE not included within Children's Services. Children's Services Budget includes £36.3m for Slough Children First

Recap of the financial challenge

Change in income, expenditure and gap 2025/26 to 2028/29, £M



1. The council has a £15.7M budget gap, which is covered by a capitalization direction
2. The updated plans include £2M Savings in 2026/27 and an additional £1M in 2028/29
3. By 2028/29, the budget will have grown by £36M – mostly caused by demand growth and emerging pressures[3]
4. The council's income is forecast to grow by £20M to 28/29. The total income (£180M) is £4M higher than spend today
5. The updated MTFS plans include £20.5M Gap in 2026/27 and £28.4M in 2028/29

1. Spend is the service budgets, plus corporate budgets. 2. Income is Council Tax, Business Rates, Revenue Support Grant, and other govt. grants. 3. £36M is calculated as £18M (demand growth and emerging pressures) plus £13M (pay award + contract inflation) plus £3M (Capital financing, time limited budgets, pension deficit, companies, reserves)
Source: Slough MTFS

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Design questions and next steps

Emerging messages from the work so far

Residents are proud of Slough. They are dissatisfied with how services are being run, and the financial position of the council. They want to be involved in the solution.

- Residents strongly identify with being part of Slough (vs London or Berkshire). Their sense of community impacted by quality of services, e.g. youth facilities
- Residents are frustrated with poor services (e.g. bins and housing) and contact inefficiencies (e.g. calling 200+ times to fix a leaky ceiling)

Across the council, 'the basics' need fixing (e.g., data, website, front-door, budgeting, core processes). This will need thoughtful prioritisation, in context of organizational bandwidth

- Data is the heart of the issue (e.g. causes inaccuracies with budgeting, evidence-based decision-making) and the lack of connectivity between systems (thereby making processes difficult)

While strategies/plans exist in many places, it is not clear how they 'ladder up' to deliver a cohesive strategy for the council, or how their delivery is wired through the operating model

- There is no golden thread/connecting narrative that links directorate/service strategies together, making implementation challenging
- There is a risk of reliance on key individuals to drive strategic / longer-term thinking – but this is difficult, given the number of interims
- Governance and decision making can compound this

Changing this culture must be a central focus for SBC to achieve lasting change, change fatigue and deep-rooted scepticism about 'transformation' is understandable given history

- People report organisational inertia and change fatigue, especially for those with long tenure
- There is a perception of risk aversion and lack of problem-solving mindset
- Many people report organisational 'silos' with limited accountability or individual empowerment

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Residents dissatisfied with services but have pride in Slough, want to be involved in solutions and want improvements in place and 'the basics'

What we've heard from residents	Potential op. model implications
Residents have pride in Slough & want to be part of the solution: majority believe the council acts on local concerns, 76% want a say in decisions	Strengthen collaboration in service design and delivery
Understanding is low; 61% say they understand the council's role, but many misunderstand council's remit; many wouldn't turn to it for support	Build trust through transparency and stronger resident engagement
Slough's strengths lie in its connectivity, esp. transport while negative sentiment focuses on quality of town centre, crime & anti-social behaviour	Focus on visible place-based improvements that residents value
Residents frustrated at services not meeting basic expectations and council contact described as slow / opaque e.g., housing repair, support	Prioritise improvements in contact & resolution, esp. in universal services
High awareness of bankruptcy & managing council finances deemed highest priority	Improve financial transparency and link spend to visible outcomes
Residents strongly identify with Slough (vs London or Berkshire), yet sense of community impacted by quality of services, e.g. youth facilities	Partner more with community groups to deliver services to residents

A common theme across resident feedback (focus groups and poll) was the sense of Slough in decline, and frustration at council services

Frustration from perceived inadequate services

How can they be bankrupt? Are they spending money for nothing? Look at the roads, look at the bins. We are paying council tax and business rates and it's getting worse

Male, 40s, Asian British

A brick wall at the side of my property took three years to fix… Over winter, my heating kept breaking – the council didn't help. I went 6 days with no heating

Female, 70s, White British

Bring the town back to life because there's nothing. Everything is closed down. There's no cinema. Shops are closed because everything is closing down

Female, 40s, White Other

Perceived decline of the area

I remember when new businesses were opening in the middle of town. You'd go in, apply for a job, and it was jobs for locals. Now - yes there's new stuff opening, but it's data centres or whatever on the outskirts of town. That can't be more than 10 jobs - and they'll all come out from London anyway

Male, 60s, Asian British

The security of the people. There's too many drug deals. Sometimes I feel unsafe

Female, 20s, Black Other

Slough's lost really, the sense of community

Male, 40s, Black British

Delays and difficulties communicating with council

At one point I was emailing 17 people in every email. I had a caseworker - but I had to email the boss of the boss of the boss of the boss before I could get a response

Female, 40s, White British

Good luck [interacting with the council]. You can't ring them, because they don't answer the phone. You email them and they never reply… nothing ever gets followed up

Female, 40s, White British

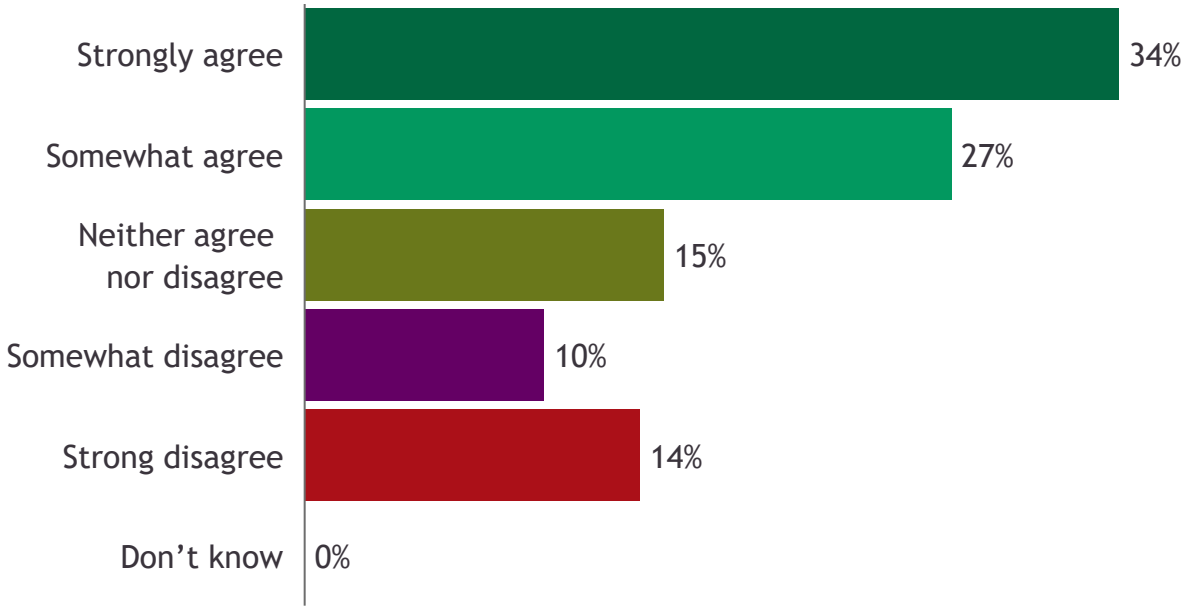
Yes they are bankrupt now, but it's been this bad since COVID. Now they all work from home, there's no one there and it takes an absolute age for anyone to get back to you

Male, 60s, Asian British

Majority of residents, 61%, are proud to live in Slough and 76% are interested in being involved in shaping decisions

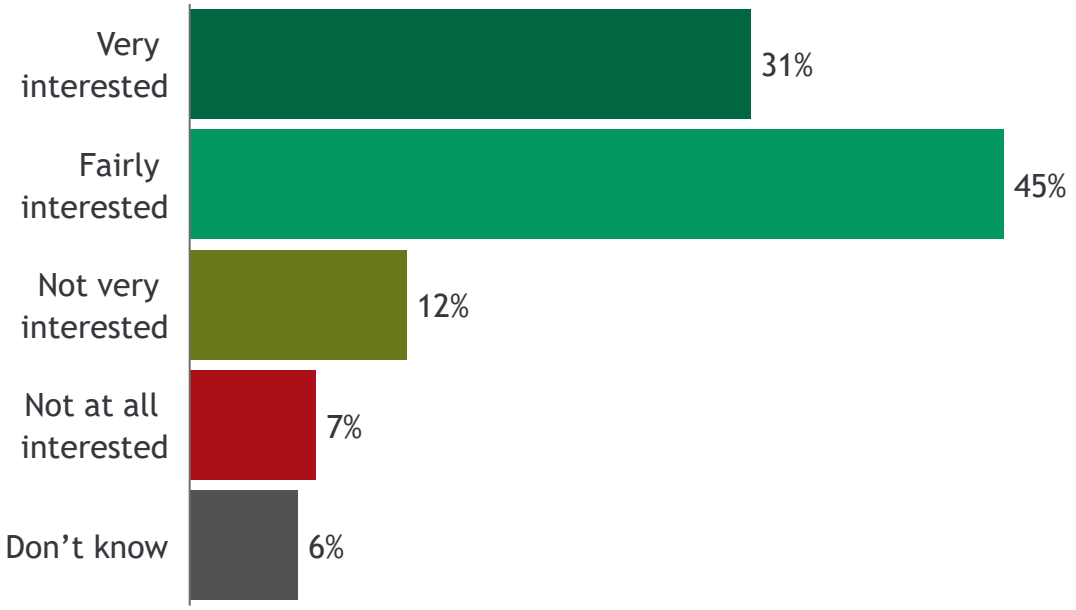
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following: I am proud to live in Slough

Sample size of 252 Slough council Residents, 1st Jul – 9th Jul 2025



How interested would you be in getting more involved in helping shape decisions made by your local council?

Sample size of 252 Slough council Residents, 1st Jul – 9th Jul 2025



Source: Public First; BCG analysis

Residents' highest priority is that the council is able to manage finances

What do you think the council should prioritize focusing on in the future? Select up to three

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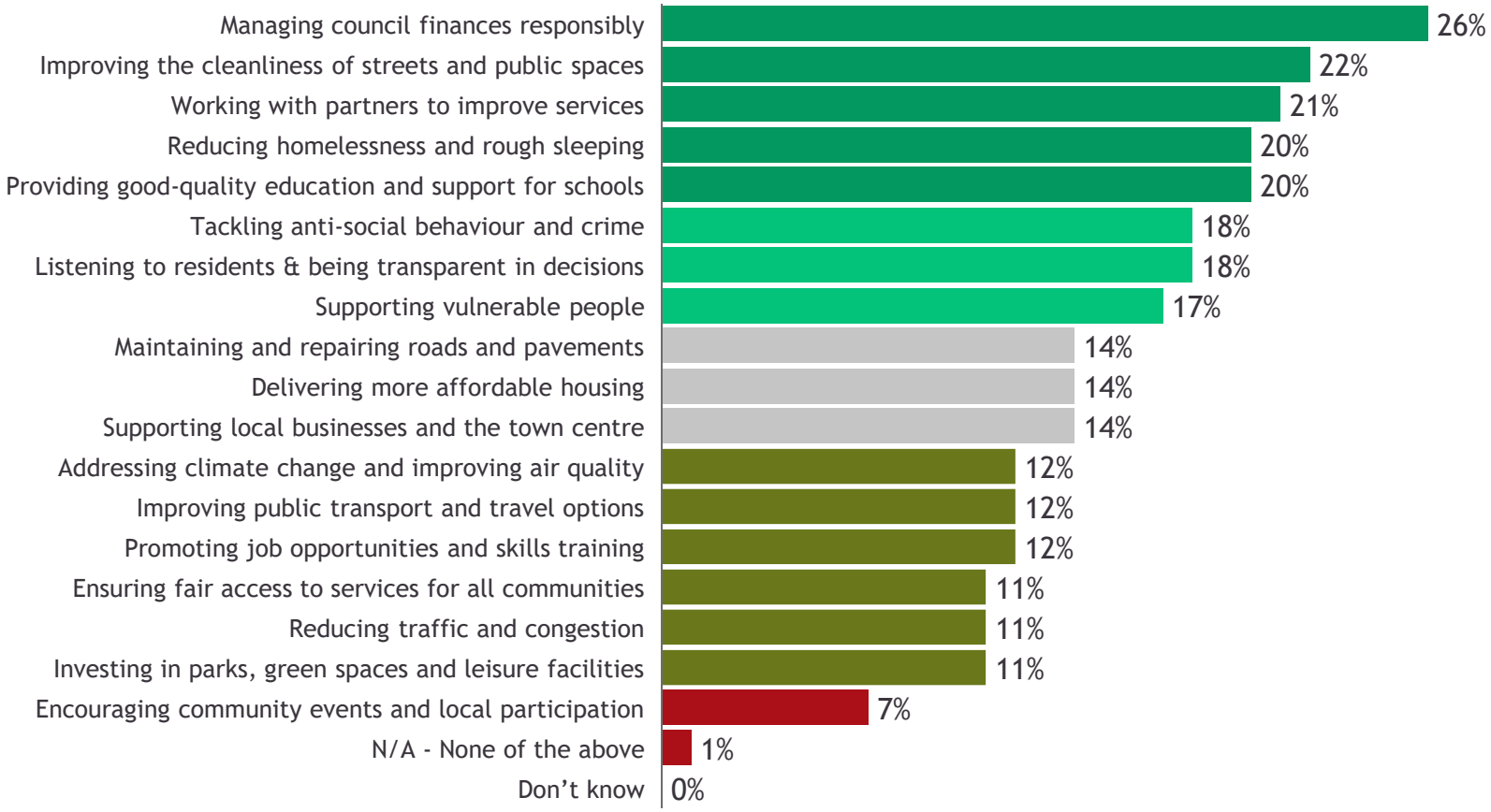

> I wouldn't give them [the council] too much to do or they won't do it. They just need to do the basics. They aren't doing them now
> Male, 30s, Asian British

> The bins are just terrible. People driving their rubbish to the landfill is not just a one off or a rare occurrence. It is a weekly experience for a majority of people
> Female, 50s, White British

> Look at the roads, look at the bins. We are paying council tax and business rates and it's getting worse
> Male, 40s, Asian British

Source: Public First; BCG analysis

Agenda

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As-is model

Key observations

Residents are proud of Slough, but dissatisfied with the council

SBC needs to focus on 'fixing the basics'

There is a lack of strategic cohesion (top to bottom alignment)

Change fatigue and scepticism could frustrate transformation

Design questions and next steps

Gaps and challenges exist across core processes, within and across services

Four critical cross-cutting processes to support a well-functioning council

Survey, interviews & data suggest gaps across these processes today

Strategic planning	Define strategic goals; support functions & services to make aligned plans	• **Multiple pockets of strategy work underway** (e.g. within ASC, DDaT, HR, Comms, Revenues & Welfare Services) but not sufficiently joined up • **Overall strategy could be improved and appears poorly understood today:** Lacking one actionable plan to coordinate and link across services • **Accountability for complete cost of service is limited** reducing management's ability holistically to make decisions for the benefit of SBC
Setting & managing budgets	Set realistic and demand-linked budgets; enable transparency, accountability and in-year flexibility	• **High variance to spend suggests budgeting process could be improved**, as directorates ranged from 30% overspend to 135% underspend in 24/25 • **Savings targets set top-down, could be better linked to strategy & deliverability** e.g., impact of employee savings targets on resourcing issues; 59% budgeted 25/26 savings cases amber/red delivery risk
Performance management	Set measures to achieve strategic goals for teams and individuals; monitor performance	• **Goals not clearly set or cascaded down to individual/team goals,** and KPIs often lagging indicators *e.g., RAG status is main metric used to report status of transformations* • **Technology landscape makes measuring & reporting on performance difficult,** e.g., *3 case management systems in contact centre with no link*
Transformation & change management	Support teams to make controlled change in-line with council priorities	• **No end-to-end transformation process** to hold initiatives to account and standardise approvals *e.g., no widely-agreed stage-gate methodology* • **Proliferation of initiatives with often limited prioritisation** impacts ability to make transformation progress and spot overlaps/ interdepencies

Performance measurement not currently set up to help strategic steering & decision-making

Metrics should be….

Aligned centrally & contribute to performance of the level above

Quantitative and easy to measure

Concise, Focus on quality over quantity

Motivating, ambitious and challenging to teams and individuals

What we've seen at SBC

- Performance team works with directors to define metrics
- Unclear link b/w individuals, teams and council goals i.e., directorates define own metrics
- Measures driven by reg / external requirements not strategy i.e., website live-time
- *We need to move to a more outcome focused performance model*

- Fragmented data landscape makes collecting data consuming
- Measures mainly Management Information (tracking data / leading indicators) could be more goal focused i.e., KPIs

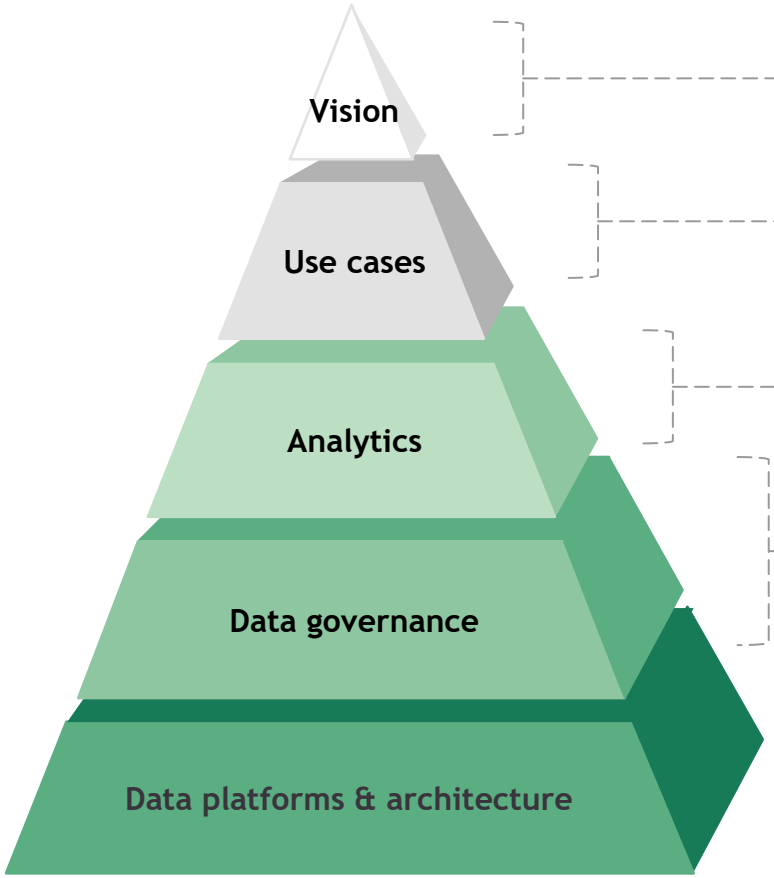
  e.g., tracking housing repair delays vs age of building / historic repairs
- *Data ownership is unclear and understanding is low*

- 40+ metrics in top-level report, most important KPIs could be identified and managed with more focus

- Targets and timelines for metrics are unclear
- Levers available for management to pull are not clear in reporting scorecard

Foundational Data (FTE, location, performance…) is hard to access and often incomplete – work underway to address, but much to do

BCG Data Operating Model



What we've seen at SBC

- **Data is seen as critical to transformation** although scale and prioritisation of change needed, and responsibility of individual services, not yet aligned

- **There are pockets where clear use cases for data exist,** but these are generally frustrated by lack of consolidated, reliable sources of data

- **Majority of analyst time spent** on collecting & cleaning data
- **Very little modern analytics capability** in the org, and what exists is spread, people have been doing things their own way

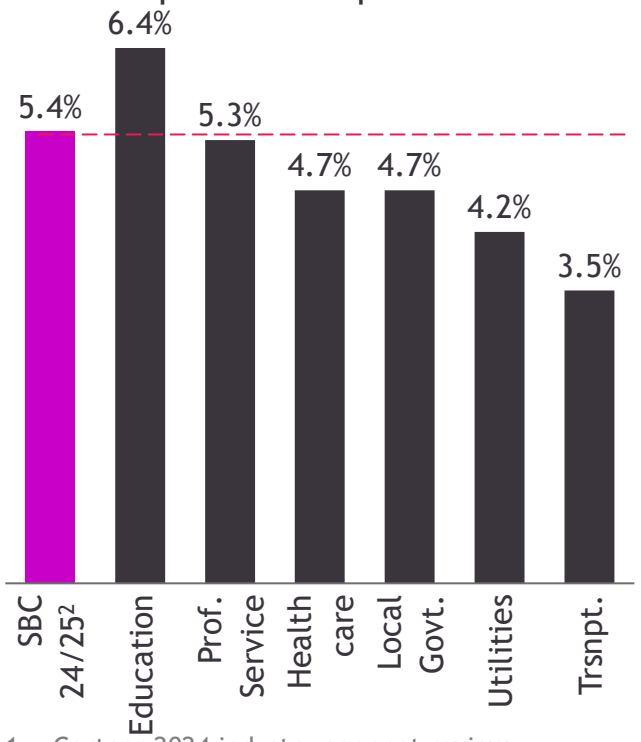
- **No central view** on data ownership / location of critical data products
- **Limited control** of data in the past e.g., chose not to purchase historical contract data when changing system

- **Data spread** in various places (end user computers), legacy systems
- **Poor data connectivity** between stores in systems /Excels – although pilot underway to improve this
- **Teams struggle with "one source of the truth"** and duplication in data collection / analysis across teams

IT and systems facing a range of challenges, inc. legacy systems, fragmented approach, user-centric design not embedded

IT spend higher than in other industries, although likely driven by small scale

IT as % operational spend[1]



5.4% not unreasonable for SBC given small scale therefore **limited scale economies**

Small, digitally mature organisations often 6+%

Challenges seen at SBC

- **Heritage of legacy LoB systems** procured and managed in a fragmented way
- **Disconnected data sets and systems** creates inefficiencies in information flows e.g., 3 contact tracking systems in call centres because of 3 routes-in
- **Lack of overarching, joined-up tech & digital decision-making & governance** – limited to security, data prot. Etc, although Design Authority aims to address in part
- **Level of digital maturity relatively low** e.g., website not connecting well to other systems
- **Opportunity to drive more user-centric design in improving digital services** for residents, but needs buy-in
- **DDaT support (hardware etc) seen as slow** by some
- **DDaT not at CEO-1,** as typically seen in orgs with higher level of digital and data maturity

1. Gartner 2024 industry peer set review
2. Agresso Data FY 24/25 IT spend defined as: £5.6m - revenue cost centres £6.208m minus £0.563m on one-off transformation and data centre technology refresh

Total spend: All spend excluding "Below the line" income (£135m) and removing capital spend (£31m)

Source: BCG internal data, council budget 24/25 financial report.

Variance between budgeting and spend, due to difficulty with underlying data

Many services have difficulty forecasting demand…

- *Our key challenge is data to make forecasts & budget requirements*
- *We need to be able to better forecast demand for our service*
- *With the right data and analysis, we could predict local demand better*
- *Data is drawn down manually – I can't see what I need or track comparative data*

Leading to budgets which are liable to variation…

- *Budgets do not align with out-turn*
- *Need a more robust financial planning process (though it is improving)*

…and underlying systems seem to make this harder

- We could use Agresso for post-based budgeting / forecasting – but lack functionality
- Budget holders could upload forecasts themselves but we don't have the functionality
- A lot of time is wasted dealing with internal mechanisms and barriers

1. 2024/25 Amount accurate as of 15th July 2025. FY24/25 amounts are subject to ongoing review and adjustments

Source: SBC Head of Service Survey

Procurement work not strategic or consistent across directorates

Best-in Class approach to Procurement

	1 Strategy & guidance	2 Needs identification	3 Costing & budgeting	4 Requirement definition	5 Supplier selection	6 Contracting	7 Contract execution
	Develop procurement strategy, set guidelines	Track & assess needs, source common items, propose capable suppliers	Get price input from suppliers, aid budgeting, support end-users	Develop sourcing plans, support tenders, qualify suppliers	Manage negotiations & direct purchasing process	Develop, negotiate and secure contracts, manage purchase orders	Manage contracts, data, logistics, measure performance
SBC as-is	No procurement strategy written No regular review of procurement with Directorate leads	Data unavailable to define maturity, extend contracts & go to bidding e.g., to-school transport company planned to withdraw service unless contract signed immediately	Insufficient capacity to manage quantity of suppliers ~50% FTE of needed Opportunity to consolidate & negotiate e.g., fencing & grass cutting suppliers selected by each directorate	No feed of requirements into procurement Procurement not involved in vast majority of deals 63 contracts in contract register[1] for 1,368 suppliers over prev. 4 years	Circumventing competitive bidding process with 'Significant Officer Awards' Poor selection audit trial in central & directorate supplier relationships	Unable to understand full contract cost and fulfil reporting obligations* Updates to Agresso will significantly enhance contract spend reporting	Contract management strategy not implemented Limited guardrails for directorates handling majority of contract management

Source: Expert calls

- Indicates obligation or compliance requirement not currently being met by SBC as part of 2023 Procurement Act

1. As at May 2025

Estates | Limited data available to make informed operational maintenance & strategic disposal decisions

Estates register and HoS survey headlines

In Property Register

- 89% properties have no sq ft estimates
- 144 properties in General Fund, many of which unsaleable e.g., changing room attached to fields
- No single view of 6,000+ council-owned homes, HRA, Plymouth Road, General Fund

From HoS Survey

Of the 26 known properties surveyed,

- 10 properties used by 2 or fewer directorates[1]
- 13 properties used by 3 – 5 directorates
- 3 properties used by 6+ directorates

What we've heard at SBC

- **Clear evidence of operational improvements** – new disposals & investment governance, ability to maintain operational levels and ensure H&S compliance
- **Risk restructuring project defines roles to lower-capability,** permanent retention / attraction issues
- **Poor data availability for business case creation and planning** – using anecdotal evidence to drive decisions
- **Budgets set incorrectly for size of estate** – consistently overspent, requires maintenance charges to be cross-charged to "assets with budget" hampering property's ability to track cost per asset
- **Challenging operational collaboration with corporate and service directorates** - day-to-day budgeting with finance, disposals with legal, demand from services
- **Limited capital programs mean contracting is ad-hoc** – inspection contracts could be rationalised if property team had more capacity

Source: Estate Management Tracker (LIVE) - July PW updated 16 (version 1)
Where use by directorate is defined as property selected used in survey by a unique Director level role, manager with a Director level role, or managers' manager with a Director level role

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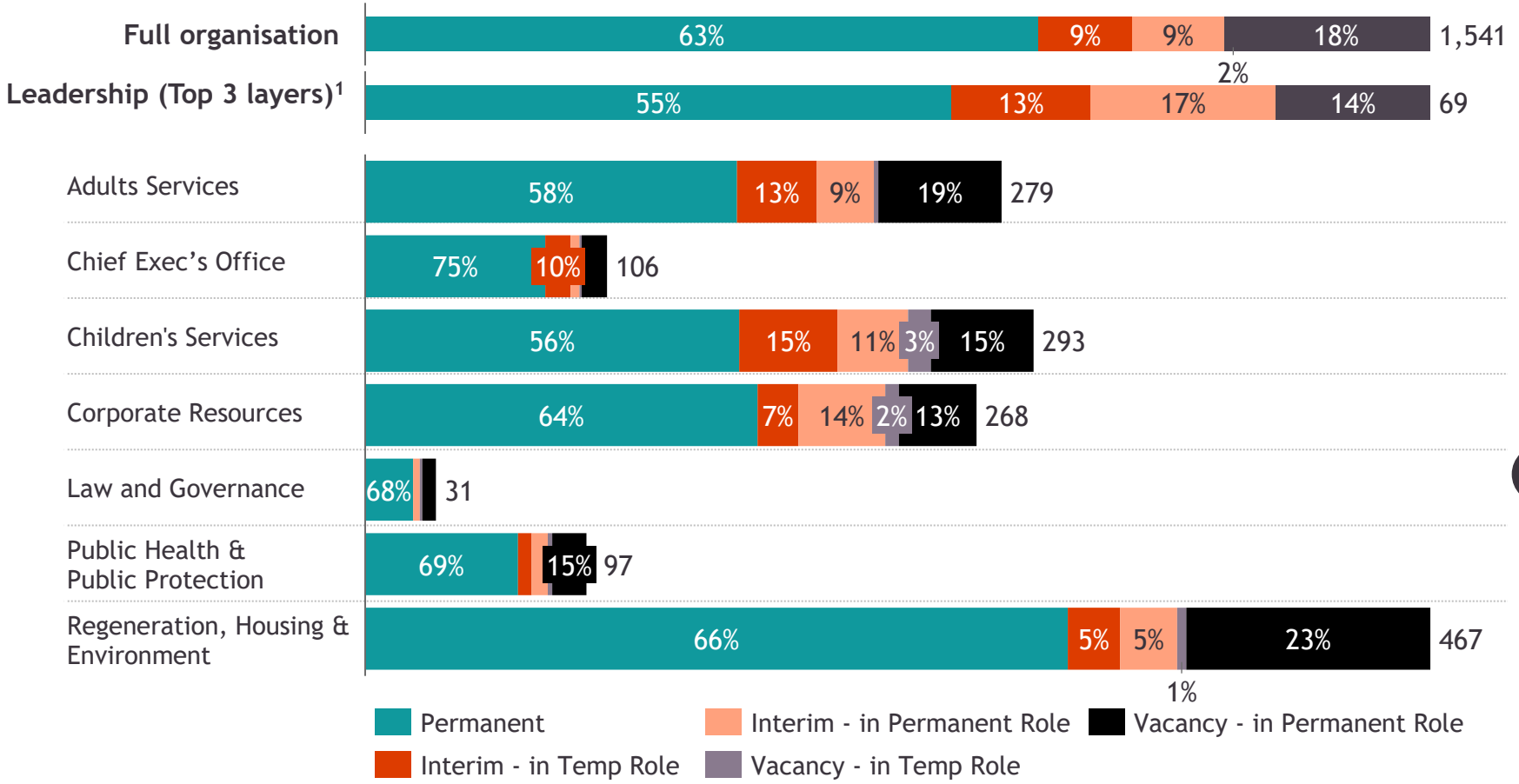
Design questions and next steps

37% of SBC roles, and 45% of leadership, are interims or vacancies, driving a low level of institutional knowledge and less focus on long-term planning



Permanent: Role filled by a permanent member of staff

Interim: Temporary or permanent post that is filled by a contractor/agency rather than permanent member of staff

Vacancy: Temporary or permanent post that is entirely unfilled

Insights

- Level of temporary employees, in either permanent or temporary roles, exceeds national average of 11%[3] across directorates
- Leadership has a lower vacancy rate than directorates, but a much higher rate of interims
- Vacancy rate is 20% overall, vs national LA average of 9%[3]
- Even within directorates that are typically harder to recruit for, such as ASC, the national average vacancy rate remains at 16%[3]
- High number of temporary roles (11% overall, 13% leadership) makes long-term view difficult

Source: HR Establishment data as of 21 May 2025. Note: some vacancies are being held back while restructures are ongoing
1. Vacancies counted across temporary and permanent roles 3. Local Government Association, as of May 2025

There are lots of positive pockets of improvement & remediation work taking place, but lack of cohesion in overarching transformation strategy across SBC

Central transformation programs

- Target Operating Model
- Front Door Transformation
- Adults' change programs
- Children's change programs
- Housing change programs
- Financial improvement plan
- CIPFA Financial Management
- Political leadership & governance
- Strategic commissioning
- Internal Audit
- Culture & Workforce
- DDaT improvement
- Risk Maturity
- Complaints Handling
- Evidence Based Decision Making
- Comms and Engagement

Directorate change programs

- Home Ownership (estates)
- Assets (estates)
- Property Portfolio (estates)
- Property Service (estates)
- Delivery Trnsfrm. (ASC)
- CQC Assurance (ASC)
- Act 2023 (Procurement)
- SEND initiatives
- Children's Social Care initiatives
- Housing improvement initiatives

Improvement plans are in place

- Across directorates, clear strategic plans are being developed, these involve establishing clear processes, reinforcing the basics, and driving towards defined team priorities
- Performance tracking frameworks are also under revision or creation in most directorates, with recognition of a clear need to improve consistency and granularity in reporting
- However, there is a **lack of cohesive strategy, prioritisation and delivery** across the organisation, with employees reporting minimal awareness of other programs & SBC's priorities

More layers than expected given organisation size, which may contribute to slower decision making

Layer	Organization Shape	Positions	SoC
N		1	-
N – 1		9	9
N – 2		59	6.6
N - 3		219	5.9
N - 4		450	6.5
N - 5		404	6.3
N - 6		172	8.6
N - 7		13	6.5
Total		**1,327**	

Observations

- More layers than expected, given the size of the organisation (a maximum of 6 should be the goal for this size)
- More layers exacerbate decision-making issues
- Best practice: 6-8 for normal teams, can be smaller for very expert/specialist areas (4-6) or more (8-12+) for operational areas with very similar roles e.g. contact centres

Note: Reporting line data not available for ~200 positions, which are excluded here. Source: HR Establishment data as of 21st May 2025.

Operational decisions & the "here and now" take up majority of senior leader bandwidth, leading to a lack of capacity for long-term strategy

Pain points identified through interviews

- Decision-making felt to be good in general within directorates, but **less effective across directorates** where there can be delays and lack of co-ordination / strategic thinking
- **Many decisions escalated**; teams are culturally hesitant to make financial decisions but also some approvals could be delegated to lower levels
- Few **controls on meeting quality & effectiveness** e.g. low attendance, sending delegates, limited challenge on quality of papers & evidence
- Accountabilities of some boards **not clear / overlapping**

Illustrative quotes from survey and interviews

> Topics go into governance but decisions aren't coming out

> Completing tasks can be challenging because of the layers of governance involved

> Small decisions go too high up the chain of command

> People are scared to make decisions without manager approval

> I find that the attendance of boards changes, so decisions change from week to week, there's no accountability

> We make decisions that are often reliant on services to agree and can mean decisions don't get made for months and/or years

> Decision making process across the council is still hard to understand. Seemingly more and more needs CLT approval

> I don't know which body to get a final decision from

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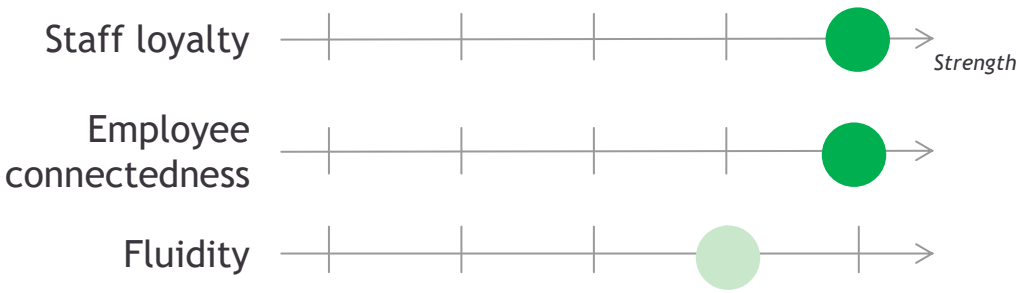
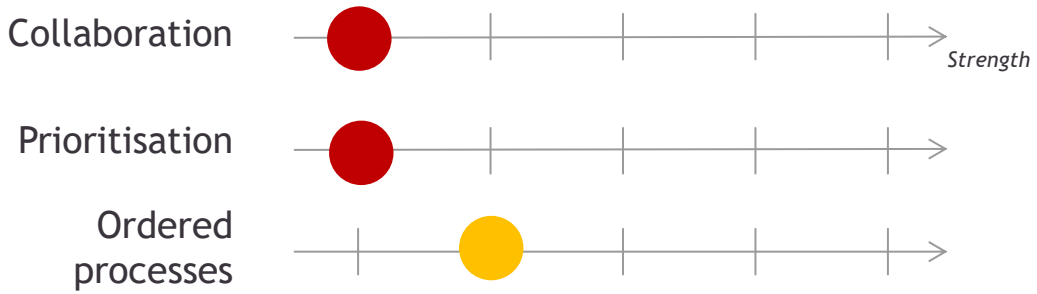
Organisational strengths are in-team connectedness and loyalty – but how the organisation works is quite siloed, lacks prioritisation and robust process

Strengths lie in loyalty and connectedness[1]



- Employees are loyal to the role that they do and feel positively about their work, with 91% feeling a sense of pride about their job (although only 60% would recommend SBC as an employer)
- Teams are very positive about their day-to-day environments, with 88% of staff feeling there is good cooperation within their own team
- In tough circumstances such as the COVID pandemic, staff changed their ways of working effectively

Areas of opportunity in collaboration & prioritisation

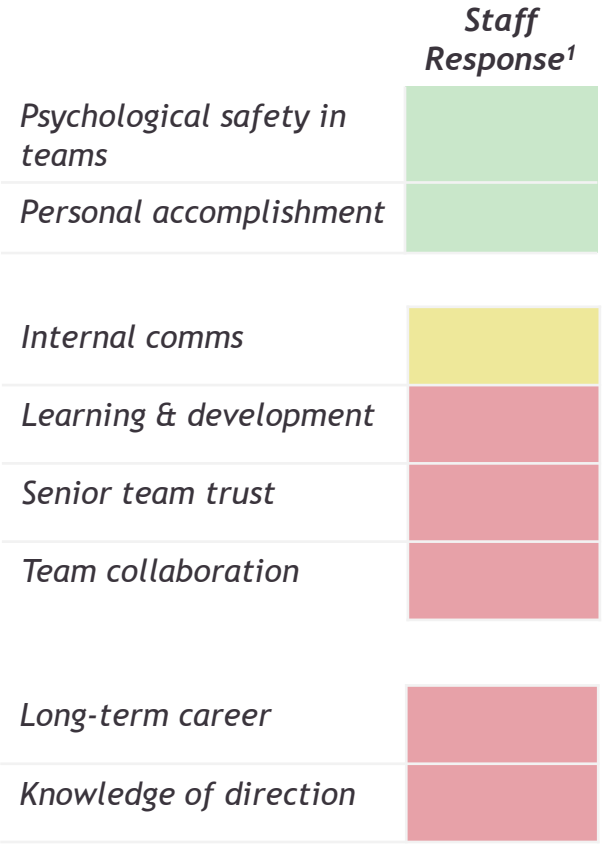


- Limited collaboration occurs across directorates, with only 59% of employees thinking teams work well across the organisation
- Prioritisation is not communicated effectively to staff, with only 56% reporting knowledge of progress against the council's priorities
- Processes are not robust or efficient, and only 55% believe processes enable them to do their jobs effectively

1. Qualitative assessment based upon criteria from BCG culture diagnostic. Source: 2024 People Poll; SBC senior stakeholder interviews

Staff report lower levels of trust in senior leaders and insufficient collaboration

Positive attitude towards management but lack of trust & career prospects



85% employees feel a strong sense of support from their line manager…

… but only 62% report trusting and feeling heard by senior leadership…

…and only 54% can see progression in the organisation

> 80% | < 80% | < 66.6%

1. Rating from People Poll 2024. 2. Sourced from FITT Workshop sessions and recent interviews

Illustrative quotes[2]

- "Staff are here because they are diligent and exceptionally passionate about helping residents
- "The values are clear but they don't translate into behaviours or actions
- "We're every day in the office… it would be nice to have that acknowledged
- "We need to see evidence from CLT that our voices are genuinely being heard

Some positive feedback in survey around recent senior leadership culture change

"There has been a significant improvement in the culture within the organisation following senior management changes"

"The culture and leadership has strengthened since a permanent CLT and next level has been in place"

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Design questions and next steps

Reminder of transformation design principles

Design Principles

Take **a resident first approach** in how it works, and understand how residents, including children and young people, interact with services, freeing up time for those who need it

Focus on **doing the basics well** and consistently right across all services

Offer fewer and more consistent points of access and more transparent ways to track progress and responses, getting things right first time

Use council resources appropriately - funding what it should be funding and ensuring partners play their part

Be **smaller and more flexible** – operating out of fewer buildings

Be more inclusive, with a thriving workforce who are once again proud to be able to say they work for Slough Borough Council

For discussion | Four design questions to be answered over the next ~4 weeks

How will **SBC set its overarching strategic vision & goals**, and how will this be **used to integrate the strategies and plans** through the organisation with a golden thread?

What are **the highest priority 'basics' to fix** (e.g., strategic and operational data, core processes, information flows and systems) and in what order should they be fixed?

How can **residents and community groups be more involved** in the design and delivery of services?

What are the most impactful ways to **improve the culture** throughout the organisation?

Next steps (over next 4 weeks)

1. Agree design questions for next phase
2. Develop options against design questions (to form target operating model)
3. Identify & size initiatives to achieve target operating model (including a benefits/savings model)
4. Develop a communications and stakeholder plan