

## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Date:</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> April 2026
<b>Subject:</b>	2027/28 to 2029/30 Budget and MTFS Timetable
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Bedi – Lead Member for Finance, Children and Lifelong Learning
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Ian O'Donnell - Interim Executive Director of Corporate Resources (S151 Officer)
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Mark Hak-Sanders – Director of Financial Management & Strategy
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Key Decision:</b>	NO
<b>Exempt:</b>	NO
<b>Decision Subject To Call In:</b>	YES
<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix A – Detailed Budget Timetable

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out a proposed timetable for producing, scrutinising and consulting on the 2027/28 to 2029/30 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The report sets out a high-level timetable consistent with the proposed calendar of meetings to be presented elsewhere to Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2026. The timetable builds on the balanced three-year MTFS approved by Full Council in March.
- 1.2 Further detail will follow on certain sections as the budget takes shape, particularly on the focus of scrutiny work, to be discussed with the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee, and the format and approach to consultation with external stakeholders, including residents, tenants and business rate payers.

#### Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- A) Approve the budget timetable as summarised in section 2 and detailed in Appendix A.
- B) Note that the timetable will be communicated to the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee to accompany engagement to agree the detailed scrutiny approach.

## **Reason:**

It is good practice to set out a clear timetable for producing the budget ahead of detailed work commencing in each financial year. Paragraph 2.1 of the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules states that:

“Before the publication of any draft budget proposals, Cabinet shall agree a timetable for the consideration of the budget, having consulted the s.151 Officer. The timetable shall accord with these Rules, statutory requirements, in particular the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2001, and shall also detail the process for consultation on the budget with local stakeholders and others. The timetable can be published as an indicative timetable dependent on the timing of the Local Government Finance Settlement and any other Government deadlines which impact on decision-making. The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee must be notified of the timetable.”

## **Commissioner Review**

The medium-term financial planning and annual budget process is the Council’s single most complex undertaking within its annual cycle. Cabinet should determine a clear timetable early each year for the preparation and consideration of the plans and strategies that are required to be made in aligning strategic objectives with its financial resources for all funding streams in that year.

Given the process involves every elected member at some stage, officers, partner organisations and impacts a range of stakeholders, proactive planning is essential, with enough time to identify future budget requirements, allow for planned measured responses, appropriate engagement and consultation. Ultimately, getting this multi-disciplinary effort right is vital to the Council’s success, ensuring financial stability and sustainability and contributes significantly to what the Council can achieve for the local area and its communities.

Commissioners are content with the recommendations in this report.

## **2. Timetable Overview**

2.1 The principal aim of the budget setting timetable is to set a clear path to ensuring that a budget for 2027/28 and a Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2029/30 is approved by Full Council by the statutory deadline of 11th March 2027. This, however, is the minimum requirement. In practice, Full Council will meet before then, on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2027, in order to allow optimum time for annual council tax and business rate billing to take place. The process up to that point will run over a 10-month period.

2.2 In order to achieve a balanced, robust and approved budget, associated aims of approving the timetable are to provide:

- Alignment with Corporate Planning process and the Vision 2040 refresh.
- Time to ensure cross-organisational alignment and collaboration.
- Adequate time for Lead Members in collaboration with CLT, Executive Directors, Budget Holders and Finance to work-up robust estimates for each Directorate.
- Appropriate time to ensure that accurate data is used as the basis for proposals, and any unknowns and assumptions documented and tested.
- Adequate time for engagement with Cabinet on emerging proposals.
- Adequate time for Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee engagement.
- Adequate time for engagement with Opposition Groups.

- Appropriate opportunities and sufficient time for external stakeholder engagement (e.g. Residents, Tenants and Businesses).

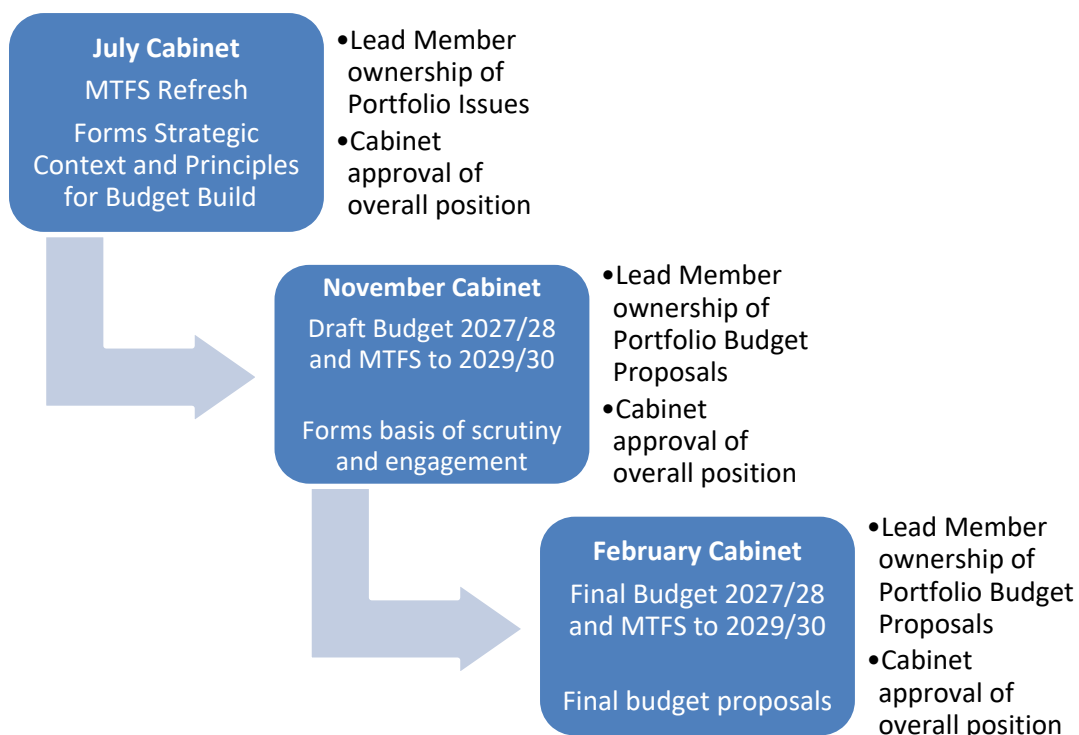
2.3 The proposal is to develop a three-year MTFS to cover the period from 2027/28 to 2029/30. This will build on the agreed, balanced MTFS and approved Transformation Programme. Cabinet as a whole and Lead Members for each portfolio will be closely involved with developing the budget as it progresses through each stage.

2.4 Budget challenge sessions with CLT and Cabinet will be scheduled in the lead up to the Draft Budget proposals. At least one budget challenge session will be scheduled per Directorate, in advance of the Draft Budget where Lead Members and Executive Directors will set out:

- Demand pressures and proposed mitigations
- Legislative or government policy pressures
- Existing savings & transformation programmes with any changes
- New savings proposals
- Financial risks and opportunities.

2.5 The high-level timetable from a Cabinet perspective is set out below, with detailed proposals set out in Appendix A. Subsequent sections set out the process on a thematic basis.

Topic	Date / Timeframe	Item	Cabinet Involvement
MTFS Refresh 2027/28 to 2029/30	<p>MTFS refresh process will run from May to July</p> <p><b>Cabinet Meeting Date 20<sup>th</sup> July 2026</b></p>	<p>MTFS Refresh report to July Cabinet setting out assumptions (e.g. inflation, demand, pay award), scenarios and principles required to set the budget.</p> <p>Sets the framework for developing the Draft Budget and MTFS.</p>	<p>Cabinet approval of the revised MTFS.</p> <p>Lead Member ownership of portfolio-specific issues, in collaboration with Executive Directors and CLT.</p>
Draft Budget 2027/28 and MTFS to 2029/30	<p>Draft Budget process will run from July to November including Budget Challenge sessions with CLT and Cabinet</p> <p><b>Cabinet Meeting Date 16<sup>th</sup> November 2026</b></p>	<p>Draft Budget 2027/28 and MTFS to 2029/30.</p> <p>The Draft Budget should be as fully-formed as possible, setting out the proposals for 2027/28 to consult upon and to form the basis of scrutiny and political engagement.</p> <p>Engagement with MHCLG will be required on the level of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) required for 2027/28, likely to take place over December and January, based on the Draft Budget and MTFS.</p>	<p>Cabinet approval of the Draft Budget and MTFS.</p> <p>Lead Members ownership of portfolio-specific position, in collaboration with Executive Directors and CLT.</p>
Final Budget 2027/28 and MTFS to 2029/30	<p>Final Budget process will run from November to February, finalising the budget proposals, accounting for scrutiny and public engagement.</p> <p><b>Cabinet Meeting Date 15<sup>th</sup> February 2027</b></p> <p><b>Council Meeting Date 25<sup>th</sup> February 2027</b></p>	<p>Final Budget 2027/28 and MTFS including General Fund, Dedicated Schools Grant and Housing Revenue Account.</p>	<p>Cabinet approval of the Final Budget and MTFS.</p> <p>Lead Members ownership of portfolio-specific position, in collaboration with Executive Directors and CLT.</p>



### 3. Further Detail

#### 3.1 Housing Revenue Account

The timetable includes provisions to set the Housing Revenue Accounts rents for 2027/28 and refresh the 30-year Business Plan. The 30-year HRA Business Plan is subject to mandatory, regular, and event-driven updates to ensure the long-term financial viability of Council housing services. A refresh has been recommended by commissioners following the development of the Housing Strategy, sample from the updated stock condition and other surveys underway, to and evidence the ability to meet the needs of tenants, compliance with consumer standards and scenario/sensitivity test its long-term viability. This will be commissioned over the course of the summer. A key date in the rent-setting and business plan refresh is the publication of September inflation indices in mid-October. Housing rents must be set by the end of February to allow sufficient notice to be given to tenants. Historically, rents have been set in January and this timetable will be considered to give adequate advance notice to tenants and leaseholders. The timetable indicates February, consistent with 2026/27's process however this will be reviewed for opportunities to bring forward.

The process will require a comprehensive engagement and consultation process with tenants on the plans for 2027/28, including rent levels, and the 30-year business plan.

#### 3.2 Dedicated Schools Grant

The timetable sets out indicative Schools Forum dates in the lead up to setting the DSG budgets in February 2027. The forward plan of Schools Forum dates has yet to be agreed, but is expected to follow the established pattern used in the process for the 2026/27 budget.

Issues of particular note are:

- The need to develop and agree a Local SEND reform plan by mid-May for final submission by 19<sup>th</sup> June 2026. This is a requirement of Government announcements accompanying the recent Schools White Paper and is a prerequisite to receiving the High Needs Stability Grant, which is estimated to be c.£15m.
- Linked to the above, ongoing work to mitigate the High Needs Block (HNB) deficit, which is expected to be c.£20m for 2026/27 and could be of a similar order or higher for 2027/28.
- As part of mitigating the HNB deficit, in previous years Schools Forum have approved a transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block. Whilst this was approved again for 2026/27 the decision was not unanimous and is likely to come under further scrutiny for 2027/28. The Schools Forum minutes for 27<sup>th</sup> November 2026 record that [officers] “ensure it is well understood by LA and DfE colleagues that Forum is uncomfortable with continuing to approve the transfer if the service does not improve.” Early engagement on this matter will be a key part of the budget process for DSG for 2027/28.

At this stage, the timetable for setting the DSG budgets is based on the meeting schedule for Schools Forum and Cabinet and require approval by Cabinet by the end of February. Alongside this, more fundamental and wide-reaching work is under way in respect of SEND services and the DSG deficit, both of which also interact with the General Fund.

### **3.3 Fees and Charges**

A detailed review of fees and charges is currently underway, looking at opportunities to ensure full cost recovery or greater transparency on any subsidising of services from taxation. This will continue throughout 2026/27. The timetable for 2027/28 proposes two briefing sessions with Cabinet on proposed fees and charges prior to approval for those in Cabinet’s remit in January 2027. Further engagement with Licensing Committee will also be required in advance of the meeting in January 2027.

### **3.4 Capital Programme**

3.5 The timetable for the Capital Programme is set out in Appendix A. Directorates will be asked to submit Capital Programme proposals in July and August, to be collated in September in time for engagement with Lead Members and Cabinet October, prior to the Draft Budget being set. This will in turn inform the Treasury Management Strategy which is scheduled for approval by Audit and Corporate Governance Committee in January 2027. Work on refreshing the programme will be consistent with the Capital Strategy approved in March.

### **3.6 Stakeholder Engagement**

For the purposes of the budget timetable, stakeholders include residents, tenants, business rate payers, service users, the charity and voluntary sector and other partners. The Council has a statutory duty to consult with business rate payers on the budget proposals. Wider engagement on the budget overall is not a prescribed requirement however there is a statutory duty to consult on how the Council is

meeting its best value duty and consultation on the budget, aligned to a medium-term vision, can contribute to meeting that duty. Engagement will again take place in two phases:

Firstly, following publication of the MTFFS Refresh in July, key financial issues will be built into planned engagement on refreshing the Vision 2040.

Secondly, following the publication of the Draft Budget, formal budget engagement can take place on the detailed proposals.

It should be noted that specific proposals in the budget may require separate consultation and engagement and the outcome of this will be reported to the relevant decision-maker. An approach to stakeholder engagement and communication will be developed in consultation with the Leader and Lead Member for Finance in the lead up to the MTFFS refresh going to Cabinet in July.

### **3.7 Scrutiny**

Proposals for scrutiny will require further development with Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee, however the timetable set out in Appendix A assumes that there will be two broad phases of work:

Firstly, in the period following publication of the MTFFS Refresh in July, through to the publication of the Draft Budget in November, a series of placeholder meetings to allow CISC time to understand topics associated with the budget, to be agreed. Topics previously covered have included temporary accommodation, demand projections and savings proposals. For the 2027/28 process, the topics will be agreed with CISC and based on emerging budgetary issues.

Secondly, in the period following publication of the Draft Budget in November, a period of time prior to January CISC and February Cabinet to scrutinise the detailed proposals and provide formal feedback for Cabinet to consider as part of the final budget proposals.

The full programme of budget scrutiny work will be agreed in discussion with CISC and will need to respond to the report on the 2026/27 Budget Process currently under production with the Budget Task and Finish Group and due to be considered by CISC on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2026.

### **3.8 Alternative Budget Proposals**

The Constitution sets out the following in respect of Alternative Budget Proposals under section 2.1 and 2.2 of the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, as follows:

“Once Cabinet has approved a draft budget and prior to consideration by Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the political groups and any ungrouped member can choose to prepare an alternative budget or amendment. The finance function will specifically assign a senior finance officer to each political group to support this exercise.”

“Any motion to amend Cabinet’s budget proposals will only be permissible if it has been:

- (a) Provided to the s.151 Officer at least seven working days prior to the Council's Budget Meeting; and
- (b) Certified by the s.151 Officer at least two working days prior to the Council's Budget Meeting as being reasonably calculated and sufficiently deliverable as to be robust and sustainable in the medium term and continue to ensure that reserves are maintained at an adequate level which protects the Council's financial standing."

The timetable sets out that seven clear working days prior to the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2027 Council meeting is Monday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2027. By July, Group Leaders will be provided with a dedicated senior finance officer to work with them alongside the process, which will commence in earnest once Cabinet has provided a draft budget in November. The period of time between November Cabinet and the deadline for Alternative proposals is c.13 weeks.

## **4. Implications of the Recommendation**

### **4.1 Financial implications**

This is a financial report with implications throughout.

### **4.2 Legal implications**

- 4.1.1 Section 31A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires the Council to set its Council Tax taking account of its estimated income and expenditure. Cabinet is required to formulate and recommend a budget to Full Council, making estimates of gross revenue expenditure and anticipated income, leading to a calculation of council tax requirement for 2027/28 and the setting of an overall budget to ensure proper discharge of the Council's statutory duties and to lead to a balanced budget.
- 4.1.2 Specific service decisions are in general the responsibility of Cabinet and separate decisions may be required on these proposals either before or after the budget is set. Cabinet will need to take account of all relevant information when making these decisions, taking account of the statutory framework, any requirement to consult and consideration of overarching duties, such as the public sector equality duty.
- 4.1.3 The Council has a best value duty under the Local Government Act 1999, including a duty to consult on how it will meet this duty. The statutory guidance states that the annual process of setting the authority's budget, the corporate plan and the medium-term financial plan provides a key opportunity to conduct such consultation. This is the stage at which consultation will best assist the authority in deciding how to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. The guidance emphasises the need for collective ownership of the budget and this includes between different groups of elected members. Whilst Cabinet has the responsibility for formulating the budget proposal, scrutiny members have a key task in effectively scrutinising aspects of the budget, including deliverability risks and impact on residents and service users.



#### **4.3 Risk management implications**

No specific risks associated with approving the timetable. Financial risks will be refreshed and captured as part of the budget setting process.

#### **4.4 Environmental implications**

None

#### **4.5 Equality implications**

There are no equality implications of approving the timetable. The detailed budget work and associated proposals will be accompanied by Equality Impact Assessments where required.

### **5. Background Papers**

None