

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	20 July 2026
Subject:	Medium-Term Financial Strategy Refresh
Lead Member:	Cllr Chahal – Leader of the Council Cllr E Ahmed – Lead Member for Corporate Resources
Chief Officer:	Ian O'Donnell – Interim Chief Operating Officer (S151)
Contact Officer:	Mark Hak-Sanders – Director of Financial Management and Strategy Nick Penny – Director of Finance - Corporate and Commercial
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	YES
Exempt:	NO
Decision Subject To Call In:	YES
Appendices:	A – Adult Social Care MTFS Modelling B – Children's Social Care MTFS Modelling C – Temporary Accommodation MTFS Modelling D – Other Directorates Emerging Pressures E – Budget Risks F – Communication and Engagement Plan

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out a refresh of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), updating the strategy approved by Council in March 2026.
- 1.2 Following best practice, the Council should have an MTFS that runs for at least three years. For this reason, the refreshed MTFS uses 2026/27 (the current year) as the starting point and covers the period from 2027/28 to 2029/30.
- 1.3 The assumptions underpinning the current MTFS have been refreshed, particularly in terms of funding, inflation and demand modelling, and the impact of these changes has been reflected in the requirement to deliver savings to balance the Council's overall financial position.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- A Approve the refreshed Medium-Term Financial Strategy to be used for planning purposes and to form the basis of work to develop a Draft Budget for 2027/28, to be reported to Cabinet in November.
- B Approve an increase in the Slough Children First contract sum for 2026/27 of £4.512m to £44.029m, as set out in section 9.
- C Approve the addition of £13.764m planned capital expenditure to the General Fund capital programme, as set out in Section 12.
- D Approve the removal of £1.469m planned capital expenditure from the General Fund capital programme, as set out in Section 12.
- E Approve the reprofiling of £6.995m of planned 2026/27 capital expenditure across the remainder of the General Fund capital programme, as set out in Section 12.

Reason:

The Council's MTFS should be updated to maintain a three-year financial planning horizon and set clear expectations for the Council's savings programme. This will ensure that the Council remains on track to end the requirement for Exceptional Financial Support and build resilience to support robust service delivery over the medium-term. The report will form the foundation of the Draft Budget for 2027/28 to be reported to Cabinet in November, and the Final Budget for approval by Cabinet and Council in February 2027.

Commissioner Review

The commissioners welcome this report.

The report represents phase 1 of the rolling Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) refresh process, and highlights the emerging pressures, evolving assumptions, risks and uncertainties in relation to the budget and MTFS approved by Council. While not an exhaustive exercise at this stage in the process, it provides a forecast outlook that allows the Council to identify and respond to issues early and to aid timely and robust planning. The outlook indicates that in addition to the £22.4m previously projected budget gap for which additional EFS was forecasted, the scale of the budget gap is predicted to grow over the period of the strategy, to £40.4m (up to £33m 2027/28), noting that the figures are based upon best estimates and forecasts and will therefore be subject to change. The Council's budget strategy recognises that with a budget gap of this scale over the next three years, the Council will need to pull every local lever available to ensure financial sustainability is achieved and financial resilience restored.

As such difficult choices will still need to be made, opportunities for transformation and innovation embraced and strong discipline embedded regarding approach to efficiency and productivity as opposed to growth in sustainably meeting service demand. Borrowing will continue to be limited, and focus will need to be retained on delivering the debt reduction strategy. The adequacy of reserves is a key consideration in assessing the Council's resilience, coupled with the need to be continually alert to the risks and uncertainty to which the Council could be exposed. This will be a crucial factor in ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council and provide ongoing resilience against the backdrop of economic and financial challenges.

Commissioners approve the recommendations in this report.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Council approved a Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy on 5th March 2026, running for the three-year period from 2026/27 to 2028/29. In order to allow sufficient time to scope robust savings proposals where needed, and mitigate emerging budget pressures, the MTFS needs to be refreshed, and extended by a year to 2029/30.
- 2.2 The requirement for this refresh was set out and agreed by Cabinet on 20th April 2026 when the “2027/28 to 2029/30 Budget and MTFS Timetable” report was approved. The report sets the context for the development of the Draft Budget for 2027/28 which will be reported to Cabinet in November. It provides the strategic direction for work required between now and November to develop detailed budget proposals.
- 2.3 The report sets out a challenging position, with emerging issues in Children’s Services, Temporary Accommodation and Treasury Management serving to increase the scale of the financial pressure faced by the Council. This will require work over the coming months to identify and validate savings proposals to include in the 2027/28 budget.

3. Strategic Context and Existing MTFS

- 3.1 The recently approved MTFS demonstrates that the Council is on a course to set a budget with no further reliance on exceptional financial support (EFS) by 2028/29.
- 3.2 Like all local authorities, the Council needs to manage increasing demand in Adult Social Care, Children’s Social Care, Special Educational Needs and Temporary Accommodation.
- 3.3 Refreshing the MTFS involves making assumptions about the direction of travel for these services, based on the best information available, scenario planning and a set of assumptions which need to be monitored as the budget develops.
- 3.4 Key features of the existing MTFS are:
 - EFS reducing from £42.9m in 2026/27, to £22.4m in 2027/28 and zero by 2028/29.
 - A requirement to meet Directorate pressures of c.£10m per year, with further allocations for pay, inflation and corporate costs such as capital financing.
 - Funding which increases by £47m over the period from 2026/27 to 2028/29, with further increases expected in 2029/30.
 - Restoring reserves to c£24m by 2028/29, based on an assessment of the financial risks facing the Council.
 - A savings programme equating to c.£40m prior to any new pressures to balance the Council’s MTFS.
 - A General Fund Capital Programme of c.£180m over 5 years.
 - A sustainable approach to the HRA 30-year business plan.
 - An approach to the DSG deficit aligned with emerging information from DfE on the High Needs Stability Grant and plans for the management of future funding shortfalls.
 - A debt repayment strategy to reduce the level of General Fund debt to under £300m, over the next 10 financial years as well as lowering the percentage of

the debt servicing costs compared to the net revenue budget; with 10% the targeted level.

- 3.5 The refresh does not propose a fundamental change to this strategy. It continues to work on the basis that the Council should no longer need EFS by 2028/29, that it remains committed to debt repayment, that the HRA 30-year business plan will remain sustainable and that the DSG deficit will be managed in accordance with guidance emerging from DfE.
- 3.6 Despite the overall strategic objectives remaining unchanged, the Council's approach to achieving its aims will be put under pressure by the emerging financial challenges set out in section 6.

4. Key Corporate Assumptions

- 4.1 The existing MTFS assumed pay inflation of 3% in 2026/27 and CPI inflation of 3.8% in 2026/27, both dropping to 2% in 2027/28 and beyond. The current economic position challenges those assumptions, and it is deemed prudent to increase them by 1% each from 2027/28, in line with the most recent CPI data (2.8% in May 2026).
- 4.2 Pay budgets will be uplifted as and when the National Joint Council agree rates for each financial year, which is often a number of months in arrears.
- 4.3 Contractual commitments are assessed for each Directorate, rather than a blanket uplift in third-party spend budgets.
- 4.4 The financial impact of inflation on the Council's General Fund is c.£0.6m for pay and c.£1.0m for non-pay for each percentage-point added. For 2028/29, the MTFS will assume that inflation reduces back to the target 2% but this will be kept under review.
- 4.5 On borrowing costs, there is a forecast negative impact of £0.550m in 2026/27 due to elevated UK borrowing rates, with the assumed 5-year gilt yield increasing from 4.3% in February 2026 to 5.5% in May 2026. From 2027/28 onwards, interest rates are expected to be less volatile and remain stable through to 2029/30, with the Council's new borrowing expected to cost 5.0%–5.5%.

5. Refreshed Funding Position

- 5.1 The Final Local Government Finance Settlement provided three years funding for each local authority, known as Core Spending Power. Core Spending Power is modified locally for assumptions on Council Tax Base growth and surpluses or deficits on the collection fund. The MTFS assumes 4.99% annual increase in Council Tax rates and a 0.5% increase in Tax Base year-on-year. The latter will be kept under review with a Tax Base report scheduled for Cabinet in January 2027. Expected surpluses and deficits on the collection fund remain in line with the previous MTFS.
- 5.2 The current Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS) only runs to 2028/29, meaning that funding for 2029/30 is uncertain at this point. The table below assumes that business rates income will grow by 2% for 2029/30 (aligned with inflation and consistent with rises over the existing MTFS) and that Government

funding will remain flat. Coupled with the increase in Council Tax assumed at 4.99%, this would generate an additional £7m of funding for 2029/30.

Table 1a: Four-year funding assumptions – total amounts

MTFS Overview	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
	£m	£m	£m	£m
FINANCING				
Grants, including provisional settlement	(48.100)	(57.571)	(66.954)	(66.954)
Council Tax Income	(91.193)	(96.272)	(101.621)	(107.267)
Council Tax Collection Fund (Surplus) / Deficit (One-off)	4.181	0.000	0.000	0.000
Business Rates - Local Share	(49.113)	(50.239)	(51.253)	(52.278)
Business Rates Collection Fund (Surplus) / Deficit (One-off)	(9.495)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Total Financing	(193.720)	(204.082)	(219.828)	(226.499)
CD Support	(42.899)	(22.433)	0.000	0.000
Net Budget	(236.619)	(226.515)	(219.828)	(226.499)

Table 1b: Four-year funding assumptions – movements year-on-year.

MTFS Overview	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
FINANCING					
Grants, including provisional settlement	(6.637)	(9.471)	(9.383)	0.000	(25.491)
Council Tax Income	(3.714)	(5.079)	(5.349)	(5.646)	(19.789)
Council Tax Collection Fund (Surplus) / Deficit (One-off)	5.763	(4.434)	0.000	0.000	1.329
Business Rates - Local Share	(6.720)	(1.126)	(1.014)	(1.025)	(9.885)
Business Rates Collection Fund (Surplus) / Deficit (One-off)	(3.064)	5.064	0.000	0.000	2.000
Collection Fund Savings	(6.038)	4.684	0.000	0.000	(1.354)
TOTAL FINANCING INCREASE	(20.410)	(10.362)	(15.746)	(6.671)	(53.190)

The variable elements of funding predominantly consist of:

- Government Grant: Despite offering a multi-year settlement, the LGFS indicated that “final allocations for 2027/28 and 2028/29 will be confirmed in their respective year” indicating that MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) reserve the right to amend future years allocations. This will be kept under review. Each 1% change in government grant funding from the 2028/29 indicative amounts would be £0.7m.
- The Council Tax Base, where every 0.1% variance from the 0.5% expected growth would add or deduct c.£0.1m funding.
- Business rates growth, where every 1.0% of growth retained locally would add c.£0.5m. Business rate income cannot drop lower than 3% (£1.5m) below the level assumed within the MTFS, as this is underwritten by Government through the business rates baseline and a 97% safety net.

Funding	Impact of a 1% change
Grants	£0.7m
Council Tax	£1.0m
Business Rates	£0.5m

6. Overview of Emerging Pressures

- 6.1 Initial work has taken place since the budget was set in March to gauge the extent to which the demand-led pressures included within in the MTFS have changed. Corporate budgets for treasury management and housing benefit income have also

been reviewed. Significant additional pressures have been identified, at this stage totalling £11.2m, as follows.

Table 2: Emerging Pressures

	2027/28 (Existing MTFS) (£m)	2027/28 Revised MTFS (£m)	Difference (£m)
MTFS Unallocated Pressures	5.000	0.000	(5.000)
Reversal of one-off pressures from 2026/27	(0.720)	(0.720)	0.000
Emerging Pressures			
Adults	5.800	5.800	0.000
Children's		8.600	8.600
Housing		2.000	2.000
PHPPEC		0.644	0.644
Corporate Resources		0.300	0.300
Below the Line/Other	2.712	7.412	4.700
Subtotal: New Pressures	12.792	24.036	11.244

6.2 In summary:

- The MTFS assumed £5m unallocated pressures for 2027/28, the reversal of £0.720m one-off pressures from 2026/27 and a £5.8m assumption of demand growth in Adults.
- Adults' MTFS pressures remain unchanged on initial review as set out in Appendix A.
- Children's pressures have increased by £8.6m as set out in Appendix B, consisting of SEND (£1.4m) and Children's Social Care (£7.2m). For 2026/27, the equivalent SEND pressure will be met by up to £1.4m Transformation & Recovery funding and will not present as a budget pressure. The Children's Social Care demand growth of £7.2m may present as a pressure in 2026/27 if it manifests itself as modelled and if mitigations cannot be identified.
- Housing (Temporary Accommodation) pressures have increased by £2.0m as set out in Appendix C. This is the continuation of a pressure likely to be seen in 2026/27.
- PHPPEC pressures have increased by £0.6m as set out in Appendix D.
- Corporate Resources pressures have increased by £0.3m as set out in Appendix D.
- Below the Line / other pressures have increased by £4.7m as set out in Appendix D, including £1.6m of inflationary pressures and £0.5m of interest rate pressures, referred to in the key assumptions section above. Interest rate and inflationary pressures may impact in 2026/27 also but will depend on prevailing rates and individual contractual clauses regarding the timing of inflationary uplifts.

6.3 The emerging pressures are indicative only at this stage and will be kept under review. They do not represent approved allocations to each Directorate, but indicate a combined additional challenge of £11m in 2027/28. 2028/29 assumes £10m headroom for further pressures. In order to maintain a realistic MTFS, £10m has also been assumed in 2029/30.

6.4 Scenario planning has been undertaken on each of the major pressure areas as set out in the respective appendix. The mid-point has been used for planning purposes but it should be noted that reality in each area could vary significantly. A key

illustrative example of this is in Children's services, when a single child with specific characteristics could cost the Council significantly in excess of £1m per annum. In order to combat this uncertainty, it is currently assumed that reserves remain on the same trajectory as set out in the March Council MTFS to achieve and maintain a level of c.10% of the Council's net revenue budget, in line with the risk assessment.

7. Summary MTFS

- 7.1 Bringing together the revised funding and pressures set out above, the General Fund MTFS is summarised in the table below:

Table 3 – Summary MTFS

MTFS Overview	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Opening net budget	175.727	236.619	226.515	219.828	
Removal of CD PY CD Support	15.709	42.899	22.433	0.000	
Replenish Reserves for 2025/26 Overspend	10.000	(8.000)	(2.000)	0.000	0.000
Revised Opening Position	25.709	34.899	20.433	0.000	0.000
Pressures					
Pay Award & Contract Inflation	4.896	3.205	2.984	3.043	14.129
MRP, Assets, Time Limited Budgets, Pension Deficit, Companies, Reserves, Interest,	1.104	(0.493)	2.069	0.324	3.004
2026/27 budget setting - rebasing exercise	25.059	0.000	0.000	0.000	25.059
Directorate growth and pressures (assumed in MTFS)	9.554	10.080	9.853	0.000	29.487
Emerging pressures reported July 2026 (less £5m included)		11.244		10.000	21.244
TOTAL NEW PRESSURES	40.613	24.036	14.905	13.367	92.922
TOTAL GROWTH / PRESSURES	66.323	58.935	35.338	13.367	92.922
FINANCING					
Grants, including provisional settlement	(6.637)	(9.471)	(9.383)	0.000	(25.491)
Council Tax Income	(3.714)	(5.079)	(5.349)	(5.646)	(19.789)
Council Tax Collection Fund (Surplus) / Deficit	5.763	(4.434)	0.000	0.000	1.329
Business Rates - Local Share	(6.720)	(1.126)	(1.014)	(1.025)	(9.885)
Business Rates Collection Fund (Surplus) / Deficit	(3.064)	5.064	0.000	0.000	2.000
Collection Fund Savings	(6.038)	4.684	0.000	0.000	(1.354)
TOTAL FINANCING INCREASE	(20.410)	(10.362)	(15.746)	(6.671)	(53.190)
Funding reclassifications	13.292				13.292
SAVINGS (INCL FEES & CHARGES)					
Operational Savings	(4.165)	(6.421)	(3.181)		(13.766)
Transformational Savings	(5.249)	(10.595)	(15.514)		(31.357)
Contingency (20% of Transformational Savings)	1.400	2.119	3.103		6.622
TOTAL SAVINGS	(8.013)	(14.897)	(15.592)	0.000	(38.502)
Transformation Implementation Resources	5.000	0.000	(4.000)	0.000	1.000
CD Support	(42.899)	(22.433)	0.000	0.000	
New Gap	0.000	11.244	0.000	6.696	17.940
Closing net budget	236.619	226.515	219.828	226.499	

- 7.2 Because the existing MTFS was balanced and no changes to funding are currently expected, the £11m increase in pressures has directly increased the budget gap and generated an additional savings requirement.
- 7.3 A further £7m savings target is assumed for 2029/30 for planning purposes, being the net of £14m pressures offset by £7m expected additional funding.

8. Revised Savings Requirement

- 8.1 The existing MTFS included a savings target totalling c.£40m, consisting of collection-fund savings of £1.3m and savings on Directorate and Corporate budgets of £38.5m. The £38.5m in the existing MTFS included £8m of savings as a placeholder for operational improvement and financial grip and a £6.6m contingency. At this early stage of refreshing the MTFS, these assumptions remain in place.

Table 4: Savings Target

Budget Savings	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m	Total £m
Savings identified in existing MTFS	15.451	6.187	15.514	0.000	37.152
Projected inflationary increase to fees and charges assumed in 2027/28 & 2028/29 (2026/27 being part of a transformational review)	0.000	0.645	0.681	0.000	1.326
Placeholder for Operational Improvement and Financial Grip Savings	0.000	5.500	2.500	0.000	8.000
Additional savings now required	0.000	11.000	0.000	7.000	18.000
Less contingency	(1.400)	(2.119)	(3.103)	0.000	(6.622)
Total Savings	14.051	21.213	15.592	7.000	57.856

- 8.2 The savings programme up to 2028/29 includes a 20% contingency against the £31.4m existing Transformation Programme (included within the £37.2m existing savings above). The extent to which contingency is necessary for the additional £11m of savings in 2027/28 or the £7m requirement in 2029/30 will depend on the risk profile of the savings plan, which will be assessed as opportunities are identified. Contingency will be reprofiled as part of the work to set the 2027/28 budget and an ongoing refresh of the savings plan RAG rating.
- 8.3 For the purposes of developing a savings plan to form the basis of the Draft Budget for November Cabinet, it is assumed that the £11m additional savings required are nominally allocated as £4m each to Adults and Children's Services and £1m each to the remaining four Directorates. This distribution would generate £12m of proposals. The distribution of indicative allocations to Directorates was based on assessment of the net revenue budget of the Directorate, before and after existing savings targets were applied. There is no intention to top slice budgets, but to give Directorates a clear steer on the scale of savings required to close the gap.
- 8.4 The following work is planned over the course of July, August and September to identify opportunities. This will be supplemented by the mobilisation of the Transformation Implementation Partner, who will be tasked as a priority with identifying additional savings opportunities.
- Work to address the level of growth pressures, including VFM assessments – using national frameworks, localised tools, and cost metrics to ensure value for money and cost-effective service provisions.
 - Reviewing opportunities put forward as pipelines generated through previous external support from Boston Consulting Group and EY.
 - Financial resilience assessments of key service areas and the Council overall.
 - Line-by-line budget review – led by Corporate Finance with Directorate support.

- Neighbouring council review – e.g. Geographical / Statistical neighbours. To include benchmarking on cost / performance and also review of other published savings plans.
- Gap analysis against existing savings plan – i.e. are any services not currently represented in a savings proposal that represent opportunities to deliver more efficiently.
- Understanding which services are statutory and which are discretionary.
- Review of contract spend.
- Review of fees and charges.
- Demand analysis – e.g. top 10% of units (placements / packages) and how they can be mitigated.

8.5 The MTFS is predicated on delivering the existing savings target in addition to the £11m additional requirement. Any variations on existing savings proposals do not in themselves change the strategy, since the level of savings required remains unchanged regardless of the individual initiatives. Confidence assessments and delivery plans are currently being refined and the latest position for 2026/27 will be reported to Cabinet in September. Any savings which slip or reduce in value will need to be replaced by alternate measures.

8.6 Alongside identifying new savings opportunities, a focus will continue on closing the size of the gap through financial grip, operational improvement and pressure reduction.

9. Slough Children First Contract Sum

9.1 The 2026/27 Budget approved by Council in March included a contract sum of £39.517m for Slough Children First for the current financial year. This now needs to be amended to account for a number of developments, distinct from the MTFS pressures flagged from increasing demand and placement costs. The intention is for a revised business plan to be presented to Cabinet in September.

2025/26 Outturn

9.2 The provisional outturn report to Cabinet on 22nd June 2026 flagged a full-year deficit on Slough Children First of £1.8m for 2025/26. The contract sum for 2026/27 needs to be amended to provide the company with funding to cover this deficit. The Council could ask the company to make-good the deficit in future financial years, however in light of the demand growth flagged, this is unlikely to be possible and will only exacerbate future pressures outlined in section 6 and Appendix B. The 2025/26 variance was provided and accounted for within the Council's outturn position and so this change has no further impact on the Council's finances.

Fair Funding Review – Families First Partnership

9.3 The Government's Fair Funding review increased funding for Children's services in 2026/27 by £2.0m, through Core Spending Power, with a number of grants previously passported to Children's rolled up into the Families First Partnership Grant. This was held corporately in the 2026/27 Budget pending release to SCF. The contract sum now needs to be amended to allow the company to access the grant, which will be met from corporate funding budgets intended for this purpose. The grant is ringfenced to Children's services and it comes with reporting requirements to give MHCLG and DfE assurance that it has been spent as intended, predominantly to increase preventative spend with the aim of mitigating more expensive placement costs in future. The company will provide this assurance

through Government grant returns scrutinised by Finance and the Section 151 Officer.

OFSTED / ILACS Inspection

- 9.4 Two requests have been made by the company for additional funding to support workload associated with the anticipated OFSTED ILACS inspection. The first, at £0.467m, was approved in April as a significant officer decision, being under the £0.5m threshold for Cabinet approval. The decision is published here: [Decision Details](#). A further request of £0.260m has since been made. These amounts will be met from contingency.
- 9.5 The sum total of these requests is set out in the table, below, with a recommendation to amend the contract value by £4.512m.

Table 5: Amendments to SCF Contract Sum

Element	£m
Approved Contract Sum	39.517
2025/26 Deficit	1.743
OFSTED ILACS Funding	0.467
OFSTED ILACS Funding (Additional Amount)	0.260
Families First Partnership Grant	2.042
Total	44.029
Increase	4.512

- 9.6 These amounts do not change the approved MTFS. The preventative work linked to the Families First Partnership Grant should have a net benefit on future years' placement budgets, but it is not possible to quantify the benefit at this stage.

10. Housing Revenue Account

- 10.1 In March, Council approved the 30-year Business Plan for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), considering both the revenue and capital position. The Revenue Business plan assumes annual income of £46m and a revenue surplus of c.£2m, inflating year-on-year. The HRA Capital Programme provides for a total capital investment of £118.5m over the next 5 years and a total of £775.6m over the 30-year period. Capital spend over the period from 2026/27 onwards was increased by £6.1m as a result of slippage from 2025/26, which Cabinet approved would be carried forward on 22nd June 2026.
- 10.2 The 2026/27 budget included increases to Housing Revenue Account (HRA) dwelling rents, affordable housing rents, garage rents of 4.8% based on the September CPI of 3.8% plus 1%. September 2026 CPI will be available in time for the draft budget for 2027/28 to be reported to Cabinet in November.
- 10.3 The 30-year Business Plan for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) will be updated for 2027/28. An external assurance review will be commissioned, testing the following key areas with sensitivity analysis and stress testing:
- New and emerging legislative requirements.
 - Alignment with Corporate priorities.

- Approach to consultation with stakeholders, tenants and leaseholders, including underrepresented groups.
- Sufficiency of investment to meet tenant requirements and consumer standards.
- Rental income and rent increases.
- Inflation rates (general and construction-specific).
- Responsive and planned maintenance costs, integrated with results emerging from the ongoing condition survey.
- Lifecycle and capital investment assumptions.
- Right to Buy sales.
- Void rates and bad debt.
- Interest rates and borrowing assumptions.

The results of this review will be built into the next iteration of the business plan to demonstrate long-term viability of the HRA.

11. Dedicated Schools Grant

- 11.1 The Dedicated School Grant (DSG) has carried a deficit balance for several years due to overspends on the High Needs Block. This mainly relates to increased demand for out of borough SEN placements, post 16 services and places at special schools. Up until 2025/26, an element of the deficit was met by DfE according to an agreed schedule of 'Safety Valve' payments. In February 2026, it was confirmed in the final Local Government Finance Settlement that the Safety Valve Programme would cease at the end of 2025/26. Instead of receiving the final planned £6.480m instalment of the Safety Valve in 2026/27, the scheme would be replaced by a High Needs Stability Grant (HNSG).
- 11.2 The HNSG is based on 90% of the gross DSG deficit at the end of 2025/26 (excluding any Safety Valve receipts from the whole programme) less the amount of those Safety Valve receipts already received.
- 11.3 As reported to Cabinet on 22nd June 2026, the outturn position on the DSG for 2025/26 was a £6.6m deficit in-year, and a closing balance of £17.1m. The expectation is that £13.3m of this will be met through the HNSG subject to DfE approval of the Local Area Reform Plan (LARP). This would leave an accrued deficit balance, retained locally, of £3.8m.
- 11.4 The first iteration of the Council's LARP was submitted to DfE on 25th June 2026. A number of review and approval stages are anticipated and further submissions may be necessary. Submitting the LARP involved updating the MTFS estimates for the DSG, and a deficit of £21.8m for 2026/27 followed by a deficit of £29.9m for 2027/28 is now expected. These are not materially different from the MTFS, which projected a deficit of £20.9m for 2026/27 and a deficit exceeding £50m by the end of 2027/28.
- 11.5 From 2028/29 onwards, responsibility for funding the High Needs block will pass to the DfE. This leaves a projected deficit of £55.4m up to that point. There is, as yet, little certainty on how this deficit will be addressed, however Government have indicated that arrangements similar to the 2025/26 grant will be repeated. As illustrated by the table, overleaf, a 90% grant would leave a c.£9m deficit retained by the Council, increasing by £5m for every 10 percentage-point reduction in the grant. An 80% grant would lead to a deficit of £14m. The Council's MTFS Risk

Register includes a risk of £16.8m in respect of SEND services and the High Needs Block.

- 11.6 Alongside the uncertainty on the level of retained deficit, it is also unclear whether Government intend for this to be retained as a General Fund or DSG issue. Regardless, there is an expectation that reserves will exceed the deficit in order to provide balance sheet sustainability.

Table 6 – Projected DSG Deficits

Movement of DSG deficit	With- out Safety Valve / HNSG £m	Safety Valve / HNSG Impact £m	Net DSG pos- ition £m	Grant - 90% HNSG £m	Grant - 80% HNSG £m	Grant - 70% HNSG £m	Ret- ained Deficit 90% HNSG £m	Ret- ained Deficit 80% HNSG £m	Ret- ained Deficit 70% HNSG £m
Net DSG deficit b/f 2022/23	25.4	0.0	25.4						
In-year movement 2022/23	0.3	(10.8)	(10.5)						
Net DSG deficit at end of 2022/23	25.7	(10.8)	14.9						
In-year movement 2023/24	(0.4)	(4.4)	(4.8)						
Net DSG deficit at end of 2023/24	25.3	(15.2)	10.1						
In-year movement 2024/25	2.4	(2.1)	0.3						
Net DSG deficit at end of 2024/25	27.7	(17.3)	10.5						
DSG Outturn	9.8	(3.2)	6.6						
Net DSG deficit at end of 2025/26	37.6	(20.5)	17.1	(13.3)	(13.3)	(13.3)	3.8	3.8	3.8
Projected deficit 2026/27 (from LARP)	21.8	(13.3)	8.4	(19.6)	(17.4)	(15.2)	2.2	4.4	6.5
Forecast position at end of 2026/27	59.4	(33.9)	25.5	(32.9)	(30.7)	(28.6)	5.9	8.1	10.3
Projected deficit 2027/28 (from LARP)	29.9		29.9	(26.9)	(23.9)	(20.9)	3.0	6.0	9.0
Forecast position at end of 2027/28	89.3	(33.9)	55.4	(59.8)	(54.7)	(49.5)	8.9	14.1	19.3

- 11.7 As reported to Cabinet in the 2027/28 Budget Timetable report, as part of mitigating the HNB deficit, in previous years Schools Forum have approved a transfer of 0.5% (£0.9m) 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 27th 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. The figures submitted in the LARP, repeated above, assume this transfer takes place in 2027/28.
- 11.8 The Council will maintain a dialogue with DfE on the level of the deficit, local plans to address it as set out in the LARP, and the expected treatment of any retained balance. In the meantime, the latest updated projections do not materially change the published MTFS or the expected profile of financial risks.

12. Capital Programme

- 12.1 As part of budget approved in March 2026, a five-year capital programme was set covering financial years 2026/27 through to 2030/31. The £179.516m approved budget is shown in the table below, alongside £6.835m of carry forwards which were approved as part of the 2025/26 Provisional Outturn Report presented to Cabinet in June 2026.

Table 7: Revised Capital Programme 2026/27 - 2030/31

General Fund Capital Programme Directorate	26/27 Draft Estimate £m	27/28 Draft Estimate £m	28/29 Draft Estimate £m	29/30 Draft Estimate £m	30/31 Draft Estimate £m	Total £m
Adults	1.534	1.415	1.415	1.415	1.415	7.194
Children's Services	5.535	5.956	4.575	3.450	3.270	22.786
Reg, Env't & Planning	29.215	18.132	11.086	8.765	1.332	68.530
Corporate Resources	3.089	5.695	1.940	1.940	2.140	14.804
General Fund Capital Exp Total	39.373	31.198	19.016	15.571	8.157	113.314
Corporate - Transformation	8.000	9.000	3.000	-	-	20.000
Capitalisation Directions	42.899	22.433	-	-	-	65.332
General Fund Total	90.272	62.631	22.016	15.571	8.157	198.646
Funding						
Grant	(34.004)	(21.800)	(14.512)	(12.925)	(4.822)	(88.063)
s106	(0.739)	(1.357)	(0.879)	(0.041)	(0.200)	(3.215)
Capital receipts	(2.500)	-	-	-	-	(2.500)
Total External Funding	(37.243)	(23.157)	(15.391)	(12.966)	(5.022)	(93.778)
Prudential Borrowing (Transformation)	(8.000)	(9.000)	(3.000)	-	-	(20.000)
Prudential Borrowing (Service budgets)	(2.130)	(8.041)	(3.625)	(2.605)	(3.135)	(19.536)
Capitalisation Directions	(42.899)	(22.433)	-	-	-	(65.332)
Capital Financing Requirement	(53.029)	(39.474)	(6.625)	(2.605)	(3.135)	(104.868)
Total funding	(90.272)	(62.631)	(22.016)	(15.571)	(8.157)	(198.646)

Table 8: Movement since February 2026 approved budget

General Fund Capital Programme Directorate	26/27 Revised Budget £m	27/28 Revised Budget £m	28/29 Revised Budget £m	29/30 Revised Budget £m	30/31 Revised Budget £m	Total £m
Approved Budget (Feb 26)	87.265	55.172	16.572	12.451	8.057	179.516
Carry Fwds	6.835	-	-	-	-	6.835
Additions	3.731	3.851	3.271	2.811	0.100	13.764
Removals	(0.563)	(0.627)	(0.137)	(0.141)	-	(1.469)
Reprofiling	(6.995)	4.235	2.310	0.450	-	-
Revised Budget	90.272	62.631	22.016	15.571	8.157	198.646

12.2 The table above includes £13.764m of additional capital works for which approval to add to the capital programme is recommended as part of this report. The works are almost exclusively to utilise grant funding which became available to the Council since the budget was set in February 2026, further detail about the additions is provided below:

- £11.096m Local Transport Development plan (grant funded). This addition relates to the final 4-year settlement from DfT (Department for Transport) covering the Local Transport Delivery Plan.
- £1.500m Pride in Place Funding (grant funded). £1.5m was awarded from MHCLG. A separate cabinet report will set out the purpose of the grant and the process to allocate the funding to projects; this will come to Cabinet at a later date.
- £0.900m Schools' Condition (grant funded). School Condition Allocation Grant: DfE (Department for Education) has awarded additional grant for 2026/27 for maintaining SBC schools.

- £0.150m Parks and Playgrounds (Section 106 funding). This covers the replacement of playground equipment in a number of playgrounds within the borough. The use of S106 has been recommended for approval by officers as part of the Capital Board at which it was considered whether the proposed use met the criteria of the S106 funding.
- £0.118m Pride in Place II Funding (grant funded). This is part of a significant new grant from MHCLG and further details are set out in a separate July Cabinet report.

12.3 Also included within the table is £1.469m of work which is no longer required (or being accounted for differently) and can be removed from the capital programme, this report recommends approval to remove the following from the capital programme:

- £0.540m Devolved Schools expenditure is to be removed from the capital programme and accounted for within schools returns. Individual schools will still receive the grant but given the de minimis level of expenditure by each school, which is not material to the Council's accounts, this will be accounted for within the schools' returns in future.
- £0.929m Flood Defence Measures. Due to the timing conditions of the grant from the Environment Agency and the delay in committing expenditure to the Sponge City project, the funding available to Slough for the project has reduced by £0.929m (from £7.902m to £6.973m). The Capital board is working with service areas to ensure lessons are learned from this to reduce the risk of a similar situation recurring, including ensuring sufficient resources are available to deliver capital schemes.

12.4 Following the 2025/26 capital closing process and an early review of the capital programme in 2026/27, £6.995m of planned expenditure for 2026/27 has been reprofiled over the remainder of the capital programme, further detailed to be provided as part of the Quarter 1 monitoring report.

12.5 A review of the capital works requirement for the Council is underway with a further year 2031/32 being added as part of the budget setting process, ensuring the Council has a five-year capital programme. As part of this, the latest available information regarding external funding available including funding allocations from the DfE and DfT will be considered. Where external funding is not available, works will only be considered as additions to the capital programme if they are essential or are on an invest to save basis. Any proposed additions will be presented to Cabinet in the November 2026 budget report.

HRA Capital Programme

12.6 Since the HRA Capital programme was approved in February 2026 by Cabinet the Council has been successful in formally securing £10.422m of Local Authority Housing Fund Round 4 funding (LAHF4). This funding is to be invested in housing stock within Slough and Cabinet as part of this report will be recommended to Full Council to approve this scheme as an addition to the capital programme.

Table 9: HRA Revised Capital Programme 2026/27 - 2030/31

HRA Revised Capital Programme	26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30	30/31	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Planned Maintenance Capital	4.679	5.236	4.966	3.947	3.839	22.667
RMI Capital Programme	15.276	14.641	13.686	13.521	13.681	70.806
Affordable Homes	8.512	3.014	1.067	3.407	5.000	21.000
Affordable Homes - LAHF4 HRA Funded	2.910	1.986	3.933	1.593	-	10.422
LAHF4 Programme – Grant Funded	2.910	1.986	3.933	1.593	-	10.422
Total	34.288	26.863	27.585	24.061	22.520	135.317
Funded By:						
Major Repairs Reserve	(12.480)	(14.946)	(12.985)	(12.775)	(13.800)	(66.986)
Capital Receipts Reserve (CRR)	(11.075)	(3.655)	(6.733)	(8.100)	(6.720)	(36.283)
Capital Receipts Reserve (CRR) - LAHF4	(2.910)	(1.986)	(3.933)	(1.593)	-	(10.422)
Grant - LAHF4	(2.910)	(1.986)	(3.933)	(1.593)	-	(10.422)
Grant (Warm Homes)	(3.413)	(2.791)	-	-	-	(6.203)
s106	(1.500)	(1.500)	-	-	-	(3.000)
Revenue Contributions	-	-	-	-	(2.000)	(2.000)
Total Affordable Housing Funding - Revised	(34.288)	(26.863)	(27.585)	(24.061)	(22.520)	(135.317)

12.7 The LAHF4 grant funding is to be matched by up to £10.422m HRA capital contribution under the terms of the grant award. The match funding was included within the HRA business plan and HRA capital programme approved by Cabinet as part of the budget paper in February 2026 and is funded from disposal receipts, as such there is no adverse impact on the Council's debt reduction strategy. A separate cabinet report is being presented setting out the purpose of the grant, how the Council plans to use the funds and the how the match funding can be afforded within the HRA and how the long-term acquisition of the stock benefits the HRA. The table above assumes this is included but it will be subject to appropriate approval.

Exceptional Financial Support

It is important to recognise the level of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) assumed within the 2026/27 budget and over the MTFS. The amounts up until 2024/25 have been agreed, for 2025/26 MHCLG will continue to work with the Council on the final amount of support required, this is linked to the statement of accounts sign off which is expected in November 2026. For 2026/27, the Secretary of State is minded to approve a capitalisation direction of a total not exceeding £42.899m and the amount for 2027/28 is the Council's projection of the EFS required to enable a balanced budget to be set. This was detailed within a letter sent to MHCLG sent in December 2025 and will be subject to a similar robust approval process as the previous years. Across 2026/27 and 2027/28 work will continue to reduce the level of EFS required if possible. It is assumed that no EFS is required from 2028/29 with the allocations shown in the table below:

Table 10: Exceptional Financial Support

Financial Year	Exceptional Financial Support £m
2018/19	78.0
2019/20	47.5
2020/21	24.9
2021/22	60.0
2022/23	56.6
2023/24	46.3
2024/25	23.1
2025/26 (Subject to final approval)	15.7
Sub Total to 2025/26	352.2
2026/27 (Projected)	42.9
2027/28 (Projected)	22.4
2028/29 (Projected)	0.0
Total	417.5

13. Risks and Reserves

- 13.1 The MTFS includes an assessment of Budget Risks. These are included at Appendix E. At present, they are unchanged from the March MTFS, as set out in the table below. The assessment includes 100% of a £5m risk relating to Children's Social Care. Arguably, this risk has materialised and should now be excluded from the risk register, however the cost is extremely sensitive to low numbers of children and so the risk has been retained as-is until further demand trends are established.

Table 11: Budget Risks for MTFS

Risk Category	Red £m	Amber £m	Yellow £m	Green £m	Total £m
Funding			2.032		2.032
Inflation		0.500	1.401		1.901
Demand	25.390				25.390
Savings		6.622			6.622
Companies	5.000				5.000
Corporate		2.000			2.000
Financing Costs			0.379	1.000	1.379
Total	30.390	9.122	3.812	1.000	44.324
Reserve Coverage	100%	50%	50%	25%	
Weighted Risk	30.390	4.561	1.906	0.250	37.107

<i>Assumed Level of General and Non-Restricted Reserves by 2028/29</i>		<i>£m</i>
General Reserve		23.972
Budget Smoothing Reserve		3.729
Directorate C/Fwds		0.063
Plus Provisions		5.800
Total		33.564

- 13.2 The March MTFS review highlighted a requirement to increase the level of reserves by some £3.54m, requiring a net increase in reserves to £1.2m per annum over the 3-year 2029/20 to 2030/31, increasing the General Reserve to £27.5m by 31st March 2031. The balance between General Fund and earmarked reserves will be reassessed alongside the annual £1m contribution.
- 13.3 If additional reserves were required in the meantime, there is potential to repurpose an element of the Redundancy Reserve of £5m. The balance on this reserve will be reviewed throughout the MTFS by cross-referencing the expected impact of transformation and savings proposals.
- 13.4 The MTFS included a proposal to re-build reserves to a level commensurate with these risks over the medium-term. The risk assessment demonstrates that the general fund reserves trajectory should remain unchanged from the MTFS, however the £2.3m improvement in the financial position for 2025/26 (as reported to Cabinet in June) does provide a limited degree of headroom to amend the phasing of future contributions. As set out below, the profile assumed a £15.5m deficit in 2025/26, which at outturn has now improved to £13.2m.

Table 12 - Reserves Profile Updated for Outturn

General Reserve – MTFS	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m
Opening Balance	23.465	8.972	19.972	22.972	23.972
Contribution in base budget of £1m per year, with a further £10m in 2026/27 and £2m in 2027/28 as part of the Council's EFS request	1.000	11.000	3.000	1.000	1.000
Assumed impact of 2025/26 GF overspend	(15.493)				
Closing Balance	8.972	19.972	22.972	23.972	24.972
Net Revenue Budget	175.727	236.619	226.515	219.828	226.499
Percentage of net revenue budget	5.11%	8.44%	10.14%	10.90%	11.03%

General Reserve 2025/26 Outturn	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m
Opening Balance	23.465	11.313	22.313	25.313	26.313
Contribution in base budget of £1m per year, with a further £10m in 2026/27 and £2m in 2027/28 as part of the Council's EFS request	1.000	11.000	3.000	1.000	1.000
Assumed impact of 2025/26 GF overspend	(13.152)				
Closing Balance	11.313	22.313	25.313	26.313	27.313
Net Revenue Budget	175.727	236.619	226.515	219.828	226.499
Percentage of net revenue budget	6.44%	9.43%	11.17%	11.97%	12.06%

General Reserve Movement	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m
Opening Balance	0.000	2.341	2.341	2.341	2.341
Contribution in base budget of £1m per year, with a further £10m in 2026/27 and £2m in 2027/28 as part of the Council's EFS request	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Assumed impact of 2025/26 GF overspend	2.341	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Closing Balance	2.341	2.341	2.341	2.341	2.341
Net Revenue Budget	175.727	236.619	226.515	219.828	226.499
Percentage of net revenue budget	1.33%	0.99%	1.03%	1.06%	1.03%

13.5 Note, the reduction in net revenue budget set out above from 2027/28 to 2028/29 relates to reducing expected EFS from £42.9m to £22.4m and then zero.

- 13.6 Decisions on updating the reserves strategy for the £2.3m improvement in 2025/26 will largely depend on the in-year financial position for 2026/27 and a refresh of the S25 reserves risk assessment as part of finalising the budget for 2027/28. Given the scale of savings now required for 2027/28, the headroom in reserves may be needed to ensure the savings target for 2027/28 remains realistic and deliverable.
- 13.7 A more comprehensive financial resilience assessment will be required in the next iteration, as a minimum assessing weaknesses, dependencies, adequacy of reserves, quality of underlying assumptions and capacity and agility to withstand financial shocks.

14. Budget Engagement Proposals

- 14.1 It is good practice to engage with external stakeholders, including residents, tenants, partners and businesses as part of preparing the budget for each financial year. There is a statutory duty to consult representatives of business rate-payers on expenditure proposals under the Local Government Finance Act 1992. In addition, statutory guidance on Best Value standards states: “[Local Authorities] are also required to consult on the purpose of deciding how to fulfil the Best Value Duty. 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.”
- 14.2 In addition to the Council’s overall MTFS and budget consultation, the HRA Business Plan will require a consultation programme of its own, to be set out and agreed with the Director of Housing, the Chief Executive, Commissioners and Members. The need to consult is set out in section 10, above.
- 14.3 Schools Forum is the consultative body for setting DSG budgets. A programme of work was set out in the 2027/28 Budget Timetable report to April Cabinet. Schools Forum dates are yet to be confirmed.
- 14.4 Publishing the refreshed MTFS forms the starting point for communication and engagement which will broadly fall into two phases:
- July to October – Communication and engagement on key MTFS messages
 - November to January – Consultation on draft budget proposals.
- 14.5 During the period July to October, the Council is undertaking a Vision 2040 refresh and a strategic partnership review. Both of these form opportunities to communicate and raise awareness of key financial issues, including the Council’s aim to promote preventative initiatives and to become an enabling Council, helping people to live independently and reducing the need for higher-cost intervention.
- 14.6 Appendix F sets out a Communications and Engagement Plan which will be supplemented by emerging opportunities to raise awareness and receive feedback. This covers the period July to November. The Draft Budget report in November will set out further detail on how specific budget consultation will take place. The content of the budget itself will influence how it should be consulted on.

- 14.7 The CISC Budget Task and Finish group may also consider the approach to engagement and consultation subject to agreement of their work programme.
- 14.8 Specific consultation may also be needed on other matters pertaining to the budget, for example the Council Tax Support Scheme, if any changes are subsequently proposed. The 2027/28 Budget Timetable report to April Cabinet set out that this would take place following September Cabinet.

15. Conclusion and Next Steps

- 15.1 Over the period between this report and the 2027/28 Draft Budget, scheduled for Cabinet in November, work to identify opportunities to meet the revised savings target will commence. Key activities (as referenced in the approved budget timetable) will include:
- Communication and engagement on high-level financial position
 - Scrutiny of the refreshed MTFS position and key-risk areas
 - Draft budget and capital programme preparation including Cabinet challenge sessions from September
 - HRA 30-Year Business Plan review
 - Ongoing work with DfE on LARP and retained deficits
 - Savings identification as set out in section 8.
 - Refresh and alignment of business plans for the Council's companies, including the potential to use JEH for TA and/or agreed exit strategy milestones. This will include an assessment of the General Fund and HRA risks and opportunities stemming from company activity.
- 15.2 The financial challenges facing the Council have been exacerbated by the economic context, heightened pressures in Children's services and increasing demand for Temporary Accommodation. The Transformation Programme will be key to addressing the MTFS position, both in terms of assurance on delivering the existing savings target and identifying opportunities to increase it. The Lot 1 delivery partner is expected to be appointed and mobilised in August and will give immediate attention to these matters.

16. Implications of the Recommendation

Financial implications

- 16.1 This is a financial report with implications throughout.

Legal implications

- 16.2 Section 31 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires the Council to set a balanced budget at the start of each financial year. Section 28 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires all local authorities to review actual expenditure against this budget on a regular basis during the year. Where it appears that there has been a deterioration in the financial position, the local authority must take such action as is necessary to deal with the situation.
- 16.3 The Council's best value duty requires it to keep under review its services to ensure continuous improvement. This includes having a financial strategy and budgets which are clearly aligned with strategic priorities and a robust process for reviewing and setting the budget. There should be a robust system of financial controls and

reporting to ensure clear accountability and a clear strategy to maintain adequate reserves. There should be collective accountability for the budget and MTFS both at officer and political level. Regular financial reporting to Cabinet ensures members are aware of the issues mid-year and the mitigating measures in place, as well as providing for public accountability

Risk management implications

- 16.4 Financial risks are set out in section 13 and Appendix E. It is a key feature of the MTFS that the Council's reserves demonstrate sustainability against the level of risk quantified.

Environmental implications

- 16.5 No specific environmental considerations from refreshing the MTFS.

Equality implications

- 16.6 There are no specific equality considerations in approving the refreshed MTFS, but EIAs will be required in some circumstances to accompany detailed budget proposals, prior to their approval in February 2027.

Procurement implications

- 16.7 The Council's existing savings plan includes a £0.750m saving from strengthened commercial and procurement management. The saving is not amended as a result of this report, but is part of the Council's overall MTFS position.

Workforce implications

- 16.8 Some savings set out in the MTFS may have workforce implications. These will be identified and communicated to staff on a case-by-case basis following proper consultation where applicable. The communications and engagement plan recognises staff as a key stakeholder who need to be updated and engaged in the development of savings plans.

Property implications

- 16.9 The Council's existing savings plan includes a £1m saving from reducing property costs under the corporate landlord model. The saving is not amended as a result of this report, but is part of the Council's overall MTFS position.

17. Background Papers

None