Service: Children's Services

Narrative Overview:

The MTFS position for Children's Services broadly consists of two key areas: SEND and Slough Children First. This appendix sets out the key elements, particularly in respect of demand pressures. Further details will be required regarding these emerging pressures, before they are funded. This will be part of the business plan refresh, which will set out clarity on additional spending and new roles, demonstration of the activity they will provide and an assessment of value for money.

Any capital spending assumptions in the business plan will also need to be set out, including alignment with the Council's Capital Strategy.

SEND:

As reported to Cabinet in June, the SEND service requires £1.4m investment in 2026/27 (subject to providing a detailed implementation plan for approval), with elements expected to continue on a recurring basis into 2027/28. Although work is under way to establish the permanent effect, the refreshed MTFS assumes that £1.4m is ongoing. As plans develop, this may reduce over the latter years of the MTFS when process, data and practice improvement take effect.

Slough Children First:

Demand growth in SCF has significantly exceeded the level expected when the contract sum of £39.5m was agreed. Demand for placements and the unit cost of those placements have increased by c. 20% each since the business plan was agreed by Cabinet. Along with other budget pressures in SCF (e.g. additional staffing to cover the increased caseload), this has the effect of a demand pressure of c.£7.2m over the MTFS period.

Work is under way to mitigate the pressure in 2026/27 but over the Medium-Term, unless demand can be reduced, additional budget will be required. Existing savings of £1.4m are already planned from closer integration with the Council (£0.4m) and internally-provided accommodation (£1.0m). Further opportunities will be needed.

Existing Savings Proposals in MTFS:

Title	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	TOTAL MEDIUM TERM SAVING
Children First Integration Programme	0.000	0.000	0.417	0.417
Accommodation Model	0.000	0.000	1.000	1.000
SEND Transformation Programme	TBC	TBC	TBC	0.000
Removal of Budget Line no longer required	0.100	0.000	0.000	0.100
	0.100	0.000	1.417	1.517

Risks & Opportunities

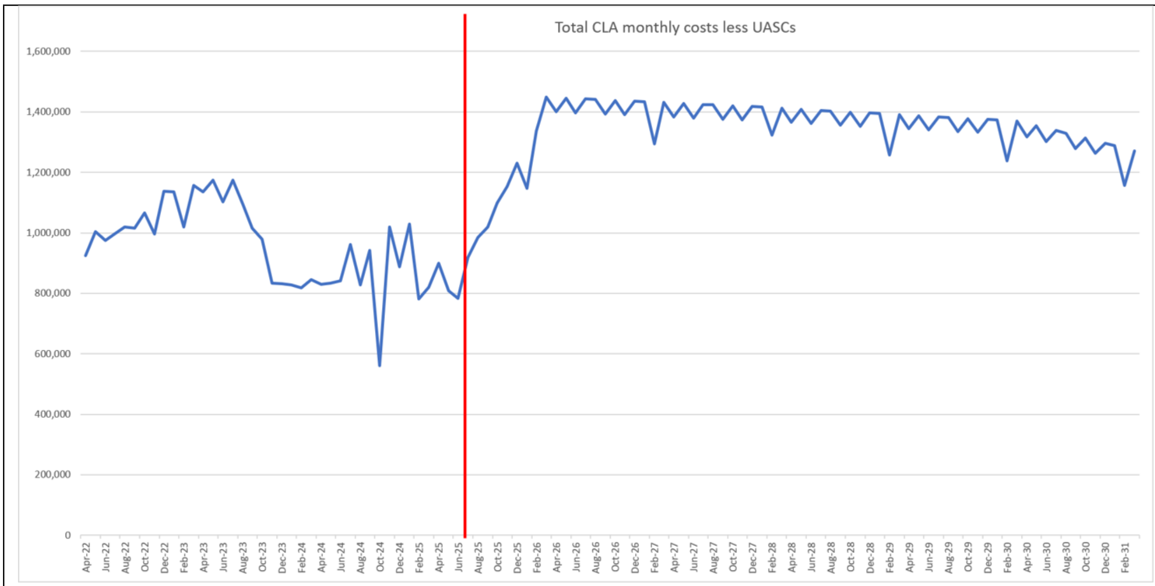
The key risk for Children's Services is demand for looked-after children placements. The long-term modelling assumes that demand will reduce in proportion to ONS projections for the overall number of children in the borough. However, the budget is very sensitive to demand, with individual children potentially costing up to £1.5m per year.

Demand will continue to be monitored as the year progresses.

The key opportunity is to grow the transformation programme in Children's Services. A dedicated transformation resource for Children's has been approved by CLT, and developing new opportunities will be a priority for the Lot 1 Transformation Partner currently being procured.

Assumptions used in MTFS; latest assumptions and differences

The two key drivers for cost in Children's services are the volume and cost of individual placements. The chart below shows the increase in both between June 2025 and March 2026. The significant increases took place after the initial contract sum was put forward to Cabinet in December.



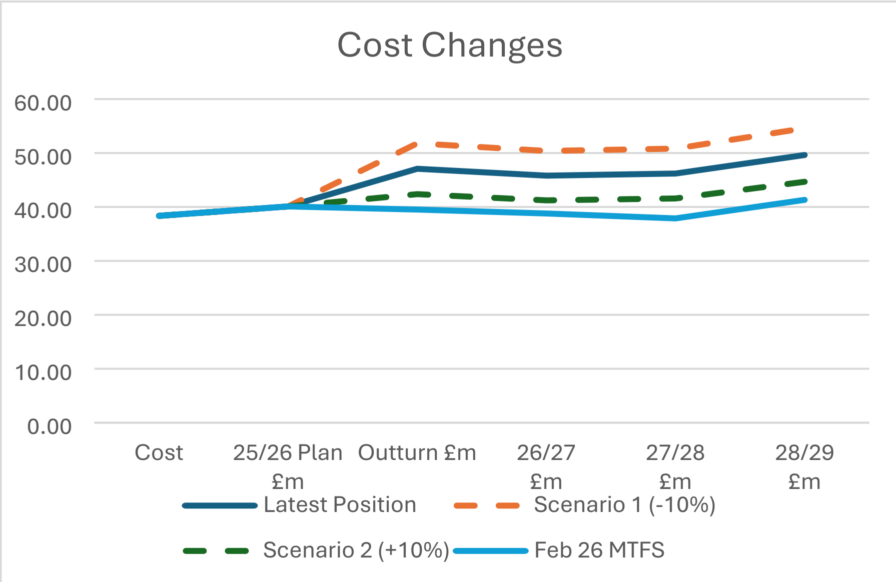
NB The red vertical line indicates approximate point at which data was available for original Business Plan submission.

176	Placements at March excl UASC	19%
148	Placements at June excl UASC	
28	Difference	
£		
7,668	Unit cost per month March	23%
6,245	Unit cost per month June	
1,423	Difference	
£m		
5.0	Pressure	

The overall pressure consists of

- Staffing: £2m
- Support to children and young adults: £2m
- Placements: £5m (above)
- Offset by grant: £2m (Families First Partnership Funding – to be transferred).

Table showing expected variance to MTFS in each scenario



	Actual		Forecast			
Cost	25/26 Plan £m	Outturn £m	26/27 £m	27/28 £m	28/29 £m	29/30 £m
Latest Position	38.35	40.10	47.08	45.81	46.19	49.63
Scenario 1 (-10%)	38.35	40.10	51.79	50.39	50.81	54.59
Scenario 2 (+10%)	38.35	40.10	42.37	41.22	41.57	44.67
Feb 26 MTFS	38.35	40.10	39.52	38.79	37.88	41.32