

<b>MEETING</b>	<b>CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b> (Councillors Shaik (Chair), Khawar, Escott, Hulme, Iftakhar, Mann, Matloob, Mohindra, O’Kelly and Stedmond)
<b>DATE AND TIME:</b>	THURSDAY, 4TH JANUARY, 2024 AT 6.30 PM
<b>VENUE:</b>	COUNCIL CHAMBER - OBSERVATORY HOUSE, 25 WINDSOR ROAD, SL1 2EL
<b>DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER:</b> (for all enquiries)	MANIZE TALUKDAR 07871 982 919

### SUPPLEMENTARY PAPERS

The following Papers have been added to the agenda for the above meeting:-

\*Please note that for ease of reference all items published in the main agenda as well as those marked as ‘to follow’ have been included in this supplementary agenda.

### PART 1

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#### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

#### CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

1. Declarations of Interest

All Members who believe they have a Disclosable Pecuniary or other Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting must declare that interest and, having regard to the circumstances described in Section 9 and Appendix B of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter is discussed.



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3.	Register of Recommendations and Action Tracker	11 - 18	

#### **SCRUTINY CHALLENGE ITEMS**

4.	Update on Progress from the Improvement and Recovery Board	19 - 54	ALL
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#### **MATTERS FOR INFORMATION**

6.	Update on task and finish report: Review of Workforce Strategy Business Case for Slough Children First (SCF)	77 - 92	ALL
7.	The Forward Work Plan	93 - 130	
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8.	Date of Next Meeting		
	30 January 2024.		

**Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 28th November, 2023.**

**Present:-** Councillors Manku (Chair), Shaik (Vice-Chair), Escott, Hulme, Iftakhar, Mann, Matloob, Mohindra, O’Kelly and Stedmond

**Also present under Rule 30:-** Councillors Bedi and Wright

**PART 1****16. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations were made.

**17. Minutes of the last meeting**

Following discussion, it was agreed that:

- the request for further information regarding ICT improvements set out in paragraph 3.3 would be sought from the relevant Associate Director;
- the actions in paragraph 3.4 would be listed in the committee’s recommendations tracker;
- paragraph 5.4 was erroneous and should state that ‘Councillor Stedmond undertook to provide a response in due course.’

Regarding the Action Tracker and Recommendations Register, the Scrutiny officer advised that the whole-numbered items were referred to Members’ attention specifically, noting that several were due to be considered at forthcoming Cabinet meetings and feedback would be received after those dates. Some items had a January 2024 deadline and would be dealt with in due course, while others dated back to February 2023. Most of these had been reported on and others had been partially implemented. Any outstanding actions would be reported at a future meeting of the committee.

**Resolved – That:**

- a) The minutes of the meeting of 24 October 2023 be approved as a correct record, subject to the amendments above;
- b) The attendance report, the action tracker and the recommendations register be noted.

**18. Verbal presentation:: Budget Setting and financial update**

The Chair stated that the Committee had been expecting to scrutinise the Council’s budget setting process in the form of the Cabinet budget report,

however, the report had been delayed and instead Members had been sent a presentation regarding the budget, at very short notice. These circumstances did not constitute good budget scrutiny, nor did they comply with the budget scrutiny guidelines recommended by CfGS (Centre for Governance & Scrutiny) and LGA (Local Government Association) and did little to allay Members concerns regarding the robustness of the budget setting process. He emphasised that the following year's budget scrutiny process must follow best practice.

Members asked the following questions regarding the delayed report:

Why had the report been delayed? Where were the bottlenecks in obtaining the information for the reports? Was the delay an indication that there were areas of concern regarding the budget setting process? What impact would the delay have on the overall budget setting process and would it have a negative impact on residents? Would there be additional delays in providing this information? How could officers provide surety regarding the budget setting process? At a previous scrutiny meeting, the Lead Member for improvement & Recovery had given assurance that the recurring issue of poor-quality reports and late reports being submitted to Scrutiny would not be repeated in the future.

The SBC Executive Director of Finance & Commercial advised that the Q2 (quarter 2) budget monitoring report had been delayed pending more detailed investigation and assessment of the information and data contained in the report. The delay had been necessary to ensure that the most accurate and up-to-date information regarding the budget would be submitted to Cabinet and residents.

She added that these were unusual and undesirable circumstances, due in part to resource issues (her team's workloads were spread across multiple areas of activity and the team were trying to catch up with outstanding work; high turnover in staff; embedding new staff in the team, who had brought a new perspective to the work of the finance team and had raised a number of queries regarding the report which had needed to be investigated).

Once these issues had been resolved, the draft budget report would be submitted to December Cabinet. She expected her team to be in a far stronger position in 2024 and was considering implementing further improvements in work processes to ensure that such a situation would not recur. She added that she did not expect this delay to negatively impact either the budget setting process or residents. Two Member briefings on the budget setting process were planned in coming weeks, which would bolster the budget scrutiny process and she would support Members in shaping their key lines of enquiry regarding the budget.

The Chair stated that the delay would affect the momentum of the committee and its work programme and future reports must be provided on time and that budget scrutiny must follow best practice.

The SBC Executive Director of Finance & Commercial highlighted two areas of significant in-year overspend (about which scrutiny members had raised

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concerns). These were ASC (Adult Social Care) and TA (temporary accommodation). There was an overspend of £7.8m in ASC and £4m in housing in Q1. She briefly outlined the key cost and income drivers for these areas.

Members asked the following questions and received the responses below:

Why was there a variance of £11m in ASC budget? Why had virements been necessary? Where was the £3.4m virement funded from? What measures were in place to mitigate against the overspends? What actions were being implemented to control the overspends, what were the timescales for these and how much could the overspends be reduced by? Why were hospital discharges not funded from the BCF? Was there a gap between the local housing allowance rates and local rents? The out-of-borough placement policy would need to be scrutinised in the future. Had the Housing surgeries included private sector tenants and would they be expanded?

The SBC Director of Finance & Commercial advised that the forecast overspends related to the cost of services in all areas, particularly in the areas of ongoing long-term support and care provision, staffing and operational pressures, short-term services related to hospital discharge (the latter being a national issue faced by many councils). Some of the discharges could be funded from the BCF (Better Care Fund) and the hospital discharge grant but had to be negotiated with the ICB (Integrated Care Board).

Housing, planning and property continued to be under pressure from unachievable income targets, particularly in respect of re-charges to the HRA (Housing Revenue Account). The current significant increase in demand for temporary accommodation continued to rise. A number of actions were in place to mitigate against these pressures.

She added that during the budget setting process for 2023-2024, a large number of budgets and in-year grants had been held centrally, which should have been allocated out to service areas. These amounts had been retained centrally to cover the cost of inflation, as the previous year, inflation had been unpredictable and had significantly increased. The virement had been provided from those centrally held budgets which had since been allocated to relevant service areas.

The Lead Member for Adults advised that the overspend was the result of an inadequate budget being set for ASC. The outturn forecast for ASC this year was similar to last year. The service had absorbed growth pressures from an increasingly ageing population, increases in the cost of living and service provider costs. In September, Cabinet had agreed virements to ASC totalling £1.8m and had allowed expenditure against two ring-fenced grants awarded in 2023. The original ASC budget had been a significant underestimate for the scope of the undertaking in adults and this was now being rectified. Internal discussions on the importance proportionate investment in ASC had been undertaken. She added that the Leader of the Council had prioritised improving health outcomes for residents and Cabinet had recently approved a carers' strategy and an older people's strategy and was committed to

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delivering improvements in ASC and setting the right-sized budget whilst ensuring best value.

The transformation delivery board had delivered £3m savings, and there were further savings anticipated in agency staff spend (plans included reviewing the contracts of agency staff who had been at the Council for more than 3 years), in continuing health care by transferring costs to the NHS where appropriate and reviewing fees and charges.

The Lead Member for Housing advised that the original budget had been significantly underestimated and included some unachievable targets, for example, re-charges to the HRA (Housing Revenue Account), the significant increase in demand for TA.

Actions being taken to bring down the overspend included:

- robust provider invoice checking before payment
- Accommodation visits for welfare and tenancy checks
- Create missing rent accounts for nightly/daily rate clients to capture income.
- Increase placements to avoid ready to let HRA properties.
- Introduce a new Private Sector Leasing (PSL) scheme.
- Introduce a new Private Rental Sector (PRS) Incentive scheme.
- Update the Out of Borough Placement Policy

She added that the issue of TA was a national phenomenon, the forthcoming increase in the LHA (local housing allowance) would indirectly help reduce pressures on temporary accommodation. Her group were committed to supporting vulnerable residents, improving the housing service whilst achieving best value. TA was a challenging situation that had been significantly underfunded. Housing surgeries had been introduced and a revised resident engagement strategy was due to be agreed at Cabinet shortly. The Finance team working closely with the housing team to assist tenants to submit timely housing benefits claims. The housing budget was being re-evaluated and would be re-allocated at a more appropriate level. Pressure on non-HRA housing costs has also been reduced by agreeing that a recharge for asset contract management should be transferred to the HRA.

The budget and savings targets which had been signed off the previous year had not been met. How could the committee be confident that the current year's savings would be met? Would the issues of centralised corporate budgets recur? Which of the mitigating actions would have the greatest impact on issues of overspend in housing? How could the spend on hotels the pressures on TA be reduced?

The SBC Executive Director of Housing advised that all of the actions listed in the presentation were due to be implemented. There were approximately 300 homelessness presentations to the Council each month. This was lower than the previous year's peak but nevertheless of concern. The Council had 698 units of TA in stock. The savings identified were crucial to ensuring good budget management. Going forward, tenants would be placed directly into

private properties rather than through agents or landlords (thereby avoiding high daytime and night time costs levied by landlords) and the increase in the LHA would provide further savings. All these measures would take around 12 months to bear fruit.

He added that temporary accommodation levels could not be anticipated or predicted as this was a demand-led service. Most local authorities would agree that the current national housing policy was not aligned with the stated objective of achieving a sustained reduction in homelessness. It was crucial that the homeless be installed in less expensive points in the market. In addition, there were plans to allocate a minimum of the Council's own housing stock for those living in TA accommodation, so that they could move out of expensive private accommodation and into sustainable social housing, when the stock was available.

He added that the scope of the out-of-borough policy would need to be widened and it would need careful consideration due to the legal implications of placing people out of borough. The policy affected a relatively small number of people. The revised policy would be submitted to February 2024 Cabinet for approval. Its core would be placing people in lower cost housing areas and giving them real choices about their sustainable housing for the future.

He clarified that the housing surgeries had also been attended by private (right-to-buy) tenants. Attendees had sought advice on a mixture of issues, some of which would be shared with relevant partners. There were plans to review and expand the surgeries in 2024.

The SBC Executive Director of Finance & Commercial re-iterated that the centrally held budgets and virements had been a way of dealing with inflation the previous year. Four internal budget challenge sessions, which had included both officers and members, had evaluated pressure areas, how these might be mitigated against and any contingency plans. It should be noted that the budget and the MTFS (Medium term financial plan) existed to ensure delivery of priority areas of the corporate plan, in this case vulnerable adults and housing support.

The SBC Executive Director of Housing stated that new, longer-term relationships were being developed with the private rental sector and housing officers had recently attended a modelling with meeting with DLUHC. The actions outlined earlier were predicted to generate £700k savings. Ensuring that rent accounts were correctly established, that tenants had signed up for all their benefit entitlements, recovering rents and the revised out of borough policy would contribute significantly to achieving savings targets. The Director of Finance & Commercial added that the actions outlined in the report were predicted to reduce overall costs as well as achieve key outcomes for vulnerable residents.

It was agreed that officers would provide an email update to the Committee regarding the temporary accommodation actions, in due course.

**Resolved:** That the verbal presentation be noted.

**19. Report from the Task and Finish Group on the Preparedness of Adults Social Care for an assessment by the Care Quality Commission**

The Chair advised that the scope of the Task & Finish Group (T&FG) on the Preparedness of Adult Social Care for an assessment by the CQC had been to consider whether recommendations would be needed to improve the accuracy of the SBC (Slough Borough Council) CQC self-assessment and suggest further preparation work which may improve the chances of a more favourable CQC (Care Quality Commission) inspection and its associated costs and benefits.

The Chair of the Task & Finish Group (T&FG) stated that learning point for future T&FGs would be to provide an initial briefing session for T&FG Members as preparation for undertaking the work. The work of the T&FG had been affected by issues of limited time and limited availability of key staff.

The recommendations arose from the readiness of the service for inspection, where gaps had been identified. The report also set out the following:

- areas where the service was doing well
- how it was managed
- its areas of activity
- whether it had sufficient capacity to provide the information required for inspection
- that further work would need to be undertaken before the inspection
- Cabinet may need to allocate additional resources to the service for this purpose

The Head of Governance & Scrutiny advised that it had not been possible to cost the recommendations in the report due to the tight timescales. Cabinet would need to give the matter due consideration and may not be in a position to respond immediately.

Lead Member for Adult Social Care praised the work of the T&FG and agreed that the availability of data and its analysis were key factors in the inspection preparedness. ?? Every Slough Councillor should be ??

The Chair of the T&FG advised appendix D of the report highlighted areas requiring improvement (this related to August 2023) and there may have been improvements since.

The Director of ASC advised that making improvements in the service was an ongoing and continuous process. Nevertheless, it was important to recognise the fact that the self-assessment had indicated that ASC at Slough was likely to receive an 'inadequate' rating from the CQC and that the Council did not currently have the resources required to avoid such a rating.



**Resolved:** That:

- a) Recommendations be submitted to Cabinet for approval;
- b) the verbal update be noted.

**20. Proposals for the Scope (terms of reference) for a Task and Finish Group on Resident engagement and Re-building trust**

The Head of Governance & Scrutiny advised that when considering the scope of the proposed Task & Finish Group, Members should also consider whether launching a T&FG would constitute a good use of time and resources, how lessons learned from the previous T&FG could be applied to this one, desired outcomes as set out in the scope, how these would contribute to the Council's recovery and improvement.

The SBC Head of Communications and Resident Engagement advised that three areas of the Council's Corporate Plan related to resident engagement (namely Resident focused, Building trust & Enabling Residents & Communities). It was therefore an important area to be scrutinized that would contribute to recovery and improvement. The LGA defined engagement as anything which created a stronger two-way relationship between a council and residents. These could include formal consultations, co-production, crowd-sourcing, events, public meetings, focus groups, etc. The Council had implemented proactive communication methods of engaging with residents, however, more emphasis was required on two-way communication and greater consideration should be given to the role of Members in this area.

A 2023 resident survey showed that 25% of Slough residents trusted the Council 'a great deal / fair amount' compared with a national average of 59%. They survey also showed that residents most trust information from their local councillor, or from direct contact with the council.

The resident survey showed that 28% of Slough residents thought that the council acted on the concerns of local residents 'a great deal / fair amount' , compared with a national average of 52%.

Different models of resident participation, T&F could assess the Council's current position, undertake desktop research, work with the LGA, set up resident focus groups and learn from best practice at other authorities.

Following questions she advised that the Tenants' Engagement Strategy would be submitted to December Cabinet for approval; and that 500 consultation responses had been received and analyzed using the same statistical methods used for polling. The respondents were cross-ward and accurately represented the demographics of the town.

Desired outcomes of the T&FG would be to build stronger relationship with residents, increase in the levels of resident trust and a clear understanding of

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the ambition for citizen participation, while bearing in mind that resources were limited, and the T&F would need to come up with creative solutions.

Following questions regarding the scope of the T&FG, it was advised that complaints would be looked at as a source of information regarding the levels of resident engagement with the Council and would not be an evaluation of the complaints process itself. If the T&FG were to look at data from consultations, it would need to decide whether to sample them or do a deep dive into a single consultation.

Councillors asked further questions about potential areas of focus, and the Head of Governance and Scrutiny advised that these would be more appropriate for Members of the T&FG itself.

Councillor Mohindra was appointed as Chair of the Resident Engagement Task & Finish Group. The remaining membership of the T&FG would be confirmed after the meeting.

**Resolved:** That:

- a) A Resident Engagement Task & Finish Group be launched as per the draft scope at appendix A of the report;
- b) Councillor Mohindra be appointed Chair of the Resident Engagement Task & Finish Group.

**21. Forward Work Plan**

Following the planned budget briefing for scrutiny Members on 13 December, there would be a workshop to consider and refresh the work programme.

**Resolved:** That the revised work programme be noted.

**22. Vote of Thanks**

The Chair advised that he was resigning as Chair of CISC to take up a Cabinet position. He thanked and praised Committee Members and officers for their diligent efforts and commitment to ensuring the establishment of a robust scrutiny function at the Council, in accordance with the Directions.

The Vice Chair thanked the Chair for his leadership and guidance and wished him luck in his new area of responsibility

**23. Date of Next Meeting**

4 January 2024.

Chair

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(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.28 pm)

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## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date:</b>	04 January 2024
<b>Subject:</b>	Action tracker and register of recommendations
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Stephen Taylor, Monitoring Officer
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Alexander Polak, Statutory Scrutiny Officer Michael Edley, Scrutiny Officer
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Appendices:</b>	<b>Appendix A</b> – Register of Recommendations <b>Appendix B</b> – Action tracker

### 1. Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the latest version of the action tracker and recommendations register. The Action tracker (Appendix A) serves to record agreed actions arising from the Committee's meetings, usually relating to requests for additional information, flagging a request that an update to a report will be requested at a future date, for circulation to members as a 'for information' report, or a task required of scrutiny officers to support members or in the administration of the scrutiny function.
- 1.2 The register of recommendations (Appendix B) records those proposed improvements that arise as a result of members' report-based enquiries in committee meetings or from the work of task and finish groups. These are more substantial, often proposing changes to current policy or practice, and requiring the agreement of relevant Lead Members and/or full Cabinet approval.
- 1.3 Implementation of recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee and the improvements they deliver are the best measure of the impact of scrutiny and serve as key evidence when the committee produces its annual report describes the committee's work over the course of a municipal year
- 1.4 In some instances (as in item X in this Agenda), following Cabinet's approval of Scrutiny recommendations, the committee might ask for a timely update from the relevant portfolio holder/s setting out how and when each recommendation was implemented, together with an account of any improvement observed as a result.
- 1.5 The register would also record the reason/s why cabinet was unable to approve any recommendations the committee make.

Recommendation:

- The Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee is recommended to review the actions and recommendations arising from the most recent meeting and that deadlines for previous actions have been met where relevant.

***Commissioner Review***

Noted - no other comment from commissioners.

**2. Appendices**

**Appendix A** – Register of Recommendations at 14 December 2023

**Appendix B** – Action tracker as at 14 December 2023.

REF (CISCREC)	Committee Date	Agenda Item	Detail of recommendation:	Cabinet Date	Response received to date	Date of Response	Response Detail	Accepted?: Y/ N/ P[ARTIAL]	Notes
0.14	1st Feb 2023	5	Move to a 2-stage corporate complaint process with extended timescales at each of the two stages	27-Feb-23	Y	TBC		Y	
0.15	1st Feb 2023	5	introduce accessibility of different languages on the council's website reflective of the ethnic makeup of the borough, to make it easier for customers to access service and navigate information relating to service requests	27-Feb-23	Y	TBC	The Councils website is now judged as 10th in the country for accessibility.	Y	
0.16	1st Feb 2023	5	Make the online complaint page more robust	27-Feb-23	Y	TBC		Y	
0.17	1st Feb 2023	5	Encourage officers to use various communication methods when investigating complaints	27-Feb-23	Y	TBC		Y	
0.18	1st Feb 2023	5	Strengthen the learning and improvements captured through complaints and ensure that these are incorporated in all future complaints' report	27-Feb-23	Y	TBC		Y	
0.19	23-Jan-23		The start of the procurement process must be well managed, with clear outcomes and deliverables in the procurement specification, which include outcomes-based deliverables, gateways, monitoring, timelines, milestones and reporting.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	The Commercial service works closely with service areas to plan timely procurement activity which is assisted by a robust forward plan, this ensures that the procurement process is well managed and tenders are scored against the outcomes and deliverables in the specification. The service ensures that comprehensive records are maintained including a register of the progress of live procurements.	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place
0.2	23-Jan-23		When assessing tenders for work they should be scored against the outcomes and deliverables in the specification and the results retained as evidence.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	as above	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place
0.21	23-Jan-23		Where authority is delegated to Officers for the award of a high value/high risk contract, this should be in consultation with the lead member. Members must be properly consulted with evidence of decisions in writing and their agreement clearly sought.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	The Council has updated its constitution with a list of significant officer decisions which require a formal decision report to be published. This includes contracts over the financial threshold of £180k and any decision exercised following specific delegation from Cabinet. Such record should record the consultation process and comments from the consultee. This takes place during briefings	Y	
0.22	23-Jan-23		Council staff must follow a proper governance process, as set out in the updated Contract Procedure Rules, including having an effective and up to date forward procurement plan.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	The Council has an annual procurement plan agreed by Cabinet and this is updated throughout the year as required, with the last one approved at September cabinet.	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place

0.23	23-Jan-23	Cabinet reports for procurement must set out the evidence base for a particular recommendation and have an effective options appraisal as part of the report. Consideration should be given to phasing procurement and reserving future decisions to Cabinet for high value / high impact commissioning.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	All procurement activity that require a cabinet report, have an options appraisal, however it is important that a business case methodology is used and cabinet authority is sought at the most appropriate time during the procurement cycle. Where cabinet authority is not required, a full business case is developed which sets out case for change, the options appraisal and the cost/benefit of the proposal. In addition, the forward plan report to cabinet in April and September provides an outline of the procurement including deliverables and outcomes.	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place
0.24	23-Jan-23	Contracts on the Council's contract register must be risk assessed to identify the scale of the risk for each contract. This should be done using a standardised risk assessment matrix that considers contract value, business value and impact, sourcing and contractual complexity, and	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	These actions are underway as part of the development of the contract management strategy and toolkit, which will assist contract managers to appropriately contract manage high risk contracts. This is due to be in place by the end of October 2023.	Y	
0.25	23-Jan-23	There must be a dedicated contract manager for high-value/impact contracts identified through the risk assessment process. This officer should be appropriately trained and should have responsibility for monitoring the contract and ensuring compliance with the contractual requirements. The officer should keep records of contract meetings and should convene formal monitoring meetings as required by the contract. The officer should raise any risks with the relevant Executive Director. The officer should have access to legal and finance advice, as required, to assist with their role.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	as above	Y	
0.26	23-Jan-23	Meaningful Key Performance Indicators must be developed for contracts and reviewed and followed up regularly at contract review meetings to ensure that any performance issues are discussed and challenged accordingly. For more significant commissioning arrangements, contract review meetings should include operational and strategic meetings with key officers in attendance. These meetings should be confidential to allow for full and frank discussion, with opportunity to agree minutes to be put in the public domain where updates are to be provided to a formal member meeting. If a contractor is invited to attend a formal Member meeting, consideration should be given to allowing this to take place in Part 2 to allow for a more detailed discussion about any issues.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	This action is underway as part of the development of the contract management framework. The council's contract management support lead is involved at the earliest stages of procurement of high risk contracts to ensure that appropriate KPI's are identified and a contract management plan is in place to monitor them. This is due to be in place by the end of March 2024.	Y	



0.27	23-Jan-23		A standardised framework for contracts should be implemented, which includes a contract management plan for each contract, tailored to take account of value and impact of the contract. This considers important mechanisms for the management of a contract, including roles, responsibilities and governance, dispute resolution, key performance indicators, and exit plans.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	as above	Y	
0.28	23-Jan-23		When commissioning management consultancy, consideration should be given to the payment mechanism and if this is on a time and materials basis, there should be close monitoring of the value being delivered via this arrangement and consideration of alternatives, such as recruiting in[1]house resource.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	Careful consideration is given to the commissioning of management consultancy and consideration of the options through development of the procurement business case that is scrutinised at procurement review board.	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place
0.29	23-Jan-23		When commissioning services, ensure that decisions are informed by data, including benchmarking data where available, to demonstrate value for money for Slough's residents.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	This is done through improvement of business cases and cabinet reporting. Business cases are scrutinised at internal strategic boards to ensure that they meet the intended strategic aims.	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place
0.3	23-Jan-23		Ensure there is an effective mechanism to review commissioning activity, including reviewing whether the arrangement delivered on the intended strategic aims and capturing any lessons learned. Regular reports should be presented to CLT and the Lead Member responsible for contract management.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	as above	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place
1	26 September 2023	3	<p><b>a. That where appropriate, the action/improvement plans to deliver the Directions are couched in terms of Outcomes: and</b></p> <p><b>b. Under Direction 5, Culture Change: The expression of outcome/s will prove helpful to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Provide the focus for IRB work;</li> <li>· Establish the building blocks of a Public Engagement and Communication Strategy; and</li> <li>· Restore a more positive dialogue with residents, businesses and service users.</li> </ul>	16 October 2023					This recommendation was not formally addressed by cabinet at its last meeting, steps are being undertaken to resolve

2	24 October 2023	4	<i>That a plan is developed and implemented with the objective to increase, over time, the data collected relating to the protected characteristics of all service users/customers and residents, Services should be prioritised on agreed criteria that should include: potential for inequality to affect access; impact on the individual; cost of data collection, and ease of data collection. This will provide assurance that our services do not carry unconscious bias to the detriment of any individuals or communities of place, interest or association (including PCs as a priority). This should be reflected as an equality objective in the strategy.</i>	20 November 2023					Link to work on Evidenced based decision making?
3	24 October 2023	4	<i>That future reports on PSED offer greater emphasis/detail about objectives and work carried out in relation to residents and services.</i>	20 November 2023					
4	28 November 2023	4	Focus resources on those areas where self-assessment has identified the most opportunity for improvement. Consideration should be given to whether some areas could be safely deprioritised in order to deliver more impactful improvements in another areas.	15 January 2024					Relates to findings of the Task Group on ASC preparedness for CQC
5	28 November 2023	4	Carry out an audit of officers' data analysis skills to identify the analytical skills and capabilities of officers in different departments across the organisation. Staff with data skills should be used to help mitigate those risks identified by the self-assessment that are dependent on data collection, analysis and interpretation (recognising that not all risks are addressed by this skillset).	15 January 2024					Relates to findings of the Task Group on ASC preparedness for CQC
6	28 November 2023	4	Prepare an 'inspection visit action plan' that will be used to guide the council upon receipt of notification of a pending inspection.	15 January 2024					Relates to findings of the Task Group on ASC preparedness for CQC
7	28 November 2023	4	Ensure that the Integrated care systems/Board continues to be engaged with and that it understands its role and relevance in an inspection of Adult Social Care (noting that they will be subject to their own CQC inspection too).	15 January 2024					Relates to findings of the Task Group on ASC preparedness for CQC
9	28 November 2023	4	Document the Slough Story and a Vision for ASCs ambition as soon as possible and circulate it to stakeholders as the first phase in the Council's engagement on the pending CQC assessment.	15 January 2024					Relates to findings of the Task Group on ASC preparedness for CQC

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
	Action Number Cisca	DETAIL	Lead Member/ Officer	Delegated to	Deadline	Actioned Y/N	Date Completed	Detail of action taken	Date of CISC	Related Item No	Notes
1	0.1	In relation to Improvement and recovery the Director undertook to provide the most up to date information on delivery of actions to Members after the meeting.	Sarah Hayward	Dean Tyler	04-Jan-24	Y			27/06/2023	5	
2	0.2	Noted that Members could request the inclusion of KPIs in the scrutiny work programme at appropriate times during the procurement and commissioning cycle, and officers would be available to help Members shape their key lines of enquiry	SH	DT	Future relevant scrutiny items	Y		Training is being provided on performance data and other datasets available to scrutiny. The reports will be held in the reference Library for members	27/06/2023		
3	0.3	AT asked Members to provide feedback about how future such scrutiny reports could be better structured.	AT	All committee members	20-Oct-23	Y			27/06/2023		
4	0.4	The Lead Member for improvement and Recovery undertook to investigate concerns about Nova House and request that an update report be provided to a future meeting of the Committee	Cllr Smith SH								
5	1	Revised information going forward that reconciles the RAG status of the Directions with Outcomes and the workstreams to deliver them with actions, outputs and milestones that will indicate progress	Cllr D Smith Sarah Hayward (SH)	DT	04 January 2024	Y			26/09/2023	3	
6	2	That in future quarterly reports, the commentary includes a summary of the direction of travel and momentum for the Directions.	Cllr D Smith SH	Dean Tyler	04 January 2024	Y			26/09/2023	3	
7	3	More information to be provided to understand the reasons and plans for the carry forward monies related to drug and alcohol Table 7 in item 4 alongside budgeted activity in Appendix 1 item 5	Cllr Chahal Adele Taylor (AT)	Neil Haddock	23 <sup>rd</sup> October 2023	Y	25/10/2023	The carry forward relates to the Public Health funding allocation in respect of the Drug and Alcohol Team programme for 2022/23 of £38k with the programme underspending by £14k. The underspend was due to slippage in the delivery of the programme mainly relating to a small number of rehab and detox placements not going ahead as originally planned. The carried forward budget of £14k will be added to this year's budget with commitments to match resulting in no impact on the current forecast variance in 2023/24.	26/09/2023	4&5	This was requested to assist members to 'follow the money' and to inform their understanding of budgeting for scrutiny of 24/25 budget. Circulate to members via scrutiny officer
8	5	Scrutiny members have offered their support to Adele Taylor and finance officers to trial budget dashboarding	AT		31 March 2024			Would make sense to incorporate this presentation element into discussions about Budget Srutiny 2025-26	26/09/2023	4&5	Possibly link it to budget setting cycle for 24-25 budget.
9	6	Scrutiny officer to develop and propose process to suggest new potential agenda items for forward plan	Stephen Taylor	Michael Edley (MTE)	28 November 2023	Y	23-Nov	Circulated to members. Already adopted	26/09/2023	6	Members need a process that they can have confidence in and manages stakeholders expectations. Proposal to be circulated in advance prior to fomal adoption on 28th Novg
10	7	Request for more detail on the projects in Phases 2 and 3	Simon Sharkey-Woods SSW		28-Nov-23	Y	25/11/2023	The list in Appendix A provides a comprehensive list of the projects the ICT & Digital Team has on its portfolio. As requested by Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee, each entry has a statement about the resident impact they will have.	24/10/2023	3	<a href="#">Appendix A for action Cisca007.docx</a>
11	8	Further information regarding the Ark data centre suppliers	SSW		28-Nov-23	Y		The new Crown Hosting Data Centre (ARK) provides: -secure, scalable and resilient data centre facilities for public sector customers (central government, local government, defence, health, policing and justice) -all services are secure to Official as MINIMUM standard (For details of exactly what this means go here: Government Security Classifications Policy -use best of breed energy efficiency technology, complying with HMG greening government ICT strategy -have dedicated public sector data halls -comply with National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) guidelines and Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI) guidance -are brand new, built from the ground up highly resilient Tier 3 facilities. Tier 3 is defined as: A data centre with multiple paths for power and cooling, and redundant systems that allow the staff to work on the setup without taking it offline. This tier has an expected uptime of 99.982% per year. -built in multiple site synchronous replication for assured business continuity -scalable and resilient connectivity to network services framework, PSN, N3 and RLI/SLI services -uses high speed data centre interconnects.	24/10/2023	3	
12							25/11/2023				

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K																																																						
14	9	Residents' access to the council through new IT and its availability to particular communities to be referred to the Task Group on resident engagement	SH & MTE	Caroline Adlem & Michael Edley	28-Nov-23	Y	28/11/2023	This will be included in the task & finish groups investigations	24/10/2023	3																																																							
15	10	Refresh of IT Strategy in January to be brought to Committee	SSW		May onwards 2024			To support the review of the 3-year strategy we will be undertaking a peer review by the LGA that will focus on the Councils ability to continue to move forward with ICT and Digital improvements.	24/10/2023	3																																																							
16	11	Share information of resident interaction with WEBSITE forms etc	SSW		28-Nov-23	Y	25/11/2023	Here are the top 20 form submissions for October 2023: <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Form Title</th> <th>Submissions Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>General enquiry</td><td>4794</td></tr> <tr><td>Council tax enquiry v2</td><td>2141</td></tr> <tr><td>School admissions enquiry</td><td>644</td></tr> <tr><td>Customer access book an appointment</td><td>628</td></tr> <tr><td>Contact us</td><td>457</td></tr> <tr><td>Report missed bin collection</td><td>381</td></tr> <tr><td>Household support fund application</td><td>366</td></tr> <tr><td>Employment application</td><td>219</td></tr> <tr><td>Free school meals application - Eligibility outcome</td><td>195</td></tr> <tr><td>Free school meals application</td><td>190</td></tr> <tr><td>Report flytipping, flyposting or flyboarding</td><td>186</td></tr> <tr><td>Garden waste collection</td><td>133</td></tr> <tr><td>Report a highways issue</td><td>128</td></tr> <tr><td>Concessionary bus pass application for the elderly and disabled</td><td>116</td></tr> <tr><td>Council tax enquiry</td><td>102</td></tr> <tr><td>Order a new or replacement bin</td><td>98</td></tr> <tr><td>Housing service repairs request</td><td>96</td></tr> <tr><td>Community centres for hire enquiry</td><td>95</td></tr> <tr><td>Bulky waste collection</td><td>83</td></tr> <tr><td>Report a statutory nuisance</td><td>79</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Form Title	Submissions Count	General enquiry	4794	Council tax enquiry v2	2141	School admissions enquiry	644	Customer access book an appointment	628	Contact us	457	Report missed bin collection	381	Household support fund application	366	Employment application	219	Free school meals application - Eligibility outcome	195	Free school meals application	190	Report flytipping, flyposting or flyboarding	186	Garden waste collection	133	Report a highways issue	128	Concessionary bus pass application for the elderly and disabled	116	Council tax enquiry	102	Order a new or replacement bin	98	Housing service repairs request	96	Community centres for hire enquiry	95	Bulky waste collection	83	Report a statutory nuisance	79	24/10/2023	3	More generally, here are the stats for the website as a whole during October 2023: <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Month</th> <th>Total web users</th> <th>Total E-forms completed (excluding staff forms)</th> <th>% of desktop users</th> <th>% of mobile users</th> <th>% of tablet users</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Oct-23</td> <td>201,585</td> <td>12,089</td> <td>41.8</td> <td>56.3</td> <td>1.9</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Month	Total web users	Total E-forms completed (excluding staff forms)	% of desktop users	% of mobile users	% of tablet users	Oct-23	201,585	12,089	41.8	56.3	1.9
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17	12	Progress report on ICT digitisation and modernisation to come to CISC in 6 months	SH		May 2024 onwards			Will be included in Forward Workplan Review for 2024-25 to take place in May/June 2024	24/10/2023	3																																																							
18	13	Propose progress report on PSED to fall a few months after T&F report on engagement and to include self assessment against EDI framework	SH		May 2024 onwards			Will be included in Forward Workplan Review for 2024-25	24/10/2023	4																																																							
19	14	information on how the council will actively draw upon the diversity of SBC workforce to moderate and inform service development and improvement	SH		May 2024 onwards			Will be included in Forward Workplan Review for 2024-25	24/10/2023	4																																																							
20	15	Request that, in future procurement updates, where new procurements are reported, there is clarification that this relates to new contracts not existing contracts reported in the over £500 spend reports	SH	Clare Priest (CP)	May 2024 onwards			Will be included in Forward Workplan Review for 2024-25	24/10/2023	5																																																							
21	16	Suggestion that Procurement considers picking up, outside of scrutiny, cost benefit of issues and possibilities of in-cab IT	SH	CP	N/A	-	N/A	Not a scrutiny matter	24/10/2023	5	CP to contact Cllr Iftakhar for more detail and inform of action outside of scrutiny																																																						
22	17	Cllr Stedmond to pass on to Chris Stratford, outside of scrutiny, details regarding outstanding issues with a number of housing repairs for residents in his ward	MG	Chris Stratford (CS)	N/A	-	N/A	Not a scrutiny matter	24/10/2023	5	CS to respond to Cllr Stedmond outside of scrutiny																																																						
23	18	Cllr Hulme to pass on information to MTE gleaned from pilot CQA authorities to include in Task group report	MTE		November 10 2023	Y	10/11/2023	Information included in formulating recommendations in report	24/10/2023	5																																																							
24	19	2025-26 budget scrutiny arrangements are put in place that follow or closely align to CIPfA guidelines.	AT	MTE, Chair +AT	26-Mar-24				28/11/2023	3	<a href="https://sloughbc-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/p/personal/michael_edley_slough_gov_uk/EQBahCH_CMBJkfrDK_9p4ocBxa48HuBIEF1OVsd-a1kohA7e=pZFFm">https://sloughbc-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/p/personal/michael_edley_slough_gov_uk/EQBahCH_CMBJkfrDK_9p4ocBxa48HuBIEF1OVsd-a1kohA7e=pZFFm</a>																																																						
25	20	Committee to request an update, on the effectiveness of the housing actions set out in the presentation as a "for information" report	Pat Hayes (PH)	CS	May 2024 onwards			Note in the first instance, may want to ask for an update "for information" but consider option for Committee report in 24/25 forward planning	28/11/2023	3																																																							

## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date:</b>	4 January 2024
<b>Subject:</b>	Quarterly Improvement and Recovery report
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Dexter Smith, Leader of the Council
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Stephen Brown
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Sarah Hayward
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Key Decision:</b>	NO
<b>Exempt:</b>	NO
<b>Decision Subject To Call In:</b>	NO
<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix A – Report to November Improvement and Recovery Board (IRB).

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report provides the quarterly update to Scrutiny on progress being made by the Council against the Secretary of State Directions issued in December 2021, and the overall council recovery plan.

#### Recommendations:

- 1.2 Scrutiny is requested to make any comments on the following to inform the consideration of this report by Cabinet:
- a) Note and comment on the progress made by the Council since the previous report in addressing the Directions of the Secretary of State;
  - b) Advise officers on how Scrutiny members can most effectively be engaged to support Slough's recovery journey, including but not limited to commenting on whether this reporting approach enables members to effectively scrutinise recovery progress and make appropriate recommendations to officers or the executive.

#### Reason

- 1.3 The then Cabinet agreed on 21 November 2022 to receive quarterly updates from the councils Improvement and Recovery Board chaired by government commissioners.

- 1.4 Information from the most recent Improvement and Recovery Board is attached as Appendix A.
- 1.5 Formal meetings with Commissioners continue monthly in the form of the Improvement and Recovery Board. Quarterly updates will continue to be brought to Scrutiny and Cabinet setting out the detail of the issues reported on at these progress meetings along with additional areas of focus and activity as required by Commissioners. Other Scrutiny and Cabinet reports will also reference progress and agendas and decisions will strongly link to improvement and recovery activity.
- 1.6 In the past year regular reporting on improvement and recovery has been embedded in the Cabinet forward plan. The council's scrutiny programme is also focussed much more tightly on improvement and recovery. As this has been in place for a year now, it would be useful for scrutiny to reflect on how this regular reporting can add further value to Slough's Scrutiny process and ultimately our recovery.
- 1.7 Consideration has also been given to how best to involve all councillors in recovery. Regular discussion at full council is now programmed with the first debate taking place in November 2023. A summary of the discussion is set out below:

Members received a report which provided an update on progress being made by the council against the Secretary of State Directions issued in December 2021, and the overall council recovery plan. The Mayor invited the Lead Commissioner, Gavin Jones, to address the meeting.

Mr Jones stated that council had made progress in a number of key areas and demonstrated a commitment to improvement. However, the scale of problems facing the council was significant and more demonstrable and sustained improvement was required and that there needed to be a quickening of pace in delivery of change.

The financial position of the council remained fragile, in a challenging financial environment, and the key challenge for the council was how it balanced operational recovery whilst addressing the ministerial directions against financial sustainability. Although the senior leadership team had provided some stability, successful recruitment to the new structure, to introduce new capability and increase capacity, was vital to the continued rebuilding of the organisation. The gap in capability was limiting the speed in which the council had made progress.

It was stated that the council had managed an all-out election very effectively resulting in a change in administration, with new and inexperienced members on board. Although member training had been provided, it was strongly encouraged that there was continuous development and learning opportunities for all members to enable them to carry out their roles effectively. Recent improvement in audit actions being completed and routinely actioned upon was noted.

A key part of financial recovery was a successful asset disposal programme to generate capital receipts and this continued to be on track. However, phase 2 of the disposals was likely to pose a greater challenge, as it transitioned to the operational estate and in view of the current market and economic conditions meant that this would be challenging.

It was highlighted that although financial recovery and sustainability was critical, the challenge for the council was that it did so in a manner that ensured it continued to provide services to meet the needs of its most vulnerable residents of the borough.

In the ensuing question and answer session, Members asked a range of questions and replies were given by the Commissioner. Questions from Members included the risks posed by un-closed accounts and outstanding audit actions from previous years; progress on the culture change programme within the council; the costs of the senior management restructure; the medium term financial outlook; and governance issues specifically regarding the council companies and the audit and corporate governance committee.

The Leader of the Council thanked the Commissioner for his attendance and providing an update to the meeting. It was noted that there would be six monthly updates to council meetings on the progress of the council's journey to recovery and improvement.

- 1.8 This report and the appendix set out the progress made to date and the next steps to deliver change against the journey to recovery and improvement.

### **Commissioner Review**

Noted - no other comment from commissioners.

## **2. Report**

### **Introduction**

- 2.1 As previously reported Members are aware the Council received a formal direction from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities made under s.15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999, including a direction that prescribed functions are to be exercised by Commissioners; and the appointment of Commissioners from 1 December 2021.
- 2.2 The Council took a number of steps, including approving a new Corporate Plan in May 2022 that set out its strategy for improvement. This was refreshed in September 2023.
- 2.3 Commissioners have recognised that there is now a more holistic approach to reporting progress against the various action plans in place to address the Directions and this is presented in the reports attached to the Improvement and Recovery Board.
- 2.4 The Commissioners' have written three reports to the Secretary of State to date, the most recent of these being published on 14 September 2023 with a parliamentary statement and accompanying letter to the council – all documents can be found on the government website here [Intervention at Slough Borough Council - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/intervention-at-slough-borough-council).

## **3 Background**

- 3.1 It was agreed by Cabinet in November 2022 that regular public reporting on the Council's ongoing response to Government intervention was essential to ensure transparency and accountability.

- 3.2 These reports are submitted to Scrutiny Committee first to provide the opportunity for comment to Cabinet.
- 3.3 It is now two years since Commissioners were appointed by the Secretary of State. During that time the Council has had the opportunity to discuss with Commissioners the extent of the challenges it faces.
- 3.4 Commissioners' submit regular reports to the Secretary of State, the latest of which was published on 14 September. The letter to the Chief Executive from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities commented that:

The report notes that this has been a period of change for the Council, with a refreshed Commissioner Team in place and a change in political leadership. The report highlights that the intervention is now at a pivot point. The Council is demonstrating commitment to improvement and has achieved a number of successes, such as a stable corporate leadership team, a successful move to all out elections and an improvement in report quality and financial oversight.

However, the report also acknowledges that the scale of the challenges facing Slough remains significant and that the Council needs to demonstrate a commitment to accelerating the pace of transformation, provide more evidence of further implementation of changes and demonstrate greater grip on the financial position. The report also identifies a number of specific priorities, such as strengthening capacity within the management tier, implementing a robust performance management system, building on culture change work and producing a Medium-Term Financial Plan for the coming years.

In his Written Ministerial Statement the Minister notes that he is pleased to see evidence for cautious optimism, whilst acknowledging the significant scale of the challenges still facing the Council, and that following the changes at Slough in recent months this is an excellent opportunity for the Council to make substantial progress towards resolving its Best Value failure.
- 3.5 The appendix to this report presents an overview of the workstreams in place to address each of the Directions and how these have been reported to Commissioners.
- 3.6 The report is taken to scrutiny, cabinet and council to ensure members are playing a full role in the council's recovery. For each report the most up-to-date IRB paper is attached.
- 3.7 Work is currently underway to address the issues identified in the Commissioner's most recent report and prepare for their next letter which will effectively be the second annual report.

## **4 Implications of the Recommendation**

### **Financial implications**

- 4.1 Overall, navigating these financial implications requires judicious budget management to ensure successful plan implementation while maintaining financial stability.
- 4.2 The report on Government intervention highlights financial implications: reallocating resources or securing additional funds for improvement plans, increased costs for monitoring and reporting transparency, substantial investments for action plans addressing culture change, and public engagement. Addressing management capacity may require hiring and restructuring expenses. Developing a Medium-Term Financial Plan, initiating positive dialogue, and meeting Scrutiny



Committee requests entail additional costs, necessitating careful budget evaluation for effective implementation without significantly impacting operational finances.

### **Legal implications**

- 4.3 On 1 December 2021 the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities made statutory directions requiring the Council to take prescribed actions and that certain functions be exercised from this date by appointed Commissioners, acting jointly or severally. The directions were extended on 1 September 2022. The directions were made under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999 due to the Council having failed to comply with its best value duty. The general duty of best value is set out in section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 and requires local authorities to “make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness”. This requires consideration of overall value, including economic, environmental and social value, when reviewing service provision. There is also a duty to consult when deciding how to fulfil the best value duty.
- 4.4 Annex A of the directions set out the action the Council is required to take. Annex C sets out the functions to be exercised by the Commissioners. This includes functions associated with governance and scrutiny of strategic decisions, requirements for the proper administration of financial affairs, functions associated with the oversight of collection of revenues and benefits and appointment of the three statutory governance officers and the scrutiny officer, as well as functions to define the officer structure at a senior level, determine recruitment processes and recruit relevant staff to these positions. The Explanatory Memorandum to this Direction confirms that in practice most decisions are expected to be taken by the Council, however the Directions are designed to give the Commissioners the power to tackle weaknesses identified to ensure the Council is better equipped to meet the best value requirements. Cabinet should have regard to the advice and comments of the Commissioners contained in this report.

### **Risk management implications**

- 4.5 The table below sets the key risks:

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Mitigations</b>
Financial	Failure to deliver financial sustainability	Financial action plan, Capitalisation Directive and immediate to long-term savings plans
Legal	Failure to address the Directions and demonstrate compliance with the Council's best value duties or other legal duties leading to increased legal challenges to decision-making and further statutory intervention.	Appointment of new interim Monitoring Officer to bolster capacity at senior management level. Recruitment of interim support for governance and scrutiny.  A whole system approach, focusing on the basics of local government governance and decision making, including training and development and involvement of legal services at an earlier stage of policy formulation.
Reputational	Failure to meet the requirements contained in the Directions leading to further intervention from Government	A more comprehensive and corporate approach has been developed building on lessons learned over the past year to provide greater confidence in the Council's journey and direction of travel

### **Environmental Implications**

4.6 There are no direct environmental implications as a result of the recommendations contained in this report.

### **Equality implications**

4.7 The Council has a duty contained in section 149 of the Equality Act to have due regard to the need to:

- a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The protected characteristics are::

- |                                                   |                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> age                      | <input type="checkbox"/> race;               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> disability;              | <input type="checkbox"/> religion or belief; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gender reassignment;     | <input type="checkbox"/> sex;                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> pregnancy and maternity; | <input type="checkbox"/> sexual orientation. |

The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day-to-day business and to keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services.

### **Procurement implications**

- 4.8 One of the Directions includes specific reference to the procurement and contract management function and this is detailed in the Appendix.

### **Workforce implications**

- 4.9 Any future changes to the workforce will be subject to full statutory processes and consultation.

### **Property implications**

- 4.10 The Council has developed an Asset Disposal Strategy and this has been approved by Cabinet.

## **5 Background Papers**

- 5.1 None.

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Strategy and Improvement

# Improvement and Recovery Board

Page 7

Progress Report  
23-Nov-23

*Report Owner: Sarah Hayward, ED Strategy and Improvement*  
*Report Author: Strategy and Improvement Team*





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
## Headline Commentary

- Member behaviours addressed with re-drafted protocol – report included on agenda from Sarah Wilson.
- Positive response to adverts for initial Director roles for new senior management structure. Closing date 23 November. Planned interviews and potential offers before the end of the calendar year.
- All councils now submit a detailed record of all adult social care clients to DHSC (Client Level Data). Our quality report from DHSC was rated as Excellent and ranked in the top tier of council responses for data quality.
- DfE review undertaken and SEND written statement of action produced. Sue Butcher will provide a verbal update as agreed at the last meeting.
- Collation of evidence to inform Commissioners second annual report underway. Discussion required at IRB to agree requirements to evidence 'closing the gap'.
- Work to develop operating model initiated further to discussion leading up to and at last IRB. Session with Leader and Deputy Leader being arranged.
- Data Centre Move executed successfully over weekend of 11 and 12 November.

# Directions Progress Summary



Ref	Direction	CLT Lead (Strategic)	SLT Lead (Operational)	Member (Political)	Target Completion of Current Phase	RAG		Commentary / Progress
						Curr.	Trend	
1	Functional Capability Assessment	Sarah Hayward	Dean Tyler		01-Dec-22		=	14/10 - Service plans have been completed, which will address gaps in capability. These are continuing to be iterated to ensure coherence across services and alignment with the corporate plan. SLT will act as the governance body for the service planning. Next steps are to develop reporting arrangements for monitoring progress in delivery, and ensure lessons for next year are captured.
2	Avoid Poor Governance or Financial Mismanagement	Adele Taylor	Ruth Hodson/ Thomas Mulloy	Leader / Cabinet Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets	31-Mar-24		=	14/11 - Update provided to RTB. Q2 report rescheduled to December Finance Board. 11/10 - Action plan agreed, monitoring to be included in the finance board going forwards. 10/08 - Action plan overview discussed with Commissioner and Lead Member. Paper will go to cabinet in September.
3a	Financial Sustainability Action Plan	Adele Taylor	Ruth Hodson/ Thomas Mulloy	Leader / Cabinet Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets	31-Mar-24		▼	14/11 - Update provided to RTB. Q2 report rescheduled to December Finance Board. 11/10 - MTFS development underway ahead of draft budget to be considered at December cabinet. Still a gap identified hence reducing the RAG status until next review meetings are undertaken in the coming 2 months before the cabinet paper. All processes and steps in place.
3b	Democratic Governance Action Plan	Stephen Taylor	Alexander Polak	Leader	31-Mar-24		=	16/11 - - New streamlined Member/officer protocol in development. - Various improvements to cabinet office processes and support including e.g. allocation of lead support officers to cabinet members, stronger demand-led agenda items for LM&Ds; the Leader has been consulted and is content with LM&Ds as it currently stands however we anticipate this continuing to evolve. - On the recruitment of the permanent monitoring officer and succession planning, an advert has been posted, interviews expected before end of November. - Increased community engagement in the work of scrutiny is a stated ambition of the new scrutiny chair and is a live consideration in the scoping of all T&F groups. However, this priority will be picked up in earnest in the second, third and fourth years of this administration, allowing time for the new scrutiny chair, members and committee to learn and develop their approach in the first year.

# Directions Progress Summary






Ref	Direction	CLT Lead (Strategic)	SLT Lead (Operational)	Member (Political)	Target Completion of Current Phase	RAG		Commentary / Progress
						Curr.	Trend	
3c	Scrutiny Action Plan	Stephen Taylor	Alexander Polak	Chair, Overview & Scrutiny Committee	31-Mar-24		=	<p><b>17/10</b> - Draft work programme now agreed, ASC T&amp;F is preparing its final report for November, reports published for 24 October meeting with a clear focus on drivers of the council's improvement. A workshop-style pre-meeting has taken place for the first time, representing progress in members' development as a committee although not all members attended.</p> <p><b>11/09</b> – Permanent scrutiny officer position has been filled with immediate effect and they led the first meeting of the Adult Social Care Task &amp; Finish Group on <b>06/09</b>; a scope was agreed by the group. Reports for the <b>26/09</b> Scrutiny Committee meeting were submitted on time last week, and Commissioner Curran praised the revised draft work programme, having seen an advance copy.</p>
3d Page 30	Internal Audit Action Plan	Adele Taylor	Satbachan Seehra	Cabinet Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets	31-Mar-24		=	<p><b>10/10</b> - High rated actions are being given priority and are reviewed monthly by DLT's and Executive Directors. Responses from management on audit actions/audit reports are closely monitored and delays are escalated to the Executive Director - Finance and Commercial.</p> <p><b>08/09</b> - All outstanding audit actions and reports were discussed with the representative Associate Directors and Heads of Department at the Risk and Audit Board that was held on 5th September 2023. This will be a recurring theme in future meetings. The next meeting will be held on the 6th December 2023.</p>



# Directions Progress Summary

Ref	Direction	CLT Lead (Strategic)	SLT Lead (Operational)	Member (Political)	Target Completion of Current Phase	RAG		Commentary / Progress
						Curr.	Trend	
3e  Page 31	Procurement and Contract Management Action Plan	Adele Taylor	Clare Priest	Lead Member for Financial Oversight, Council Assets, Procurement and Revenues & Benefits	31-Mar-24		=	<p><b>01/11</b> Attended SME event at Arbour park and further opportunity to engage with SME's is taking place on 15 November which has been organised by Natwest. Confirmed as one of two local authorities piloting contract management process mapping with local partnerships, this is taking place on 28 November. Outcomes from the session will inform the work of developing improved contract management procedures. Commercial strategy has been drafted. Reported to Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee on 24 October on improvements in service.</p> <p><b>04/10</b> - Improvement plan to implement recommendations from process mapping exercise is live, which includes improvements to processes and procedures. Work to develop a contract management framework and refresh of the commercial strategy has commenced. Successfully recruited a procurement category manager, a further round of recruitment will be undertaken to recruit to the 2 remaining posts. Social value pilot underway and work with SME's has commenced, working with the economic development team on an event in October. Reporting to October Corporate Improvement Scrutiny committee.</p>
3f	Information Technology Action Plan	Sarah Hayward	Simon SharkeyWoods	Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance	31-Mar-24		▲	<p><b>14/11</b> - Data Centre Move executed successfully and as of Monday morning only two issues were remaining. They were connectivity to the public services network (PSN) and a failure of our security access system. Both were resolved by the end of the working day on Monday 13th November.</p> <p><b>06/11</b> - November ICT&amp;D Update Cabinet report has been signed off by all stakeholders, including the Commissioners and will be discussed at the meeting on the 20th November. ICT&amp;D will be undertaking an annual review of the ICT&amp;D Strategy in Q1 2024 and the updated version taken to Cabinet so that the new administration of the Council can take full ownership of the direction of travel. To support the annual review and with agreement of the commissioners, an LGA peer review will be undertaken around ICT&amp;D and this will be a useful input for the updated strategy. The data centre move project has identified a number of risks since the last update but through good engagement across the Council the team has managed to maintain the envisaged timeline and the work will take place across the weekend of the 10th - 12th November. Progress on provisioning better, more reliable end-user devices has been good and the team is still on track to begin releasing devices to staff to the new standard in the New Year.</p>

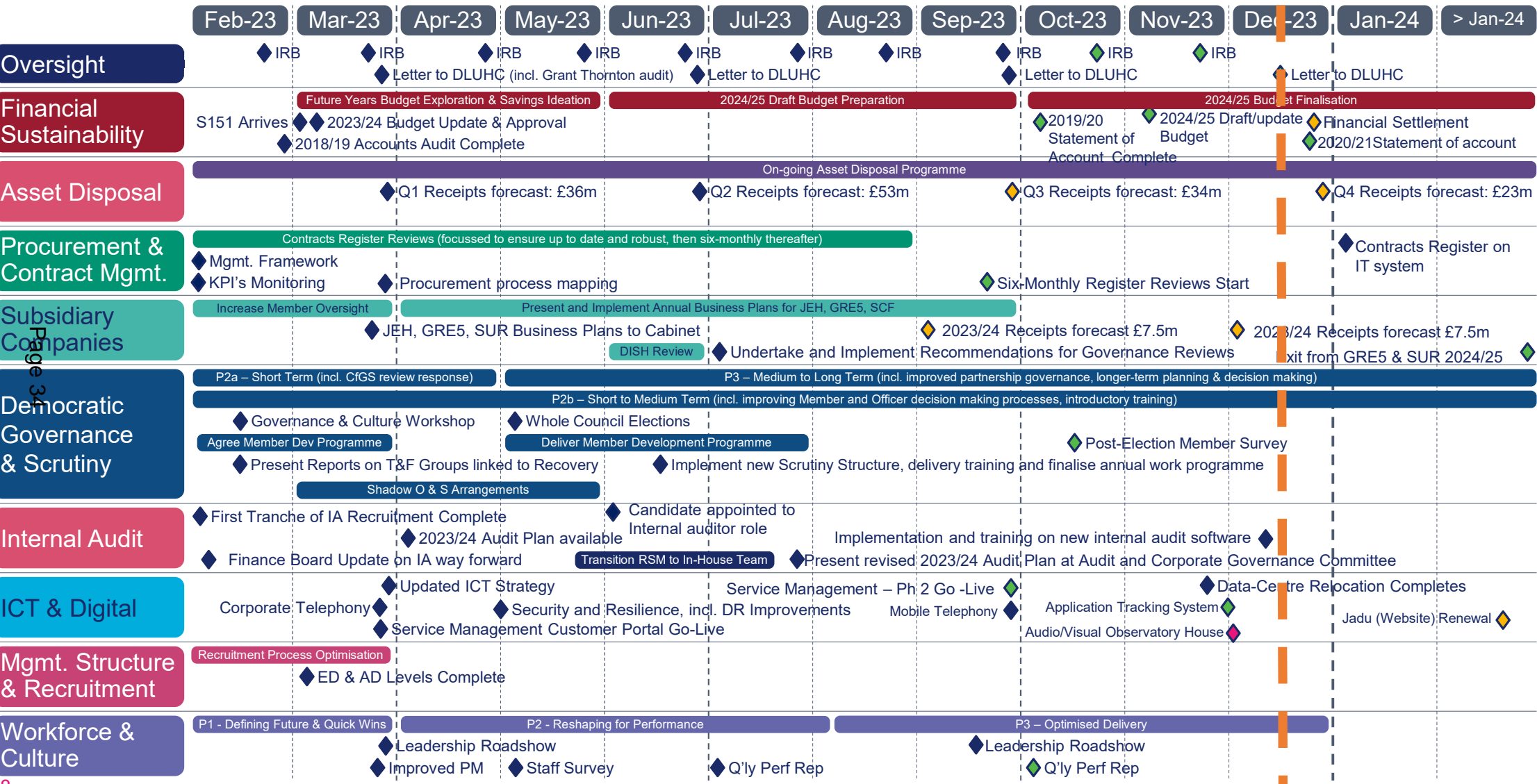
# Directions Progress Summary

Ref	Direction	CLT Lead (Strategic)	SLT Lead (Operational)	Member (Political)	Target Completion of Current Phase	RAG		Commentary / Progress
						Curr.	Trend	
3g	Suitable Officer Structure and Scheme of Delegation	Stephen Brown	Sarah Wilson (MO)	Leader	01-Oct-22		=	Please see direction 8.
4	Improvement Plan Monthly Reporting	Sarah Hayward	Andrew Merritt Morling/ Deemple Brain	Leader	31-Mar-24		=	<p><b>16/11</b> Discussing with the Directors how the Corporate Plan can be strategically implemented across their service and link in with Service plans</p> <p><b>10/10</b> Improvement plan monthly reporting has been implemented for a year. Reporting will be refreshed upon agreement of the assurance framework.</p>
5	Culture Change	Stephen Brown	Sarah Hayward	Leader	31-Mar-24		▲	<p><b>16/11</b> CLT workshop planned for 22 Nov with LGA Facilitators. Workshops taking place throughout November/mid December with staff on cultural challenges. Hybrid working policy implemented and lessons learned to be performed</p> <p><b>10/10</b> - Next CLT workshop now been targeted for November with external facilitation being lined up. Refresh of headline plans progressing well.</p>
6	Subsidiary Company Review	Adele Taylor / Sarah Wilson	Mark Halligan	Cabinet Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets	31-Mar-24		▲	<p><b>16/11</b> - Update to RTB on Slough Urban Renewal, James Elliman Homes, DISH, GRE5. SUR is a Joint Venture.</p> <p>- SUR scope is under review, and land asset sales underway - update report to Cabinet in September.</p> <p>- GRE5 - update report to Cabinet in September. Work underway to make building safe.</p> <p>- JEH and DISH. Working through Director roles due to staff leaving. Companies House changes underway.</p> <p>- Next paper planned to go to March Cabinet.</p>
7	Evidence Based Decision Making	Sarah Hayward	Dean Tyler	Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance	31-Mar-24		▲	<p><b>08/11</b> - Feedback from DHSC programme lead that new Adult statutory return rated as 'Excellent'.</p> <p>October - Performance Management Workspace now live. First iterations of Power BI reporting dashboards developed.</p> <p><b>22/09</b> - Business case approved for interim additional data analyst capacity in Adult Social Care and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.</p>

## Directions Progress Summary

Ref	Direction	CLT Lead (Strategic)	SLT Lead (Operational)	Member (Political)	Target Completion of Current Phase	RAG		Commentary / Progress
						Curr.	Trend	
8	Senior Officer Structure and Recruitment	Commissioners	Stephen Brown		31-Mar-23	C	=	<p><b>13/04</b> - Now considered BAU, however a restructure at the AD and levels immediate below is about to get underway.</p> <p><b>03/02</b> - ED for Strategy and Improvement has been appointed. This was the last remaining vacancy in CLT.</p>
SEND	DfE Issued SEND Direction	Sue Butcher	Neil Hoskinson	Cabinet Member for Education, Children's Services, Lifelong Skills and Governance	31-Mar-24 (FOR REVIEW)	A	▲	<p><b>13/11</b> - DfE Formal Review of the intervention took place in Observatory House. DfE and Commissioner provided positive feedback on progress, whilst noting there is further improvement required over the next few months.</p> <p><b>10/09</b> - Draft SEND action plan reorganises the actions in the 7 priorities in the Written Statement of Action into 5 workstreams to mitigate against silo working.</p>

# Recovery Plan on a Page – Updated December 2023



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Note, RAG Status against individual milestones does not represent overall service status

# Finance Improvement Action plan

- Presentation is different style as per agreed at September 2023 Finance board – highlight RAG status and progress in dashboard style and exception reporting
  - The action plan remains a living, breathing document and will be closely linked to outcomes of internal audits during the year
- This report considers progress against those actions where work is underway and/or deadline for completion is imminent.
- Project support resources identified to support the oversight of the improvement action plan delivery, to be in place ahead of the next reporting cycle

# Reporting by exception

## Completion of statement of accounts – Green to Red

- The plan for completion of statement of accounts is well underway and will be discussed with GT once further national framework is confirmed in Nov 23 instead as originally planned Oct 23
- Earliest set of unqualified accounts likely now to be 2023/24 now instead of 2022/23 due to government proposing a backstop where any accounts including 2022/23 will be issued a disclaimer opinion

## Financial budget monitoring and reporting – Green to Amber

- The Quarter 2 report was due to be presented in November Finance Board and this will now be presented in December

# Reporting by exception

## Treasury Management - Green to Amber

- Both 22/23 outturn and Q1 23/24 reports have now been delayed to the next Audit & Corporate Governance Committee, rather than on 22nd Nov.

## Deep Dive Projects – Green to Amber

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This project is currently an Amber as no completion dates have been assigned for these projects

## Asset Disposals – Forward Month

The priorities for the Asset Disposal Programme over the next month include:

- Secure the approvals necessary to move forward with transactions from the HRA
- Seek clarity on the approach to appropriating assets from HRA to GF in connection with the disposal programme, so that the GF secures some financial benefit from the disposal of assets currently within the HRA.
- Develop Cabinet report to seek some portfolio wide delegations for the HRA (non-residential) stock
- Progress review of Net Book Values of pipeline sales.
- Seek to launch sites where revised Net Book Values align to anticipated capital receipts.
- Complete October auction sales and prepare sites for future auctions.
- Continued identification of further disposal opportunities.
- Finalise reports for December Cabinet on the Estate Strategy and Observatory House business case.



# Internal Audit Actions Report

## November 2023

# Update on Internal Audit Actions

## **21/22 internal audits:**

- Actions completed as at end of October number 238 or 73% of the total due. A concerted effort is being made by CLT to close the remaining 89 actions or 27% that are overdue.

## **22/23 internal audits:**

- 225 actions have been raised for 2022/23. As of end of October 2023, 59 actions or 26% are overdue and 97 or 43% complete. 69 actions or 31% are not due.

## **23/24 internal audits:**

- 4 audit reports have been finalised with 5 audit reports are in draft status. 66 actions have been raised for 2023/24. 8 actions or 12% are overdue and 27 actions or 41% are not due. 22 or 33% of actions have not been allocated.

# 23/24 Internal Audit Plan Update

- Four audits have been finalised, with five audits in management review.

Status	Name of Review	Classification	Total Number of Findings		
			High	Medium	Low
Draft	Follow Up	Little Progress	2	3	4
Draft	Cash Collection and Management	Minimal Assurance	2	4	1
Draft	Matrix	Minimal Assurance	2	5	1
Finalised	Adult Safeguarding	Partial Assurance	2	4	1
Draft	Schools Audit - St Bernard's	Partial Assurance	1	6	3
Finalised	Schools Audit - Wexham	Reasonable Assurance	0	1	2
Finalised	Enrolment, School Places and Attendance	Reasonable Assurance	2	4	2
<b>Q1 Total</b>			<b>11</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>14</b>
Finalised	Council Tax	Reasonable Assurance	0	7	1
Draft	Travel and Expenses	Minimal Assurance	3	2	1
<b>Q2 Total</b>			<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>

# Update on Internal Audit Actions

As of 31 October 2023

Total 21/22				
Totals	Total	High	Medium	Low
Not Due	0	0	0	0
<b>Overdue</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>33</b>
Complete	238	52	105	81
Not Allocated	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>114</b>

The number of overdue audit actions has decreased from 98 to 89 since prior month.

As of 3 October 2023

Total 21/22				
Totals	Total	High	Medium	Low
Not Due	0	0	0	0
<b>Overdue</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>34</b>
Complete	229	46	103	80
Not Allocated	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>114</b>

The overdue actions are recommendations not being implemented by their due dates, due to factors such as (but not limited to) resourcing.

# Update on Internal Audit Actions

As of 31 October 2023

Total 22/23				
Totals	Total	High	Medium	Low
Not Due	69	15	40	14
<b>Overdue</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>14</b>
Complete	97	21	50	26
Not Allocated	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>54</b>

The number of overdue audit actions has decreased from 60 to 59, since prior month.

As of 3 October 2023

Total 22/23				
Totals	Total	High	Medium	Low
Not Due	75	17	41	17
<b>Overdue</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>12</b>
Complete	90	19	46	25
Not Allocated	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>54</b>

The overdue actions are due to recommendations not being implemented by their due dates.

# Update on Internal Audit Actions

As of 31 October 2023

Total 23/24				
Totals	Total	High	Medium	Low
Not Due	27	4	16	7
<b>Overdue</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
Complete	9	3	5	1
Not Allocated	22	6	11	5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>16</b>

The number of overdue audit actions has increased from 7 to 8, since prior month.

The overdue actions are due to recommendations not being implemented by their due dates.

As of 3 October 2023

Total 23/24				
Totals	Total	High	Medium	Low
Not Due	14	4	5	5
<b>Overdue</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
Complete	0	0	0	0
Not Allocated	46	11	27	8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>16</b>

22 actions have not been allocated, down from 46, due to two additional audit reports having been finalised since prior month.

# Internal Audit Actions By Directorate

As of 31 October 2023

### 2021/22 OVERDUE AUDIT ACTIONS BY DIRECTORATE

■ High ■ Medium ■ Low

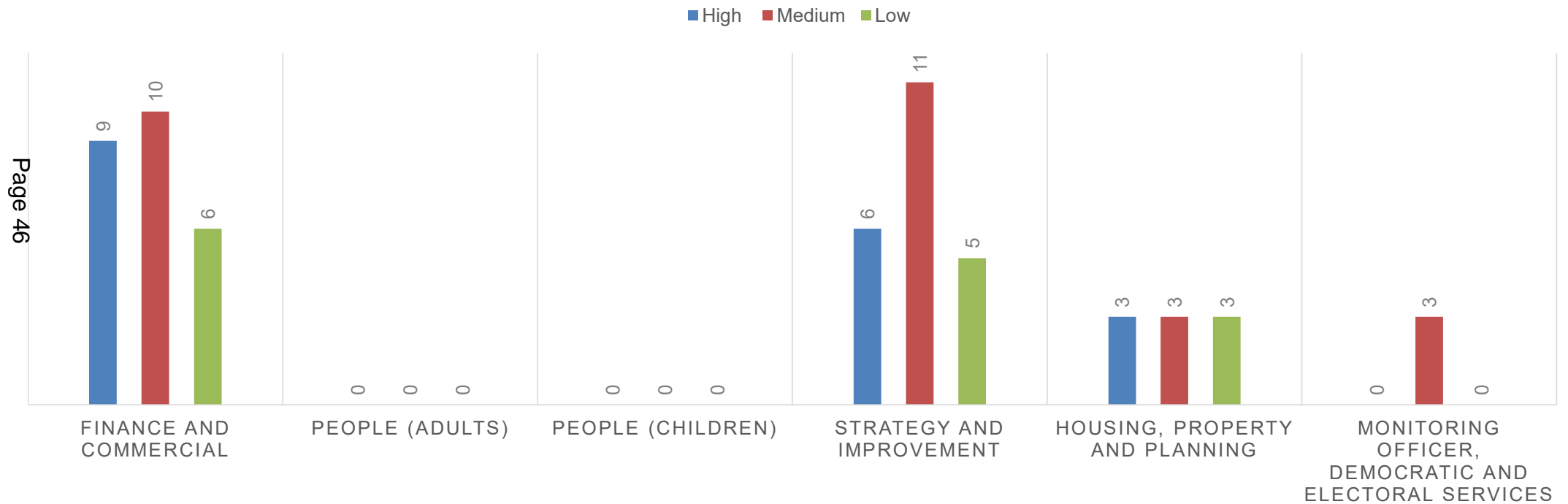


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# Internal Audit Actions By Directorate

As of 31 October 2023

## 2022/23 OVERDUE AUDIT ACTIONS BY DIRECTORATE



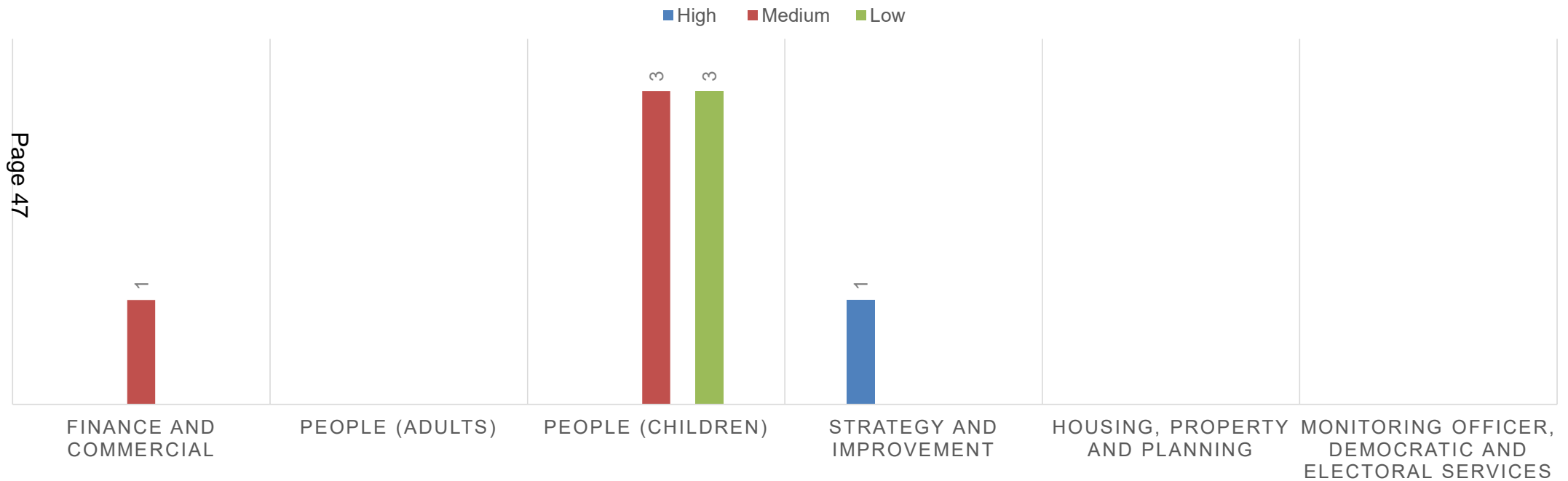
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# Internal Audit Actions By Directorate

As of 31 October 2023

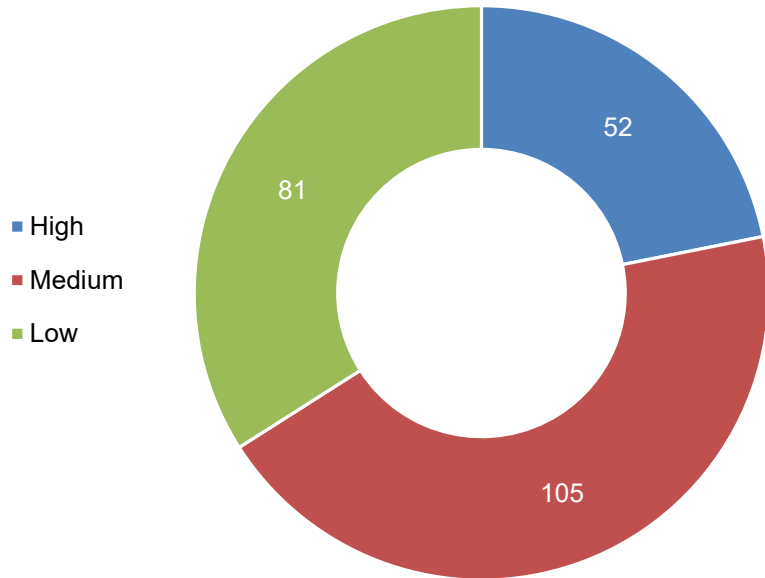
2023/24 OVERDUE AUDIT ACTIONS BY DIRECTORATE



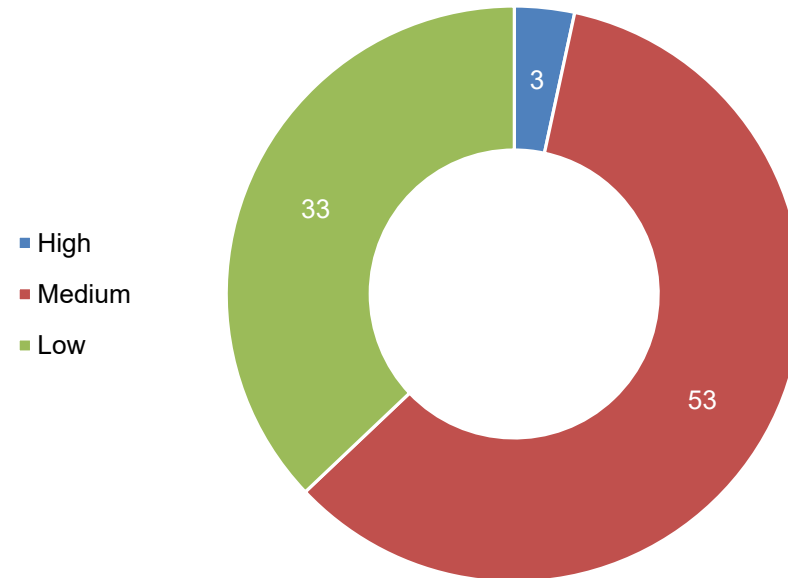
# Internal Audit Actions 2021/22

As of 31 October 2023

2021/22 COMPLETED Audit Actions



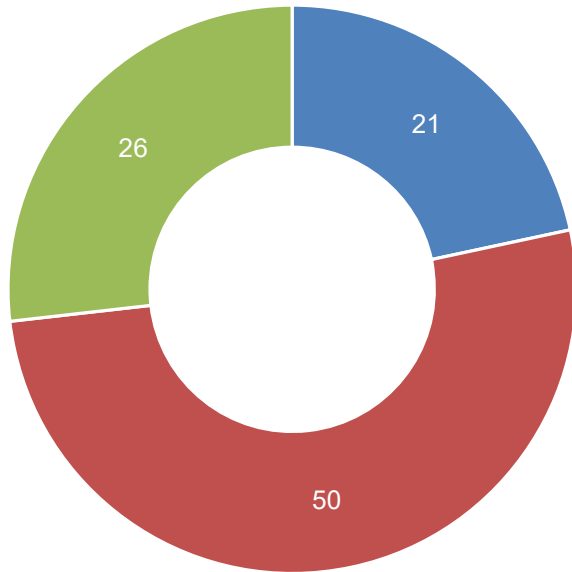
2021/22 OVERDUE Audit Actions



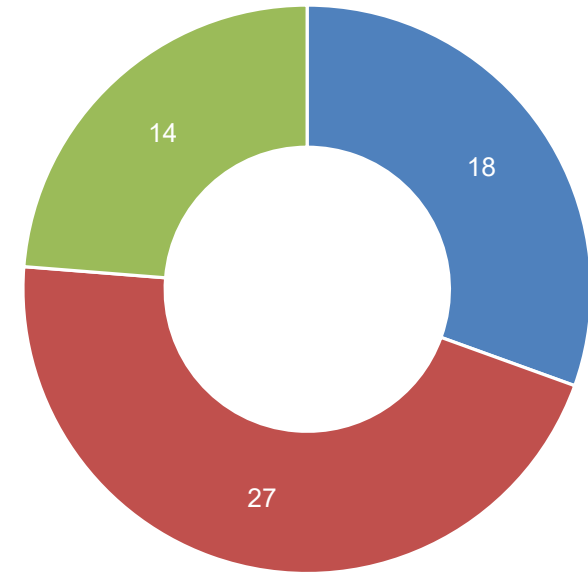
# Internal Audit Actions 2022/23

As of 31 October 2023

2022/23 COMPLETED Audit Actions



2022/23 OVERDUE Audit Actions



1. Contracts register is being used as a business-as-usual tool in forward planning procurement activity, this includes consideration of longer-term procurement activity required for high value, high risk contracts. Meetings with Executive Directors and their management teams to commence in November.
2. Utilising existing IT systems for the contract register – options for the implementation on Agresso commenced in July 2023 and currently looking at either pursuing the Agresso option or using Microsoft Office tools, with support from SBC's IT team
3. The training programme on the council's contract procedure rules continues. 126 staff have been trained to date. Further date scheduled on 8 November 2023.
4. Continue to build a permanent in-house team. Further round of recruitment successfully appointed one procurement category manager, working with HR colleagues to find creative ways to attract candidates which has had a wide reach for further recruitment rounds.
5. Reported to October Corporate Improvement Scrutiny committee, to update on improvements, including implementation of the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish group on contract management
6. Confirmed as one of two councils on local partnerships contract management process mapping pilot

**Further key development activities**

1. Implement the contracts register on IT system – by January 2024 (options appraisal in progress)
2. Develop a framework to ensure there is a co-ordinated and consistent approach to contract management.– from January 2023.
3. Tiering and risk assessment of contracts and contract management plans for high risk contracts – by March 2024
4. Process mapping procurement – implement improvements to processes and procedures including making best use of automated tools– By March 2024
5. Establishment of Contract Management Assurance Board to drive best practice in contract management – December 2023
6. Ensure KPI's are meaningful and monitored effectively – from January 2023.
7. Programme of continuous contracts register reviews to ensure the council is getting the best value for money – from September 2023 and six monthly thereafter, this will include improvements to reporting.
8. Develop a commercial strategy to replace the procurement and contract management strategy and implement actions throughout the 2023/24 financial year.
9. Pilot a social value policy and engage with SME's- from August 2023
10. Direction deep dive on procurement and contract management to the October Corporate Improvement Scrutiny committee

## The ICT & Digital Team Strategy and Plan

The ICT & Digital strategy adopted by the Council in March is our reference point for improvement work. The table below covers the three key themes and the recent against each:

Theme	Recent activities
Improving the reliability of technology services and transforming the way support is provided for them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first phase of testing of the new <b>end-user devices</b> has started with the ICT&amp;D team and work is still on schedule. This will mean that the new approach for device provision will commence for staff across the Council in the New Year.</li> <li>• With the agreement of Commissioners, an <b>LGA peer review</b> will be undertaken on the current state of ICT at Slough. This will be a useful input to the <b>annual review of the ICT&amp;D strategy</b> that will be completed in the New Year and submitted to Cabinet.</li> <li>• Following a number of risk conversations with departments across Slough, the date for the <b>data centre move</b> has been held and works will begin at 4pm on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> November and run throughout the weekend. There are some <b>significant risks</b>, but additional mitigations have been worked up to lower the impact on live services.</li> </ul>
Resetting the council’s approach to the way residents access services and increasing the volume of interactions through lower cost digital channels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <b>upgrade of our core digital platform, Jadu</b>, has been completed and the impact to digital interactions has been minimal. Changes to the site that enhance our ability to offer translation for residents who may not have English as a first language have now commenced.</li> <li>• Work to progress more extensive <b>use of the CRM</b> element of Jadu (CXM) by all departments has begun. Increasing the data flowing into CXM will ultimately provide a <b>single customer view</b> and enable the Customer Services team to deal with more queries at first point of contact.</li> </ul>
Supporting the exploitation of data more effectively so that the council can prioritise precious resources to have the most impact for residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The trial of a data integration and presentation layer</b> to help with improved reporting and analysis, focusing on Housing continues.</li> <li>• The discussions about <b>roles and responsibilities for managing platforms and data</b> in departments are including an increased focus on data. Increasing each department's ability to serve their own needs for business-as-usual activity will enable central teams to focus on more strategic advanced analytics.</li> </ul>

1. Leadership Workshop (CLT) with LGA taking place on 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov.
2. Further activities taking place to review the lessons learned from the Hybrid working roll out.
3. Staff workshops will take place throughout Nov/Dec to address the cultural issues identified through the staff surveys and to build this into a single action plan.
4. Staff roadshow implemented on 30<sup>th</sup> October raised a number of concerns that are being answered by CLT and cascaded to staff.
5. Members and cabinet development programme being rolled out and further sessions being planned
6. HR Improvements are being reviewed and further actions to transform the service in line with the TOM and strategic objectives are being identified

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## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date:</b>	4 January 2024
<b>Subject:</b>	HR Improvement report
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Dexter Smith, Leader of the Council
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Sarah Hayward
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Key Decision:</b>	NO
<b>Exempt:</b>	NO
<b>Decision Subject To Call In:</b>	NO
<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix A: HR Improvements Appendix B: March 23 Cabinet Report on Implementation of the Recruitment Direction

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report provides an update to Scrutiny regarding progress within HR as result of the impact of the Our Futures programme.

#### Recommendations:

1.2 Note and comment regarding progress by HR to the processes identified requiring improvement as part of the council's recovery programme.

#### Reason

1.3 The committee has requested a report on the HR Improvements.

#### Commissioner Review

Noted - no other comment from commissioners.

## **2. Report**

### **Introduction**

- 2.1 Slough Borough Council's HR service is in need of improvement as part of the recovery programme. As the introduction and background will set out further, the Human Resources service is on a trajectory of improvement and is not currently fit for purpose – there are a number of reasons for this also set out. The service has developed and is currently delivering an improvement plan. Due to the scale of the challenge, improvement is currently focused on the basics of the service rather than improvement to its out-facing corporate functions. That said there are some really significant improvements particularly in recruitment that the whole organisation is starting to experience the benefits of.
- 2.2 The aim of the improvement plan is to have Human Resources function that is recognisably good at recruiting, retaining, training and motivating the right staff at the right time to serve the residents of Slough. This will be through both tactical work on recruitment and retention and longer-term work on workforce strategy and organisational development.
- 2.3 The service was part of a whole council restructure that took place in 2020. At that point it was envisaged that the service would move to a fully self-service model. However, the necessary investment and business changes, in infrastructure and training for staff to support a fully self-service model was not made. This meant that there weren't the right systems, policies and procedures in place to support this change or support managers to be more self-sufficient.
- 2.4 It was not recognised at that stage that Slough's HR service was also already falling behind the local government sector in its HR practise – this was in part because until November 2019 Slough's transactional HR service was outsourced.
- 2.5 It was recognised early during the best value intervention that improvements to the HR function as a whole needed to be made. Improvement to the recruitment service was particularly important as Slough needed to source skills to drive recovery.
- 2.6 An improvement programme was developed in the first half of 2023. This programme is currently focused on the basic foundations of HR as the recovery and improvement needed is in every area of the business.
- 2.7 Most visible progress has been made in recruitment. This includes adoption of a new application tracking system and developing Slough's employer brand to overseeing several high profile and challenging recruitment campaigns.

### **Background**

- 2.8 Prior to 2020, core transactional HR services were outsourced to Arvato. These services were brought back in-house November 2019 and integrated into the main HR service. Out-sourced cultural issues led to incoming services being de-skilled and not fit for purpose prior to TUPE. This meant a mismatch of skills and services impacting service quality.
- 2.9 Since 2020, HR has undergone sustained, significant, and successive structural change that has constrained its ability to deliver a cohesive and consistent service.
- 2.10 The Our Futures Programme 2020/2021 envisaged a sophisticated 'self-service' operating model with all employees and managers independently executing core

HR services such as: payroll & pensions, first-line case management, sickness & absence management, performance management, using data from systems such as Agresso (HR and Payroll system) and Cornerstone (Learning Management system) to manage their staffing responsibilities.

- 2.11 The 'self-service' model assumed an IT- led, data driven infrastructure providing the platform to execute these tasks with employees and managers capable of operating with this level of sophistication.
- 2.12 Based on the move to self-service the HR team were reduced in size by around 40 per cent however, either the IT infrastructure nor the increased staff capability were delivered as part of the programme. This resulted in increased demand for core HR as the tools to deliver the transformation weren't delivered.
- 2.13 Since the S114 was issued, demand for HR services has increased while the systems, policies and processes were not in place to meet additional demand.
- 2.14 This background led to a loss of morale, a loss of some staff and some defensiveness in the team.
- 2.15 In the early part of 2023 some staffing issues were dealt with and an improvement plan was developed. Early improvements are being made and having an impact in improving both the HR team and the service it is able to offer to the team.
- 2.16 Recruitment is underway for a new director and three new Heads of Service and work to stabilise the team is also underway.

### **3 Improvement Plan**

- 3.1 The HR Improvement plan has been in place for approximately 7 months and focuses on reviewing and refreshing key basic processes making them fit for purpose to support the Council in its recovery journey.
- 3.2 The plan identifies 3 strategic priorities: attracting the best resources; retaining critical capacity and experience; and developing capability to support future organisational development.
- 3.3 These strategic priorities are as critical to the HR function as they are to the rest of the organisation. Based on the SBC generic competency framework developed as part of the Our Futures programme, the results of the performance reviews will be used to devise a HR specific competency development plan. This will enhance and improve skills and capability leading to speedier delivery outcomes.
- 3.4 Modern understanding and competence with technology-driven practices such as data analytics, artificial intelligence and instant reporting will be acquired to underpin traditional HR practices.
- 3.5 Historically, SBC's relationship with data has been manual, casual and ad hoc with a large amount of non-digital data spread across various platforms and locations. The digital HR agenda will be key in responding and benefiting from the critical nature of data on which to transform the business. This will also inform and shape our progress towards audit-readiness and GDPR compliance. A project has been initiated to address digital HR data collection and the development of a policy for the management and retention of HR records is in progress.
- 3.6 Dynamic access to HR access instant information via the intranet is in progress. This One-Click approach will enable managers to locate supporting data and provide an improved sophisticated tool kit with which to perform their management duties.

- 3.7 Lifting the constant threat of restructuring the HR function coupled with the establishment of a permanent management team will fundamentally improve morale and motivation of the team. This will considerably impact service levels.
- 3.8 Attracting the best resources is as relevant to HR as it is to the rest of the business to ensure quality advice and guidance. This will be achieved through a strategically designed structure, role profiles and development plans. Strategic direction and guidance at leadership level will establish new working patterns and procedures and a new permanent HR management team will ensure these plans are executed.
- 3.9 Attracting the best resources includes recruitment of a new executive team to drive the recovery journey and transition the Council from a period of intensive and continuous flux to business-as-usual operations. This requires a new creative approach to attract high calibre candidates with long-term commitment to the revival of Slough. An approach which must also flow through to all levels of recruitment.
- 3.10 An Employee Value Proposition will be critical to articulating why the best resources might want to join SBC and stay in the organisation to contribute to its future success: Attract, Engage, Reward, Develop, Environment, Retain, Transition. It will ensure the factors required to retain and develop the best candidates are understood and can be implemented as part of the improvement plan. The senior leadership team is pivotal to this proposition.
- 3.11 HR will expand their strategic grasp and control of the cross organisational implementation of Job Evaluation to ensure consistency and critical understanding of all the relative implications.
- 3.12 To improve SBC's record with Equality and Diversity, the HR function is reviewing available tools to measure and manage a diverse workforce. This will be reflected in all outputs and propositions such as the Employee Value Proposition, recruitment, development, promotion and employee relations.
- 3.13 The recruitment function has therefore been a key focus for improvement. The manual spreadsheet approach has recently been replaced with a new Applicant Tracking System to streamline the process for candidates and managers. It also provides visibility of progress to completion with management information to direct and assign focus and effort.
- 3.14 To support the new recruitment approach, a new Onboarding Programme is being developed to ensure successful applicants at all levels experience a positive, cohesive and consistent entry into SBC. This end-to-end process starts with an applicant's first touchpoint with the Council at job advert, appointment and through their probation period until they achieve full employee status. The Employee Value Proposition will underpin the Onboarding Programme as staff progress to business as usual and take up their place in the organisation.
- 3.15 The end-to-end perspective of the Onboarding Programme has highlighted the need to refresh SBC branding in line with the Corporate Plan and ensure consistent messaging and media across all channels.
- 3.16 The corporate induction approach is also being re-engineered to reflect the status of the Council and the role employees will play in their teams and the wider organisation to ensure successful achievement of the strategic priorities.
- 3.17 On arrival in SBC, new joiners have the right to expect to be properly managed and have opportunities to develop and progress their careers. Workforce analytics will be a critical success factor to understanding the performance management

and development success of our organisation. Cornerstone, our Talent Management System implemented in 2020 together with a renewed commitment to Agresso as the core HR system will support the development of a 'future-ready' workforce to lead SBC in its recovery journey.

- 3.18 To support the 3 strategic priorities of attraction, retention and development, a critical policy review schedule has been developed. The top 4 critical policies are being refreshed and consulted and the Hybrid Working Policy has already been implemented. Currently, we have four further policies which will be commencing their consultation route to final approval.

## **4 HR Improvements Delivered & In Progress**

- 4.1 Appendix B outlines the HR improvements that have been delivered to date and those that are in progress.

## **5 Critical Success Factors**

- 5.1 The HR improvement plan cannot be achieved without a period of stability for the function, and it must be structured for success to realistically support the services required for the recovery journey.
- 5.2 Investment in the function will be required to re-build and enhance capability and capacity to support newly defined services and approach.
- 5.3 The need to attract, retain and develop high calibre, high performance HR experts will be critical to the success of the new function and its ability to deliver.
- 5.4 The Employee Value Proposition for HR is therefore a critical agenda item to ensure strategic vision and creativity is deployed to capture the best resources to engage the best employees for HR as well as the rest of SBC.
- 5.5 Active support for HR during its transition will be a critical success factor to rebuild the reputation of this function as it develops its capability to support the recovery journey.

## **6 Implications of the Recommendation**

### **Financial implications**

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications of this report, activity outlined is being delivered within the agreed budget for the HR service.

### **Legal implications**

- 6.2 On 1 December 2021 the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities made statutory directions requiring the Council to take prescribed actions and that certain functions be exercised from this date by appointed Commissioners, acting jointly or severally. The directions were extended on 1 September 2022. The directions were made under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999 due to the Council having failed to comply with its best value duty. The general duty of best value is set out in section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 and requires local authorities to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness". This

requires consideration of overall value, including economic, environmental and social value, when reviewing service provision. There is also a duty to consult when deciding how to fulfil the best value duty.

- 6.3 In September 2022 the Best Value Commissioners secured an additional direction to take powers over recruitment for the top 3 levels of the authority. This was due to poor performance of council recruitment services at that time. Further information and background can be found in the cabinet report of XX date (*the once from March*)
- 6.4 Annex A of the directions set out the action the Council is required to take. Annex C sets out the functions to be exercised by the Commissioners. This includes functions associated with governance and scrutiny of strategic decisions, requirements for the proper administration of financial affairs, functions associated with the oversight of collection of revenues and benefits and appointment of the three statutory governance officers and the scrutiny officer, as well as functions to define the officer structure at a senior level, determine recruitment processes and recruit relevant staff to these positions. The Explanatory Memorandum to this Direction confirms that in practice most decisions are expected to be taken by the Council, however the Directions are designed to give the Commissioners the power to tackle weaknesses identified to ensure the Council is better equipped to meet the best value requirements. Cabinet should have regard to the advice and comments of the Commissioners contained in this report.

### Risk management implications

6.5 The table below sets the key risks

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Mitigations</b>
Staff	Failure to have appropriately qualified staff at all levels and all functions to deliver core services to residents and council recovery	The HR improvement plan is working to address shortcomings in the HR service. Improvements to our recruitment function are being prioritised
Financial	Failure to deliver financial sustainability	New Finance structure with appointments to the top level- S151 and her deputies on a permanent basis
Legal	Failure to address the Directions and demonstrate compliance with the Council's best value duties or other legal duties leading to increased legal challenges to decision-making and further statutory intervention.	Appointment of new interim Monitoring Officer to bolster capacity at senior management level. Recruitment of interim support for governance and scrutiny.
Reputational	Failure to meet the requirements contained in the	A more comprehensive and corporate approach is being developed building on lessons

Risk	Summary	Mitigations
	Directions leading to further intervention from Government	learned over the past year to provide greater confidence in the Council's HR journey and direction of travel

### **Environmental Implications**

6.6 There are no direct environmental implications of the recommendations contained in this report.

### **Equality implications**

6.7 The council is using the opportunity of the need for improvement in HR to embed equalities in our practise both within the service and across the council. There are a number of examples. The Council's draft Public Sector Equalities Objectives include two workforces focused objectives. Our new applicant tracking system has targeted job advertising at under-represented groups built in from the outset. The recent procurement for a vendor neutral temporary labour provider required the ability to do blind recruitment and, the procurement of a recruitment partner for our new director structure centred the importance of sourcing diverse candidates.

### **Procurement implications**

6.8 There are no direct procurement implications from this report.

### **Workforce implications**

6.9 Any future changes to the workforce will be subject to full statutory processes and consultation.

### **Property implications**

6.10 There are no property implications from this report.

## **7 Background Papers**

- Appendix A: HR Improvements to date and next steps
- Appendix B: March 23 Cabinet Report on Implementation of the Recruitment Direction

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **HR Improvements Delivered & In Progress**

Below are just some of the deliverables that have been achieved and work that is in progress. Business as usual continues whilst the basic HR services is being re-aligned.

#### **Human Resources Business Partnering Team**

##### **Key achievements to date**

- Attendance at Directorate Management Meetings providing an effective strategic business partnering service with stakeholders resulting in clear alignment and delivery of organisation goals and objectives.
- Improved workforce reporting and development of measurable, performance driven KPIs.
- Modernisation of policies and procedures with 4 that have been completed and 4 in consultation with one that has been implemented – Hybrid Working Policy and Procedure. Envisaged to have at least 10 set to be implemented by March 2024.
- Trial of health and wellbeing app called 'Headspace' commencing in January 2024 which will provide the focus on a wellbeing strategy.
- Creation of a re-defined HR intranet page with updated tools for managers to enable a self-service model.

##### **In progress**

- Further work on workforce data to inform key initiatives and data to inform where focus is to be targeted.
- Continuing to review policies and procedures.
- Complete the review process for the Occupation Health Contract and Employee Assistance Programme
- Reducing the agency spend in directorates working with Finance and the Directorate Management team.
- Supporting organisational change programmes resulting from the Senior Management reorganisation.

#### **Recruitment**

##### **Key achievements to date**

##### **Successful procurement and implementation of Applicant Tracking System:**

- Providing a seamless user experience for Recruiting Managers
- Giving candidates a simple and transparent journey through the application process.
- Access to more job boards to create more opportunities for candidates to view our roles.
- Ability to provide a suite of meaningful reports to Senior Officers to scrutinise and see where successes and challenges are within the process.
- Reportable ED&I data

### **Successful procurement and award of Temporary Labour Contract:**

- Monday 20<sup>th</sup> November, full Council ratified the decision to award Matrix SCM the contract for the Temporary Labour Contract.
- This contract is a four-year award, broken down into two years, with one year plus one-year extensions.
- Whilst Matrix is the incumbent supplier, the contract management of the new contract will be governed with tighter controls and more meaningful reporting to enable us to see where spend and tenure needs to be challenged. It is recommended that Slough Borough Council recruit an Agency Contract Officer, who will have oversight of the activity and work closely with Matrix and internal stakeholders to ensure best practice and value for money.

### **Successful Procurement and Engagement of Recruitment (Director Posts)**

- Successfully procured a recruitment partner to support the recruitment process for the newly created Director roles.

### **Partnering with Diversifying Group Job Board (Diversifying.io)**

- In line with Slough Borough Councils vision to improve diversity and inclusion, we have now partnered with The Diversifying Group and made an investment into securing their job board for our roles to be further promoted.
- Created an employer's profile on their website to enhance our brand and commitment to ED&I within our recruitment and selection process.
- As part of the partnership, Diversifying Group have also delivered training to HR, Recruitment and WFD colleagues, around three key areas of recruitment, with a view to mirroring the training within internally.

### **In Progress**

- Director recruitment in process – Tranche one at Longlisting and Technical interview stages – Final panel interview dates secured.
- Director recruitment – Tranche two roles have been released and close w/c 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024
- First Head of Service Roles to go-live in December – To be advertised and recruited to by SBC (No assistance from Starfish)
- On-going work to SBC Career site to build out content per directorate to promote the great work going on within each directorate.
- Workforce Improvement – Actively working on reduction of agency spend in partnership with HR and finance colleagues.
- Mobilisation of the new Temporary Labour Contract (Go Live – 24<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

### **Workforce Development Team**

#### **Key achievements to date**

#### **Corporate induction**

- Researched Corporate Induction including CIPD best practice, Local Berkshire Authority benchmarking and delegate feedback which have been incorporated into our revised corporate induction proposal, which we have started to implement.
- Corporate induction now is face-to-face and scheduled on a monthly for all new starters (permanent, interim and temps).
- Developed interactive group element to increase engagement,
- Included a top tips section for new starters to promote useful information available on our intranet and encourage self-serve.
- Full implementation dependent on completion of the organisational restructure, which will impact content.

### **Mandatory Training**

- Mandatory training report developed and sent to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to cascade down monthly to progress and encourage greater compliance levels. Current levels of compliance vary between 55 – 65%.
- A revised mandatory training proposal has been created reducing the number of modules from 8 to 5, to better reflect compliance needs and SBC standards we wish to engender.

### **Onboarding**

- New approach to Onboarding in development with the aim of enhancing candidate and new starter experience throughout the process.

### **Apprenticeships**

- Two new apprenticeships have been approved in youth work.

*NEXT STEPS FOR THIS TEAM, EG WORKFORCE STRATEGY TO ALIGHT WITH BUDGET AN OPERATING MODEL ETC*

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## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> March 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Slough Borough Council's implementation of the recruitment direction
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Councillor James Swindlehurst,  Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Council Recovery, Forward Strategy & Economic Development and Cllr Ajaib - Lead Member
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Stephen Brown
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Sarah Hayward
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Key Decision:</b>	NO
<b>Exempt:</b>	NO
<b>Decision Subject To Call In:</b>	NO
<b>Appendices:</b>	List of roles covered by the recruitment direction agreed with Commissioners

### **1. Summary and Recommendations**

1.1 The report sets out steps taken by the council since the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022 when Commissioners were given new reserve powers to appoint to the top three tiers of Slough Borough Council. It acknowledges that Commissioners have not routinely been kept up to date with developments and sets out steps taken to address this, including which roles are covered by the powers. It further sets out issues with the council's current recruitment and Human Resources (HR) practice and the early steps being taken to address them. It acknowledges that the council's response to the direction was not sufficient in quality or pace and sets out how this will be addressed.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1.2 Cabinet is requested to:
- a) To note the contents of the report

## Reason

- 1.3 On 28 July 2022 the Secretary of State announced that after due consideration he was minded to use his powers under the Local Government Act 1999 to expand the intervention at the Council. On 1 September 2022 Minister Paul Scully announced that he would expand the intervention at the Council to cover recruitment to specific levels of senior management. The council's understanding of the direction is set out below in the background section.
- 1.4 The council did not initially respond effectively to the new direction. This includes not setting out which posts are covered by the direction and not notifying Commissioners when relevant posts were being recruited to and so Commissioners were denied an opportunity to assess whether they needed to use their powers.
1. 1.5 The council acknowledges that HR practice across the council is not where it should be in terms of delivering a modern and efficient service to attract and retain the staff Slough needs to recover and succeed. In part HR was directly and significantly negatively affected by Our Futures as posts were reduced on the on the basis of greater self service by managers. The model wasn't effectively implemented. There are wider issues of capacity and resources that also need to be address in HR and across the council.

## Commissioner Review

*The Council's ability to attract and retain excellent leaders is crucial to its ability in delivering its recovery and improvement programme. This report outlines at high level the issues the Commissioners faced in the spring and summer of 2022 in being able to attract the right calibre of people to take the organisation forward, and these issues led to the Direction issued in September 2022 referred to in this report. The Council's initial response to this Direction was disappointing.*

*However, the report presented here seeks to redress that and sets out some of the background, the status of recruitment activity to the affected posts, and some indication of the elements of the recruitment improvement plan*

*It is important that this area of work is reviewed on a regular basis alongside responses to the other Directions via the Improvement and Recovery Board to ensure the improvements needed are delivered.*

## 2. Report

### Introduction

- 2.1 As previously reported Members are aware the Council has received a formal Direction from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) made under s.15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999. This Direction was issued on 1 December 2021 and sets out the functions of the Council to be exercised by Commissioners appointed by DLUHC.
- 2.2 With effect from 1 September 2022 and following the Commissioners' initial six-month report, the Minister expanded the Directions in Annex B of the Directions to include the following:  
*"5. All functions to define the officer structure for the senior positions, to determine the recruitment processes and then to recruit the relevant staff to those positions."*

- 2.3 *'Senior positions'* is defined in Annex B of the Directions as 'direct reports to the Chief Executive and their direct reports, and their Group Managers – tier one, tiers two and three.'
- 2.4 Commissioners sought the powers from the secretary of state for a number of reasons. Their experience of the recruitment process, functions and outcome was poor. A number of recruitments didn't run as they should have and took considerably longer than needed. The outcomes are still not where they should be in terms of timeliness and effectiveness of process, ability to attract quality candidates and candidate relations with both successful and unsuccessful candidates. It is recognised that not all of the recruitment challenges rest with HR, practice is also not what it should be with recruiting managers and holistic corporate improvements need to be made. These will need to start however in HR.
- 2.5 The direction applies to the Chief Executive, his direct reports the Executive Directors (ED/s), their direct reports Associate Directors (AD/s) and their 'Group Managers'. The term 'Group Managers' is subject to some confusion with some areas using this title and others not. Recent discussions with the Commissioners have clarified the position and a list of posts covered by the directions is appended to this report in the annex.
- 2.6 It is recognised that this understanding should have been sought by the council in summer 2022 and this report seeks to address that clear oversight. Further the report notifies the cabinet about posts recruited to that should have been subject to a commissioner view as to their involvement in or oversight of the process.
- 2.7 All ED posts have been appointed via the member appointment process set out in the constitution and have involved Commissioners with the exception of the ED of Place and Communities who was already in post prior to the intervention. The ED structure is now complete, and all staff are in post apart from the new S151 Officer who joins the council in March. Following discussion with commissioners, executive and personal assistants to the chief executive and EDs are excluded from the direction. The other tiers covered have either experienced ad hoc need to recruit replacements to some of the posts in the annex or have been subject to service specific restructures with the involvement of commissioners. An example is finance.
- 2.8 In order to ensure commissioners are appropriately involved in future recruitments a step is being added to the recruitment control process regarding the posts covered by the direction to ask whether Commissioners' views have been sought about the intention to recruit and recruitment requests will not be approved corporately until the Commissioners views have been given and the extent of their involvement established.
- 2.9 The reserve powers enable Commissioners to exercise them for any of the roles covered by the direction. However, Commissioners have advised the council that their practical level of involvement will be commensurate to the seniority and their assessment of risk involved. All ED recruitment will have extensive involvement of the Commissioners. AD recruitment will also involve Commissioners but the level of involvement will be on a risk basis – those AD posts with very significant budgets and/or budget savings, involving significant change, and HR and ICT who are subject to specific directions and critical to Slough's recovery are likely to see greater involvement of the Commissioners in the process. The precise nature of commissioner involvement established at the

start of the recruitment process by the relevant ED discussing the process with the Commissioners.

- 2.10 A lighter touch approach will be taken to the direct reports of the ADs – these will be agreed on a case by case basis but Commissioners will expect to see as a minimum that roles have been reviewed and job requirements updated where necessary to drive recovery in Slough.
- 2.11 Any restructures affecting these tiers, whether in departments or whole council will need Commissioner involvement. Recent examples include the finance restructure and the ICT restructure.
- 2.12 If the recruiting manager, ED or AD is interim the Commissioners will seek greater involvement and/or assurance over permanent appointments being made.
- 2.13 Work is being undertaken to start to make improvements to the HR function and practice across the council including the recruitment function and practice. The challenges are multifaceted and include issues with the HR function, the availability and use of appropriate technology and HR practice by line managers and staff across the organisation. This will take time to solve and a full improvement programme is in the early stages of development. The improvement plan will be incorporated into the Council's overarching Improvement and Recovery Plan and reported to the Improvement and Recovery Board chaired by the Commissioners.

### **3 Options considered**

This report is for noting only

### **4 Background**

- 4.1 Since the new directions were placed on the Council in September a number of senior appointments have been made. This includes the Chief Executive and all EDs apart from the ED Place. These appointments give a greater sense of stability and stronger leadership throughout the organisation.
- 4.2 All of the above appointments have had Commissioner involvement and oversight. The Chief Executive and the Interim Monitoring Officer were appointed by the Commissioners and their appointments were reported to Council. Similarly in relation to the S151 Officer who has yet to take up post.
- 4.3 As part of the need to improve processes relating to recruitment, the Commissioners have fed back that in future all shortlisted candidates for Executive Director posts must include an interview with the Chief Executive prior to final interview with the Sub Appointments Committee, and only those candidates which the Chief Executive deems as appointable will go through to this final stage, Similarly, any ADs candidates should be interviewed by the relevant Executive Director before progressing to the final interview the Final Interview Panels.
- 4.4 Currently there are some AD posts that remain vacant or are filled by interim AD. EDs have been reviewing these posts and have started to recruit to them. To date, the post of AD's for Property, Housing, and Education have interims that have been engaged. Commissioners were consulted on the process to engage these.



- 4.5 The commissioner feedback for roles at the AD level is that in terms of members, as a minimum the Lead Cabinet Member for the function needs to be included in the final interview panel. Again, the Commissioners have recommended that the ED for the function has an interview with each shortlisted candidate to assess their suitability before presenting to the final interview panel. This feedback has been taken on board.
- 4.6 It is understood that only one AD has been appointed and one Interim Group Manager have been appointed since the recruitment directions were initiated in September 2022, and our current understanding is that the process for both started prior to the direction being issued. A process has been put in place to prevent a recurrence.
- 4.7 A step has now been added to the recruitment control form, to record Commissioners involvement in the specific recruitment covered by the direction, which will be determined by them. Approval to proceed with a recruitment process will not be given until Commissioners have completed the form.
- 4.8 Underpinning the Commissioners' initial request for the direction was their experience of recruiting to the Executive Director tier in the first half of 2022 and reports from staff recruiting to more junior roles that recruitment processes weren't fit for purpose, and took excessive time to work through.
- 4.9 The end to end HR practice across the council is not modern or efficient, challenges lying both within services as well as the HR function. It is acknowledged that there needs to be an improvement plan to work with staff to improve practice, policy and process across the authority.
- 4.10 Improvement work has begun. In January a cross council workshop identified issues and quick wins that could be take both by services and HR. These are being worked through and implemented. The HR team has also identified improvements they can make and are working through them, they are also in the process of reviewing policies. A new ED for Strategy & Improvement has now been appointed, with improvement to HR practice being one of her key objectives. An HR improvement plan will be taken to the Improvement and Recovery Board in due course.
- 4.11 To develop the improvement plan further diagnostic work needs to be undertaken. Consideration is being given to an LGA peer review of HR which will help us understand both HR and cross council steps that need to be taken. Improvements will need to be in a range of areas, including but not exhaustively, ensuring we have the right professional skills and knowledge in a permanent staff base in HR, good adherence to policy and procedure across the authority and good systems that support automation, reduce workload and reduce both human error and the number of hand offs between staff. As this plan develops it will be reported through appropriate council governance and to Commissioners at the improvement and Recovery Board. Improvement work required will include developing the skills and capability both in the HR services and across the organisation, embedding consistent use of processes and a compliance culture, developing new policies, systems and processes to modernise the function and practice, bringing in greater automation. A clear improvement strategy will be agreed through council governance including the lead members, employment and appeals committee and Commissioners.
- 4.12 A number of documents are supplied at the annexes, including our recruitment policy for staff not subject to member appointment, this is currently being updated; the constitutional extract covering member appointments; the list of

posts affected by the direction, and those that have been recruited to without Commissioner notification; a copy of the wording of the direction.

## **5 Implications of the Recommendation**

### **Financial implications**

5.1 There are not significant financial implications arising from this report.

### **Legal Implications**

5.2 On 1 December 2021 the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities made statutory directions requiring the Council to take prescribed actions and that certain functions be exercised from this date by appointed Commissioners, acting jointly or severally. The directions were extended on 1 September 2022. The directions were made under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999 due to the Council having failed to comply with its best value duty. The general duty of best value is set out in section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 and requires local authorities to “make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness”.

5.3 The functions to be exercised by the Commissioners include functions associated with governance and scrutiny of strategic decisions, requirements for the proper administration of financial affairs, functions associated with the oversight of collection of revenues and benefits and appointment of the three statutory governance officers and the scrutiny officer, as well as functions to define the officer structure at a senior level, determine recruitment processes and recruit relevant staff to these positions.

5.4 The Explanatory Memorandum to this Direction confirms that in practice most decisions are expected to be taken by the Council, however the Directions are designed to give the Commissioners the power to tackle weaknesses identified to ensure the Council is better equipped to meet the best value requirements. Cabinet should have regard to the advice and comments of the Commissioners contained in this report.

### **Risk management implications**

5.5 There are minimal risks associated with this report. It seeks to clarify implementation of the direction and therefore should reduce risk.

### **Environmental implications**

5.6 There are no direct environmental implications as a result of the recommendations contained in this report.

### **Equality implications**

5.7 There are no direct equality implications as a result of the recommendations contained in this report.

### **Procurement implications**

5.8 There are no direct procurement implications as a result of the recommendations contained in this report.

### **Workforce implications**

5.9 This report recommends approval for key appointments to the workforce taking account of the requirements set out by the Secretary of State into the council.

### **Property implications**

5.10 There are no direct property implications as a result of the recommendations contained in this report.

## **6 Background Papers**

See the annex attached

## Annex

### Third tier posts by directorate:

#### People – Adults:

Reporting to AD Adult Social Care Operations

Group Manager - Long Term Services – Level 10

Group Manager - Short Term Services – Level 10

Reporting to AD – People Strategy and Commissioning

Group Manager – Purchasing - Level 10

Group Manager – Market Management – Level 10

Group Manager – Commissioning – Level 10

Commissioning Strategy Manager - Level 8 – 3-month temporary post from Jan 23 to March 23.

Commissioning Support Officer - Level 5 – business support

Reporting to Deputy Director of Public Health

Public Health Principle – Level 10

Public Health Intelligence Officer – Level 6

Public Health Business Support – Level 5

#### Strategy and Improvement:

Reporting to AD Strategy

Group Manager - Data, Insight, Strategy – Level 10

Reporting to AD Transformation

3x Programme Managers – Level 9

2 x Project Support Officers – Level 6

Reporting to AD HR

Group Manager HR – Level 10

Health and Safety Manager – Level 9

Workforce Development Manager – Level 9

Business Continuity and Emergency Planning Manager – Level 9

Reporting to AD Customer and Business Services

Group Manager Customer Services – Level 10

Complaints, Casework & FOI – Level 8

Reporting to Chief Digital Officer

Enterprise Architect - Level 10

Governance Reporting & Compliance Manager - Level 10

Programme Delivery Manager - Level 10

Technology Operations Manager - SML11

ICT&D Services Manager - Level 10

Digital Customer Engagement Manager - Level 10

Reporting to Head of Communications and resident engagement

Group Manager – Communications – Level 10

### Property and Housing

Reporting to the ED Property and Housing  
Head of Planning Policy – Level 10  
Head of Development Management – Level 10  
Group Manager – Building Management – Level 10

Reporting to the AD Property  
Group Manager Place Delivery - Level 10.  
2 x Principal Asset Managers – Level 9  
Reporting to the AD Housing  
Group Manager Accommodation services Level 10  
Neighbourhood Manager Level 9

### People Children's

Reporting to the AD Education and Inclusion  
Group Manager - School Services – Level 10  
Principal Educational Psychologist – on Soulbury Scales – Level 10  
Head of Music Service (Arts Council funded) – Level 10  
Group Manager – SEND and inclusion – Level 10 Vacant  
Group Manager – School Effectiveness – Level 10 - vacant  
.xGroup Manager - Early Years - Level 10  
xGroup Manager – Children Centres – Level 10 vacant  
× Please note these roles were the responsibility of the AD Children Services – post never recruited to since he left and all the posts have been reporting to the AD education and Inclusion

### Place and Communities

Reporting to the AD Place & Community  
Group Manager Community – Level 10  
Group Manager Community Safety, Housing Regulation & Enforcement - Level 10  
Group Manager Public Protection – Level 10

Reporting to the AD Operations  
Group Manager - Carbon and Sustainability Level 10  
Group Manager - Environmental Services Level 10  
Group Manager - Highways and Transport Level 10 vacant

### Finance and Commercial Services

Reporting to Head of Revenues and Benefits  
Benefits Manager Level 9  
Revenues Manager Level 9  
Revenues and Benefits Systems Control Manager Level 9  
Housing Recovery Lead Level 8  
Debt and Welfare Lead – Level 8

Reporting to Deputy Director Financial Management  
Head of Commercial Services – SML 11  
5X Strategic Finance manager – SML 11/12

Reporting to Deputy Director Corporate and Strategic Finance  
Head of Financial Governance, Internal Audit, Counter Fraud Risk, and insurance –  
SML 11  
3 X Strategic Finance Managers SML 11 /12  
Reporting to S151  
Head of Transactional Services – SML 11

Reporting to Monitoring Officer  
Head of Governance and Scrutiny – Level 10

## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date:</b>	4 January 2024
<b>Subject:</b>	Update on task and finish report – Review of Workforce Strategy Business Case for Slough Children First (SCF)
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Stephen Brown – Chief Executive
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Sarah Wilson – Assistant Director – Legal and Governance
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Exempt:</b>	NO
<b>Appendices:</b>	None

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report provides an update on progress against recommendations made by the previous People Scrutiny Panel in relation to SCF's workforce strategy. The previous report was presented to a meeting of the Panel on 31 January 2023 and was put before Cabinet at its meeting on 23 February 2023, which can be found at the following link - [Review of workforce strategy business case for Slough Children First](#)

1.2 Recommendations:

Committee is recommended to:

- (a) Comment and note the progress update.
- (b) Consider whether it wishes to incorporate any of the recommendations into the work programme.

#### **Reason:**

The new scrutiny arrangements are expected to focus on improvement work. Children's social care is under the statutory intervention of the Department for Education. The previous task and finish group report was commended by the DLUHC commissioners for setting a good standard to be followed in the future. They also commented that they looked forward to reviewing the responses and implementation plans that follow the recommendation. This update provides an opportunity for committee members to consider whether adequate progress has been made.

#### **Commissioner Review**

Noted - no other comment from commissioners.

## 2. Report

### Introductory paragraph

2.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2027 sets out a purpose to close the healthy life expectancy gap by focusing on children. This overarching purpose will be delivered by being resident focused, providing financial sustainability, enabling communities, strengthening partnerships and building trust. The task and finish group report made recommendations to SCF, the Council and the wider partnership. Whilst it was focused on reviewing the workforce strategy, by doing this it identified a number of wider priorities.

### Options considered

**Option 1 – do not report back to scrutiny** - There is no legal requirement to formally report back on recommendations. These were presented to Cabinet and accepted. However, the previous People Scrutiny Panel accepted a recommendation to receive an update report in the next municipal year. **This is not recommended.**

**Option 2 – report back on a regular basis.** The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Good Scrutiny Guide refers to the monitoring of recommendations easily becoming an industry and that after six months or a year, oversight should revert to a standard "watching brief" which scrutiny should hold over all services. Recommendations should not normally need to be reported to committee, however where recommendations have not been implemented, scrutiny may wish to hold the relevant lead member to account in a public forum to understand why progress has not been made. **This is not recommended.**

**Option 3 – receive one update report and use this to determine whether to amend the current work programme.** These recommendations were made prior to the change in political control. There has been significant change in leadership both at a political, strategic and operational level within the Council and SCF. Therefore, it is deemed appropriate to bring a single update report back for the current committee to consider whether it is satisfied with progress or whether it wishes the update to provide a focus for its future work programme. **This is recommended.**

### Background

2.2 The information below sets out progress made against each recommendation. These are split into recommendations for the wider partnership, for the Council and for SCF.

### Partnership recommendations

**Recommendation 1 - Recognise the importance and value of the wider "children's workforce" and develop a shared language across the partnership to empower children and families and to be aspirational and express a shared ambition. All agencies to develop performance metrics to measure these outcomes.**

2.3 In July 2023, Cabinet approved a Slough Early Help Partnership Strategy 2023-2025. This was a multi-agency strategy agreed between SCF, the Council, Thames Valley Police and Health. It set out a vision:

**'Children and young people feel happy, safe and loved within their families and wider community, where they are helped to thrive, not just survive'**



2.4 The strategy included a common language for early help and emphasised that delivery of the offer involved Council services, health, police, community and voluntary sector organisations and faith groups working alongside children, young people and families. A two year delivery plan and governance arrangements for monitoring progress is set out in the strategy.

**Recommendation 1 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**Recommendation 2 - Explore opportunities to extend the education and employment support to children in need and under child protection plans, including having a multi-agency structured apprenticeship programme focused on the value of public service.**

2.5 The Council has made progress with embedding its corporate parenting duties, which include considering the impact of Council decisions on children in care and those who have experienced care. These include a focus on education, employment and training. The Council has approved a Children and Young People’s Participation Strategy and SCF has commissioned Participation People to work on this, funded by grant from the Department for Education.

**Recommendation 2 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**Recommendation 3 - Embed a multi-agency partnership approach to supporting families impacted by the cost of living pressures, including ensuring all partners recognise the impact on children living in poverty.**

2.6 The societal factors, including the increased number of families experiencing food, fuel and hygiene poverty, as well as housing issues, due to the impact of the cost of living crisis, was highlighted as part of the national and local context for the Early Help Partnership Strategy. Evidence was presented in the Strategy that 40% of children lived in low income households in 2020/21. Under the priority of “Supporting our children to thrive”, one of the measures is for the family to feel able to manage their finances and/or debt is being managed or has been resolved. The delivery plan overview included raising awareness of early help and prevention services and increasing access to universal provision for children, young people and families.

2.7 The Slough safeguarding partnership has made direct links with the poverty forum as a result of learning from reviews. There are links to support for families around the cost of living crisis on the Slough Safeguarding Partnership website. This includes links to voluntary and community organisations such as The Baby Bank, London and Slough Run, The Cowshed as well as a training course for professionals and frontline workers.

**Recommendation 3 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**Recommendation 4 - The safeguarding partnership to review its arrangements for youth services.**

2.8 A new Multi-Agency Child Exploitation group has been created, chaired by the Director of Operations in Slough Children First and providing strategic leadership and oversight of partnership arrangements to safeguarding children and young adults at risk of or experiencing all forms of exploitation. This group brings together the various partnerships with responsibilities and regulatory duties towards these young people and their families. It principally involves leads for youth justice, community safety and safeguarding partnerships working together with partners from health and schools and the

voluntary sector to ensure all strategies and plans in relation to these young people are harmonised, parents are supported, empowered and involved and that children are protected from harm. A new comprehensive strategy is currently being devised by this group and an action plan and performance framework to monitor its effectiveness will also be created to ensure the strategy is effective. The group reports to the safeguarding partnership and all the work is directly overseen by the Safe in Slough Executive group.

**Recommendation 4 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**Recommendation 5 - Multi-agency partnership focus on early help and prevention.**

2.9 As stated above, the Council and its partners approved an Early Help Partnership Strategy in July 2023. This sets out a collective vision to share knowledge and resources to support to support children, young people and families who need help as soon as they need it, to prevent problems escalating.

2.10 In addition in November 2023, the Council approved a family hub model. A family hub model requires a focus on systems-wide models of providing high-quality, whole-family, joined up family support services. Each family hub will be bespoke to its local community and will provide services and support on a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency basis for families with children up to 19 years old (25 years for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)).

**Recommendation 5 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**SBC Recommendations**

**Recommendation 6 - Ensure that SBC is appropriately considering the risks to children and families when commissioning and designing services to target mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse.**

2.11 The Council's new Corporate Plan places children and young people at the heart of service delivery. This includes a strategic priority to be a borough for children and young people to thrive, a town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives and a cleaner, healthier and more prosperous Slough.

2.12 The Council has reviewed its commissioning arrangements for services supporting residents experiencing issues with substance misuse and mental health.

2.13 On domestic abuse support services, the Council is in the process of reviewing its services, including how it meets its statutory safe accommodation duties. Further work is required in this area to demonstrate that the needs and risks of children are fully considered when commissioning services.

**Recommendation 6 – further work to do on ensuring commissioning strategies are appropriately focused on risks to children.**

**Recommendation 7 - Ensure SBC's education service is appropriately supporting the private, voluntary and independent early years workforce to develop their skills in supporting vulnerable children and families.**

2.14 In May 2023 the Council made a decision to remodel its children's centre services to reduce the number of physical buildings and retain two children's centre buildings for specialist childcare focused on children with SEND. The decision was made following a

sufficiency assessment of childcare provision which identified that there were opportunities for the voluntary and independent early years providers to meet need in certain parts of the Borough.

2.15 Early years providers are expected to support children with SEND and other specialist needs. The Council has designated early years officers who support the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector to develop their workforce. This includes advice on training and continuing professional development portfolio that captures local and national opportunities that PVIs can access. Training includes supporting vulnerable children. The Council has recently set up a working group looking at initiatives for partnership working to support the sector with recruitment and retention programmes and is in the process of refreshing the Early Years Workforce Development Strategy.

**Recommendation 7 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**Recommendation 8 - SBC education services to work with schools to reduce prevalence of children missing education, inappropriate home schooling and exclusions and off-rolling.**

2.16 The Council's Children Missing Education team focuses on pupils missing education either due to not having a school place or due to poor attendance. The team supports schools and families to ensure pupils return to school through attendance intervention and if this does not work will use legal enforcement. Data is available to Council officers providing live pupil attendance information and the team produce termly attendance reports for each school and hold termly review meetings.

2.17 Multi-agency forums include CME / Elective Home Education (EHE) Forum and Attendance Network Meetings. Council officers are working towards the development of a persistent absence / school avoidance strategy.

2.18 There is a particular national issue around mental health and Council officers have produced a resource toolkit to reduce emotional school-based avoidance. Officers from the SEND teams are undertaking joint visits with EHE officers for those pupils who are home educated.

2.19 Council officers work closely with local schools to reduce the risk of exclusions and off-rolling. This includes managing the Fair Access Panel to ensure that pupils are allocated a school place following exclusion and providing advice to schools on how to avoid exclusions.

**Recommendation 8 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**Recommendation 9 - SBC to review its capacity and resources for joint commissioning of services with health.**

2.20 Significant progress has been made in relation to putting in place appropriate strategies to inform future commissioning priorities. This has included approval of a placement sufficiency strategy and strategies for Adult Social Care in terms of support for carers, older persons and learning disabilities. With a whole family approach, this enabled support to be provided and commissioned taking account of the multi-generational households living in Slough.

2.21 SCF works closely with the Council, with NHS Frimley ICB and across boundaries to jointly commission complex care packages for children with additional need and integrated therapies.

2.22 There are further opportunities to join up resources for commissioning of services across the wider partnership and particularly with health agencies. The appointment of a stand alone Director of Public Health to support the Health and Wellbeing Board and increasing the remit of this officer to cover a wider range of public protection services provides an opportunity for increased focus on this area.

**Recommendation 9 – further work to do to join up commissioning on a multi-agency basis.**

**Recommendation 10 - All council departments to consider and assess the impact of their work on children and families within Slough.**

2.23 The Council has passed a motion to give additional protection to looked after children and care experienced young people. Member level reports will set out how any proposal meets the Council's corporate parenting duties where appropriate. The Council's Corporate Plan also has a focus on children and families and any proposals will be reviewed against these strategic priorities.

2.24 There has been a review of the Council's corporate parenting panel and health and wellbeing board to ensure each focus on its respective statutory responsibility and meets best practice. In the future it will be important to ensure that these bodies are measured against clearly identifies priorities and outcomes focused.

**Recommendation 10 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**Recommendation 11 - Retention strategics need to focus on non-pay elements. The business case for retention packages is not supported by the evidence presented to the group.**

2.25 The new executive leadership team has made good progress in increasing the ratio of permanent staff without the need for retention packages. This has resulted in the departure of the Innovate managed teams earlier than anticipated and is an important part of building a supportive culture focused on supporting children and families.

**Recommendation 11 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**Recommendation 12 - SCF strategies need to have a greater focus on impact on the child and family and creating stability for children and families. The Edge of Care Team business case should be supported, however the Family Hubs should be considered on a wider multi-agency partnership basis.**

2.26 SCF has introduced an edge of care team to support families at risk of statutory intervention and children in care who are ready to be reunified with their families. This is leading to a reduction in the number of children subject to care proceedings.

2.27 Cabinet approved a new family hub model on a multi-agency partnership basis.

**Recommendation 12 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**2.28 Recommendation 13 - Ensure managers have access to good quality management data that supports them to make decisions on caseloads that take account of the context and skills of the team. This should include those on child protection plan and not just children who are looked after.**

2.29 There have been improvements to the management information being given to senior leaders and frontline managers. The 2024/25 Business and Improvement Plan includes a priority to identify emerging trends and inform strategic planning and transformation work, to develop and implement a revised, robust QA audit programme and to improve the performance framework.

2.30 There is further work to be undertaken on ensuring that data is accessible quickly and at low cost by all those who need to review and analyse this, however the systems are in place for managers to undertake their roles.

**Recommendation 13 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**Recommendation 14 - Utilise Slough's diverse population as a positive and avoid focus on Slough being similar to London boroughs, complexity of casework and negativity of the Ofsted rating. Many social workers see the cohort of children and families as a key opportunity to make a real difference.**

2.31 SCF's workforce is broadly representative of Slough's diverse communities. Work is starting to better engage with communities, including faith communities and there is a positive relationship with Slough's voluntary, community sector.

**Recommendation 14 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**Recommendation 15 - Focus constrained resources on leadership and management development and career progression opportunities for internal staff, as well as loans and payments to support staff with capital outlay.**

2.32 The 2024/25 Business and Improvement Plan contains an updated action plan against the seven enablers. One of these enablers is engaging and supporting the workforce. This includes supporting staff opportunities for career progression and progressively strengthening the quality of strategic and frontline leadership by means of a leadership development programme for leaders and managers at all levels of the system.

2.33 To support career progression in general, SCF is part of the Frontline programme, there is a planned career progression framework and a skills gap analysis to inform a workforce training programme. The wellbeing offer is also being formalised.

**Recommendation 15 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**Recommendation 16 - Ensure SCF's model of practice is appropriately strength based / restorative in approach.**

2.34 SCF's business and improvement plan for 2023/24 was approved by Cabinet in September 2023. The plan for 2024/25 was approved in December 2023. The plan sets out SCF's ambition for children and young people, including that support and help is provided when needed and in a way which prevents need and risk from escalating, the right support is provided in the right place at the right time, children will be supported to stay with families when it is safe, families will be empowered to make their own decisions

and there will be work with the whole family to enable them to develop the skills and confidence to manage situations at a much earlier stage.

2.35 The new early help model, edge of care team and focus on reunification with families is leading to a reduction in the number of children being subject to care proceedings.

**Recommendation 16 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**Recommendation 17 - Embed hearing the voice of the child into all records and decision-making and monitor this on a qualitative basis.**

2.36 The Council and SCF has agreed a new Children and Young People Participation Strategy focusing on ensuring that children and young people are able to influence decision-making at an operational and strategic level. The Council has amended SCF's contractual performance indicators to include indicators focused on measuring participation. These were approved by Cabinet in December 2023.

2.37 The enhancements around the QA process will ensure that data is captured on the quality of practice, including the extent to which children and young people's voice and influence is seen in decisions impacting them.

**Recommendation 17 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**Recommendation 18 - Explore opportunities for children and families to be part of delivering training and developing and influencing decision-making at a strategic level.**

2.38 The strategy referred to under recommendation 17 covers strategic decision-making and the Council will hold SCF to account via a specific contractual performance indicator focused on participation and influence at a strategic level.

2.39 One of the enablers in the 2024/25 Business and Improvement Plan is around children's voice and influence. Actions planned include providing training to young people to enable them to contribute to high level meetings and recruitment and involving children and young people in redesigning the online recruitment strategy.

**Recommendation 18 – Satisfactory progress made.**

**3. Implications of the Recommendation**

**3.1 Financial implications**

3.1.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report. The Council funds the majority of the expenditure for SCF via an annual contract sum.

**3.2 Legal implications**

3.2.1 The Secretary of State for Education has powers to issue a direction in relation to specified social services functions relating to children under s.497A of the Education Act 1996. Various directions have been issued in relation to statutory functions in Slough since 2014. The seventh statutory direction was issued in August 2023, alongside a direction in relation to SEND services. The direction requires that the Council secures that prescribed children's services functions are performed by SCF and the Council jointly and other

prescribed children's services functions are performed by SCF on behalf of the Council. The Council has an appointed DfE commissioner to oversee the improvements required for children's social care and SEND services.

3.2.2 SCF is wholly owned by the Council and as such the Council is responsible for making key decisions in relation to it. This includes approval of an annual business plan. Cabinet approved the 2024/25 Business and Improvement Plan in December 2023. Cabinet was also asked to approve updated contractual key performance indicators reflecting the need for partnership and multi-agency working to improve children's services.

### 3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 The Council's corporate risk refers to risk of failures to appropriately safeguard children and support families to ensure that children are kept safe and well and to improve services for children and young people with SEND. The recommendations arising from the previous task and finish group report are seen as key to inform a wide range of services, which will demonstrate that the Council is taking a whole system approach to its responsibilities to children and young people.

### 3.4 Corporate Parenting implications

3.4.1 Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 sets out statutory corporate parenting principles which the Council must have regard to when exercising its functions in relation to looked after children and young people. These include acting in their best interests and promoting their physical and mental health and well-being, encouraging the expression of views, wishes and feelings and ensuring these are taken into account, ensuring these children and young people are safe, stable in their home lives, relationships, education and work and preparing them for adulthood and independent living.

3.4.2 The statutory guidance emphasises that these principles must not be seen in a vacuum and should shape the mindset and culture of every part of the local authority and are intended to ensure that councils have high aspirations for children in their care and young people who have experienced being in care.

### 3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 The Council has a duty contained in section 149 of the Equality Act to have due regard to the need to: a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act; b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

3.5.2 The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day-to-day business and to keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services.

3.5.3 High quality and cost-effective children's services are critical to supporting both the Council and SCF to meet their equality duties, particularly in relation to advancing equality of opportunity by way of reducing inequalities that exist between certain groups of vulnerable children and their families and the wider population.

**4. Background Papers**

None



## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** People Scrutiny Panel  
**DATE:** 31 January 2023  
**CONTACT OFFICER:** Sarah Wilson, Principal Lawyer  
**WARD(S):** All

### **PART I**

#### **FOR DECISION**

#### **TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT – REVIEW OF WORKFORCE STRATEGY BUSINESS CASE FOR SLOUGH CHILDREN FIRST**

##### **1. Purpose of Report**

As part of improving the Council's company governance, the Panel decided to set up a task and finish group to review Slough Children's First (SCF) draft business plan. Approval of the business plan is a reserved matter and will be approved by Cabinet alongside approval of the contract sum for 2023/24. The work of the task and finish group was intended to allow informed recommendations to be made to Cabinet on the business plan. To ensure a sufficiently in-depth piece of work, the Group focused on reviewing the workforce strategy business case as opposed to seeking to review the whole business plan.

The report seeks approval of the report attached at Appendix 1, including the recommendations, which have been split up into recommendations for the Council, for SCF and for the wider partnership of agencies who support children's safeguarding and wellbeing activities.

##### **2. Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Panel is recommended to:

1. Review and comment on the report attached at Appendix 1.
2. Recommend to Cabinet:
  - (a) That the Task and Finish Group Report is considered and the recommendations for the Council are accepted and acted upon;
  - (b) That Cabinet or the Cabinet Committee receives updates on progress against the recommendations as part of updates on SCF governance.
3. Request that the Chief Executive submits the Task and Finish Group Report to the SCF Board of Directors for consideration and acceptance of the recommendations.
4. Request that the Chief Executive submit relevant recommendations to the relevant partnership forums with a view to lead agencies being identified for each recommendation.
5. Note that a report will be brought back to Scrutiny in the next municipal year providing an update on progress against the recommendations.

## **Comments of Commissioners**

*“Commissioners would like to commend the task and finish group for the work they put in and the scope of their coverage. The approach they have followed and the learning they have obtained should flow through into future work and members should be thanked for setting such a good standard. DLUHC Commissioners look forward to reviewing the responses and implementation plans that follow the recommendations.”*

### **3. Slough Corporate Plan**

- A borough for children and young people to thrive

The Council’s corporate plan emphasises the need for children and young people to be able to access services that keep them safe and secure. This includes a focus on delivering preventative help to children and families. It also includes a focus on raising aspirations and delivering opportunities for young people to prosper. Support for children and young people should be seen as a whole Council and wider partnership responsibility. Whilst SCF have a key responsibility to deliver statutory services to safeguard children and young people, many of the recommendations in the report relate to recommendations for the wider partnership.

- A council that lives within our means, balances the budget and delivers best value for taxpayers and service users

In their report to DLUHC published 28th July 2022, Slough Borough Council Best Value Commissioners expressed uncertainty regarding the deliverability of the Council’s current savings plan. It was also flagged that the financial pressures arising from the current model of delivery of SCF are not possible to contain without an impact on service delivery. The Council will need to ensure it sets a fair baseline budget for SCF to allow it to deliver on its responsibilities. The Council also needs to ensure that SCF is utilising its funding in a way that is supporting good outcomes for children in a cost-effective manner. It is clear from the report that many of the strategies and approaches adopted by SCF are delivering high quality services and leading to improvements in recruitment and retention of staff. However, the national and local pressures mean that a different approach may be needed to support children and families in the future.

### **4. Other Implications**

#### **(a) Financial**

The recommendations are seeking to ensure that the Council’s limited resources are used to best effect. This includes ensuring that strategies are targeted at increasing recruitment of permanent staff and retaining and developing a high performing workforce. This will allow for continuity of case worker for children and families. In addition, the recommendations for the Council relate to appropriately commissioning and designing services so they support children and families via services targeted at mental health, domestic abuse, substance misuse and early years. Finally, there are key recommendations aimed at the wider partnership of agencies that support children and families to ensure that the limited amount of public funding within the Borough of Slough is appropriately targeted at those most in need.

### (b) Risk Management

The Council's highest corporate risk relates to a failure to appropriately safeguard children and support families to ensure that children are kept safe and well. This report and its recommendations are key to inform Council decision-making across a wide range of services, which will demonstrate that the Council is taking a whole system approach to its responsibilities to children and young people.

### (c) Legal Implications

The Secretary of State for Education has powers to issue a direction in relation to specified social services functions relating to children under s.497A of the Education Act 1996. Various directions have been issued in relation to statutory functions in Slough since 2014. The sixth statutory direction was issued in April 2021. This requires that the Council secures that prescribed children's services functions are performed by SCF and the Council jointly and other prescribed children's services functions are performed by SCF on behalf of the Council. The Council was also directed to enter into a new service agreement to implement the discharge of these functions and continue to comply with any instructions of the Secretary of State, his representatives and the Children's Services Commissioner in relation to

- i. ensuring that the Council's children's social care functions are performed to the required standard;
- ii. the terms of the Service Agreement that require the Secretary of State's consent or approval;
- iii. the operation of the Direction.

SCF is a wholly owned company and therefore the Council as its sole owner makes decisions on reserved matters as set out in its Articles of Association. These include approval of an annual business plan covering a three-year period. SCF is required to submit a draft business plan by 30 September in the previous financial year. SCF submitted a high level 7-year plan containing invest to save business cases in the summer of 2022. However, due to the significant level of investment being requested, the DfE agreed to commission a review which was undertaken by Mutual Ventures. This review is appended at Appendix 2 and makes a series of findings and recommendations, including concern about some of the assumptions being applied and alternative areas of focus.

### (d) Equalities Implications

The Council and SCF are obligated to comply with duties under the Equality Act 2010. The services are generally intended to support children and young people and their wider families. Certain communities will be disproportionately represented within the cohort of children and families being supported. Some recommendations are particularly focused on specific protected groups, including early years support, youth services and families experienced poor mental health. There is also a recommendation about utilising the diverse population as a positive as many of the existing staff really enjoy the difference they can make within the town.

## **5. Supporting Information**

Appendix 1 is a report of the Task and Finish Group set up to review the SCF draft business plan. The Group agreed to focus on workforce strategy and interviewed a number of individuals and groups of SCF staff to inform its report. It also reviewed national publications and data provided by SCF.

The Group would like to place on record its thanks to staff within SCF and the DfE Commissioner. The morale and passion that staff showed to their work was positive to see and the Group identified many areas of good practice, including good links with the local university, embedded strategies to support staff to progress their careers within SCF and excellent leadership and management support to allow staff to feel safe and supported. It was noticeable that the things that often made the most difference were not those that cost a lot of money, but demonstrated the care and commitment of the workforce.

The report highlights the national context and pressures around children's social care and the move to strength based or restorative based approaches to allow children to stay with their family network where targeted support allows this. The Group also noted the importance of the wider children's workforce and the need to focus on and develop this wider workforce to meet needs at an earlier stage. Schools clearly play a significant role in the safeguarding and wellbeing of children and the Council's education service must ensure that these key partners work together and support children at risk of missing education and being out of school. The report highlights the improvements that have been made in Sunderland City Council, particularly in relation to ensuring the participation of children and young people in training and that they are at the heart of decision-making across a range of Council services.

The report highlights the need for effective partnership working at a strategic and operational level and opportunities for agencies to join up on recruitment and apprenticeship opportunities. The report also highlights the risks for SCF if other parts of the Council are not operating at the right level, therefore the Council needs to carefully consider the impact of its savings plans on those services that provide early help and support services that impact on children and families. These include early years, education, community safety, youth and housing services.

It was noticeable that the current strategies of recruiting and developing newly qualified and overseas qualified staff was starting to work in terms of reducing the turnover and bringing down caseloads. Managers shared positive experiences of supportive leaders and managers that compared favourably with other places they had worked. It was recognised that strong leaders are key to a motivated workforce and the Panel was pleased to note that there were interviews for a new Executive Director / Chief Executive of SCF prior to Christmas and an appointment has been made, as the turnover of senior leaders in the past has been very damaging to the workforce.

In terms of investment, the report flags that many staff want to see opportunities for progression and investment in learning and development. This was more important than retention bonuses, which can be seen as divisive and unfairly applied. This is on the basis the SCF is paying salaries that are broadly comparable to its immediate neighbours and that it is seen as an employer who will support and develop its staff.

The work of the transformation team was particularly recognised and as this is funded by a DfE grant which is ending next year, this would be an area that should be prioritised for investment.

Finally, the report highlights the need to focus on outcomes for children and understanding the impact of decisions on children, young people and families. The lack of stability in the workforce is highly damaging to children and can lead to them having to tell their story to multiple people. On the positive, there is an opportunity to put children and young people at the heart of decision-making by involving them in workforce planning, being visible at senior levels in the organisation and to lead and participate in training. It was clear to the Group that an edge of care team would make a real difference to older children at risk of criminal exploitation, family breakdown and domestic abuse.

## 6. **Comments of Other Committees**

Cabinet will be asked to consider the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group when making decisions on a variety of matters, including approval of the SCF business plan.

The People Scrutiny Panel may wish to consider whether it wants to add a topic to its work programme on multi-agency working to protect and support children and young people.

## 7. **Conclusion**

The Task and Finish Group welcome feedback on its report and hope that the themes and recommendations will be taken into account by the Council, SCF and wider partnership.

## 8. **Appendices Attached**

Appendix 1 – Review of workforce strategy business case for SCF – Report by the People Scrutiny Panel Task and Finish Group

Appendix 2 – Mutual Ventures review of SCF draft business plan

## 9. **Background Papers**

None

The draft business plan and business cases that are referred to will be appended to the Cabinet paper, but until that point, they remain confidential. The list of documents available to the Panel are either published documents or are exempt documents at this time.

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## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date:</b>	04 January 2024
<b>Subject:</b>	Review of Forward Work Programme of the Corporate Improvement Select Committee (CISC)
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Stephen Taylor, Monitoring Officer
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Alexander Polak, Statutory Scrutiny Officer Michael Edley, Scrutiny Officer
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Appendices:</b>	<b>Appendix A</b> – Revised Draft Forward Work Programme Jan 2024 - April 2024 for Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee  <b>Appendix B:</b> Workplan as at 28 November 2023

### 1. Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the latest version of the work programme for the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC), included at Appendix A. It follows a review by members of the current workplan Appendix B, and also includes key training workshops and Briefings for members,

#### **Recommendations:**

- The Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee is recommended to review and agree the revised Forward Work Programme (Appendix A).

#### ***Commissioner Review***

*To Follow.*

### 2. Report

- 2.1 The Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC) is invited to agree this revised work programme (Appendix A) whilst noting that it is a living document and is intended to continue to evolve in response to events over the course of the period covered. In the usual course of things, it will also be fully refreshed after each Annual Council.
- 2.2 Work programmes always evolve over time, and this version (Appendix A) is the result of a review on 13 December to which members were invited to submit proposals for topics/issues they felt CISC might be able to add value. Guidelines for this process (Appendix C) had been circulated to members in November, This

includes a template for a member/s to complete, prior to such a review, for members to consider in the context of an existing work plan.

- 2.3 The revised work plan also now includes CISC training events as well as other minor changes previously agreed by the committee and/or Chair between October and December, such as accommodating the Chief Constable's and PCCs Annual Report.
- 2.4 Four proposals were submitted at the review workshop (in relation to the private rented property licencing scheme (PRPLS), SEND issues at a primary school, inappropriate sub-letting of council housing properties and asset disposal). Proposers introduced their proposals and colleagues sought further elaboration, clarification and explanation as they felt appropriate. Each member then scored the proposals using the form provided (Appendix D).
- 2.5 There was clear support for scrutiny of PRLPS and this has been added to the forward plan for February where a gap had been created by agreeing to move the Report of the Task and Finish Group on Resident Engagement to its March meeting.
- 2.6 It was agreed that the other proposals needed further consideration and evidence, and that they may be considered again at a future review of the Forward Work Plan.
- 2.7 For the Committee's information, other actions from the Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan have also progressed since the last time a revised draft work programme was reported to the committee. For example:
  - The quarterly Corporate Performance Reports, Budget Management Outturn Reports and Updates from the Improvement and Recovery Board will in future be received by or circulated to the Committee as "For Information items" that they will take account of in their more focussed investigations.
  - Pre-publication and agenda scoping meetings are now scheduled simultaneously on a monthly basis, for the Chair and Vice Chair to meet report authors for the next two meetings, helping to shape the content of reports prior to publication and to scope the reports for the next meeting in a little over a month's time.
  - All-member pre-meetings are also held between the date of publication of the Agenda and the committee meeting itself. These are run in the spirit of a workshop to collectively agree key lines of enquiry, identify relevant questions and if necessary, the specific approach for each topic. This is leading to more focused discussions in the public meetings, with increasing recognition that members' questions are on behalf of the committee as a whole, rather than of the individual asking them.

### **3. Implications of the Recommendations**

#### ***3.1 Financial implications***

- 3.2 This is not a decision-making report so there are no direct financial implications. Where further work is required to respond to the issues identified, any recommendations from CISC will be made to Cabinet.



### 3.3 *Legal implications*

3.4 The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a new political management system for local councils in England and Wales, requiring them to have a separate 'executive' in the form of a leader, or elected mayor, and cabinet. To provide a counterweight for this, the Act also introduced the concept of 'overview and scrutiny' – sometimes referred to simply as 'scrutiny' – whereby every council with an executive management structure is required to have an overview and scrutiny committee. This enables the rest of the council to scrutinise the executive by investigating their decisions; policies; issuing reports and recommendations where any shortcomings are identified. Four key roles for overview and scrutiny are: holding executive, individual cabinet members and chief officers to account to ensure corporate priorities are met; policy development and review; external scrutiny, and performance management and best value.

### 3.5 *Risk management implications*

3.6 Overview and Scrutiny, commonly referred to as Scrutiny, is a statutory function and is currently subject to government direction in Slough. Failure to develop and approve a Forward Work Programme for Corporate Improvement and Scrutiny would increase the risk of challenge and criticism. The process of scrutiny itself can often serve as an early risk warning mechanism for the organisation.

### 3.7 *Equality implications*

3.8 The FWP and the covering report include reference to the CfGS scrutiny guidance – which together with the general Public Sector Equality Duty and Nolan's principles, incorporates provisions that are linked to the Equality Act duties, including, inter alia, a requirement to maintaining integrity, respect the rule of law, consideration of any disproportionate impact of decision-making process, ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.

## 4. **Appendices**

**Appendix A:** Draft proposed Forward Work Programme January to April for the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee

**Appendix B:** Current Forward Work Programme as at November 2023.

**Appendix C:** Selecting Topics For Scrutiny: A Guide For Scrutiny Councillors

**Appendix D:** Template for evaluating proposals.

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**Appendix A: PROPOSED CISC FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME JANUARY 2024 ONWARDS**

<b>December 2024: Training for Members</b>				
<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic / Issue</b>	<b>Delivered by</b>	<b>Where and time</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Wed 13 December	Draft Budget 2024-5 and MTFS 1	Adele	6:00 – 7:00	

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<b>January 2024: Training for Members</b>				
<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic / Issue</b>	<b>Delivered by</b>	<b>Where and time</b>	<b>Notes</b>
10 January	Budget and MTFS 2	Adele	Council Chamber 6:30	

# CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Forward Work Programme 2024 Jan onwards

Last Updated: Friday, 15 December 2023

## 4 January 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
3	Council-wide Improvement and Recovery monitoring	<b>Quarterly Scrutiny Challenge – Improvement and Recovery</b>	To receive a report – scrutinise key areas and monitor progress of actions relating to improvement and recovery	Holding to account – oversight and monitoring	Stephen Brown, Chief Executive Sarah Hayward, Executive Director,
4	Assurance that <b>HR function is fit for purpose</b>	<b>Deep Dive on Human Resources – Direction of travel and ‘fit for purpose’</b>	To receive a report providing assurance and progress ensuring that HR is ‘fit for purpose’	Holding to account – oversight and monitoring.	Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement
5.	Childrens Services	Review of recommendations in Report to Cabinet in February 2023.on Review of Workforce Business Case	Report: Update on implementation of recommendations following the Task and Finish Group Review		Sarah Wilson

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## 30 January 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
3.	Financial sustainability; closure of long-term budget gap across the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS); and balanced financial forecast for 2023/24.	<b>Scrutiny of Council’s Draft Budget Proposals 2024/25 (Capital and Revenue – Savings, growth, EqIA, Risks and MTFS)</b>	To receive a report about the Council Draft Budget Plan 2024/25.	Pre decision scrutiny Critical friend and budget recommendations to Cabinet.	Adele Taylor, S151 Officer and Executive Director

### February 2024: Training for Members

Date	Topic / Issue	Delivered by	Where and time	Notes
1 February	Data and managing council performance Free introductory training for councillors	LGA	Online 5.15pm - 7.45pm	
7 February	Demographic, social, economic and environmental data, slough performance data: Analysis, interpretation and benchmarks	Aman Gill Michael Edley	Council Chamber 6:30	

### 22 February 2024

Page 99	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
1	Practice improvement for Children with SEND – <b>Ofsted</b>  <b>Note: In discussion with SB about this in terms of timing, relevance, influence etc</b>	<b>Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).</b>	Report on practice improvement for children with SEND – monitoring of actions taken and progress made to address the priorities identified by Ofsted and CQC in their inspection report	Oversight and monitoring.	Sue Butcher Chief Executive, Slough Children First. As it stands this is too big and wouldn't be adding value. Hold as marker for children's but prob not this exactly
2	<b>Corporate Priorities, Balanced Budget, Health inequalities</b>	Licensing of Private rented accommodation	Review of the operation and delivery of the SBC private rented property Licensing Scheme		P Hayes Chris Stratford

### 27 February 2024

Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	All Council Special Event	Responsibility
Chief Constable and PCC	<b>Annual Report</b>	For Information for Item in April		MTE

### 26 March 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
1	Improving public trust and engagement with residents to enable better service delivery as part of wider organisational change.	<b>Report from the T&amp;F 2 (Resident engagement and building public trust) launched in October 2023.</b>	Reporting progress to the parent committee.	In depth review; policy development and monitoring	Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement Chair of T&F Cllr Manku, Chair of CIS
2	Participation/engagement is identified as an area of development by Ofsted	<b>Launch of Task and Finish Group 3 – Journey to Good – SCF</b>	To provide input to develop a plan of engagement with local communities including faith, disabled LD and other relevant groups.	Policy development and critical friend role.	Sue Butcher Executive Director – Children’s Services, Chief Executive, Slough Children First. Chair of CISC, Cllr Manku
3	Implementation of an estates strategy to make clear how the Council will use its assets to enable service delivery. <b>(Annex B, 2b of <a href="#">Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</a>)</b>	<b>Scrutiny of Council’s Estate Strategy and its implementation</b>	To receive a report on the implementation of the Council’s estates strategy to review how the Council is using its assets to enable service delivery; value for money; impact on resident and council’s finances – what external validation or checks are in place; what have been/are the key challenges and opportunities.	Oversight, monitoring and critical friend.	Patrick Hayes, Executive Director Housing and Property

23 April 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
1	Council-wide Improvement and Recovery monitoring following Government Directions.	<b>Quarterly Scrutiny Challenge –Improvement and recovery progress</b>	To scrutinise key areas and gain wider insight into progress of actions relating to improvement and recovery.	Oversight, monitoring and policy development.	Stephen Brown, Chief Executive Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement
2	<b>Statutory scrutiny responsibility</b> for crime and disorder functions.  <b>PCC and Chief Constable to make their annual report presentation on 27 February and that CISC focus on the work of the Safer Slough Partnership Here</b>	<b>Safer Slough Partnership</b> (Timing TBC, subject to all Member briefing)	To receive a report with a view to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime, disorder and community safety functions .	Monitoring and oversight. Annual attendance at scrutiny. Update on current performance and work going forward	Matthew Barber, Police and Crime Commissioner  Chief Constable Jason Hogg  Superintendent Lee Barnham

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Subject to Chair

**May 2024 Onwards: Proposed/possible topics**

	<p><b>Annex A, Paragraph 6 of</b>  <a href="#">Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</a></p>	<p><b>Governance and operation of subsidiary companies</b></p>	<p>To receive a report demonstrating that Council has compiled or adequately progressing with the letter and spirit of the Direction 6 relating to review by Authority of its companies, including any subsidiaries but excluding Slough Children First (SCF). For those companies that it is agreed to continue, make sure that the Directors appointed by the Authority are appropriately skilled in either technical or company governance matters to make sure each Board functions effectively. For those companies which it is determined not to continue with in this form, to establish a plan to internalise, close or sell as appropriate.</p>	<p>Oversight and Monitoring.</p>	<p>Patrick Hayes, Executive Director Housing and Property</p>
	<p><b>Annex A, Paragraph 3f of</b>  <a href="#">Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</a></p>	<p><b>Progress against Directions: Scrutiny of ICT and HR improvements progress</b></p>	<p>To review and scrutinise progress relating to HR and ICT directions/commentary/report by Commissioners.</p>	<p>Oversight and monitoring.</p>	<p>Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement</p>



# CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Forward Work Programme 2024 Jan onwards

Last Updated: Friday, 15 December 2023

## May 2024 Onwards: Proposed/possible topics

	<p><b>Monitoring of Corporate Performance</b>  <b>Agreed that corporate performance will not in itself be a scrutiny item but that relevant performance data will be available to scrutiny for their investigations</b></p>	<p><b>Quarterly Corporate Performance Report</b>  <b>Organisational Culture Change Programme –</b>  <i>Flexibility to be taken as a report or a T&amp;F.</i></p>	<p>To receive a quarterly performance report in order to review and scrutinise council's performance. A report to the main item or a T&amp;F – TBC.</p>	<p>Oversight and monitoring.                   Policy development.                  Critical friend role.</p>	<p>Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement.                   Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement.</p>
	<p><b>Scrutiny of Draft Budget 2025-6</b>   <b>May 2024 -January 2025</b></p>		<p>Suggest ongoing sub-group to undertake a programme of scrutiny following CIPFA guidelines</p>		<p>Adele Taylor</p>
<p>Page 103</p>	<p><b>Update Items arising from 23-24 ACTIVITY:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IT</li> <li>• HR</li> <li>• PROCUREMENT</li> <li>• EQUALITIES</li> <li>• IRB</li> <li>• ENGAGEMENT TASK GP RECOMMENDATIONS</li> <li>• ASC TASK GP RECOMMENDATIONS</li> </ul>		<p>May ask for these as For information type reports outside of formal committee or ask for reporting by exception</p>		

**Task and Finish Group Topics ‘Taxi-rank’ in Priority Order**

Page 104

Topic / Issue	Comments
Adult Social Care (ASC) Assurance Programme/New CQC regime	<p>The ASC assurance programme touches a number of key improvement and recovery areas.</p> <p>CQC will place a lot of emphasis on the importance of good Leadership and Culture as well as on Customer Service and experience.</p> <p>The initial assessment suggests opportunity for value to be added through scrutiny/T&amp;F. Timely scrutiny engagement, through this Task and Finish Group will help assure that the service is focussing on the right priorities and making required improvements. This will also offer critical friend challenge around assurance programme and delivery of the outcomes through an action plan. Starting in September 2023.</p>
Resident Engagement and Building Trust	<p>Building and maintaining public trust through resident engagement is an important component for SBC. Agreement in principle with the service.</p>
Journey to Good – Slough Children First	<p>Participation/engagement is identified as an area of development by Ofsted so a T&amp;F can add real value.</p> <p>A Task and Finish Group focussing on developing community and faith groups involvement in improving children services. This will ensure that enhanced partnerships bring different skillsets and experiences. Agreement in principle with the service.</p>

Sup

**Forward Work Programme 2024 Jan onwards**

**Last Updated: Friday, 15 December 2023**

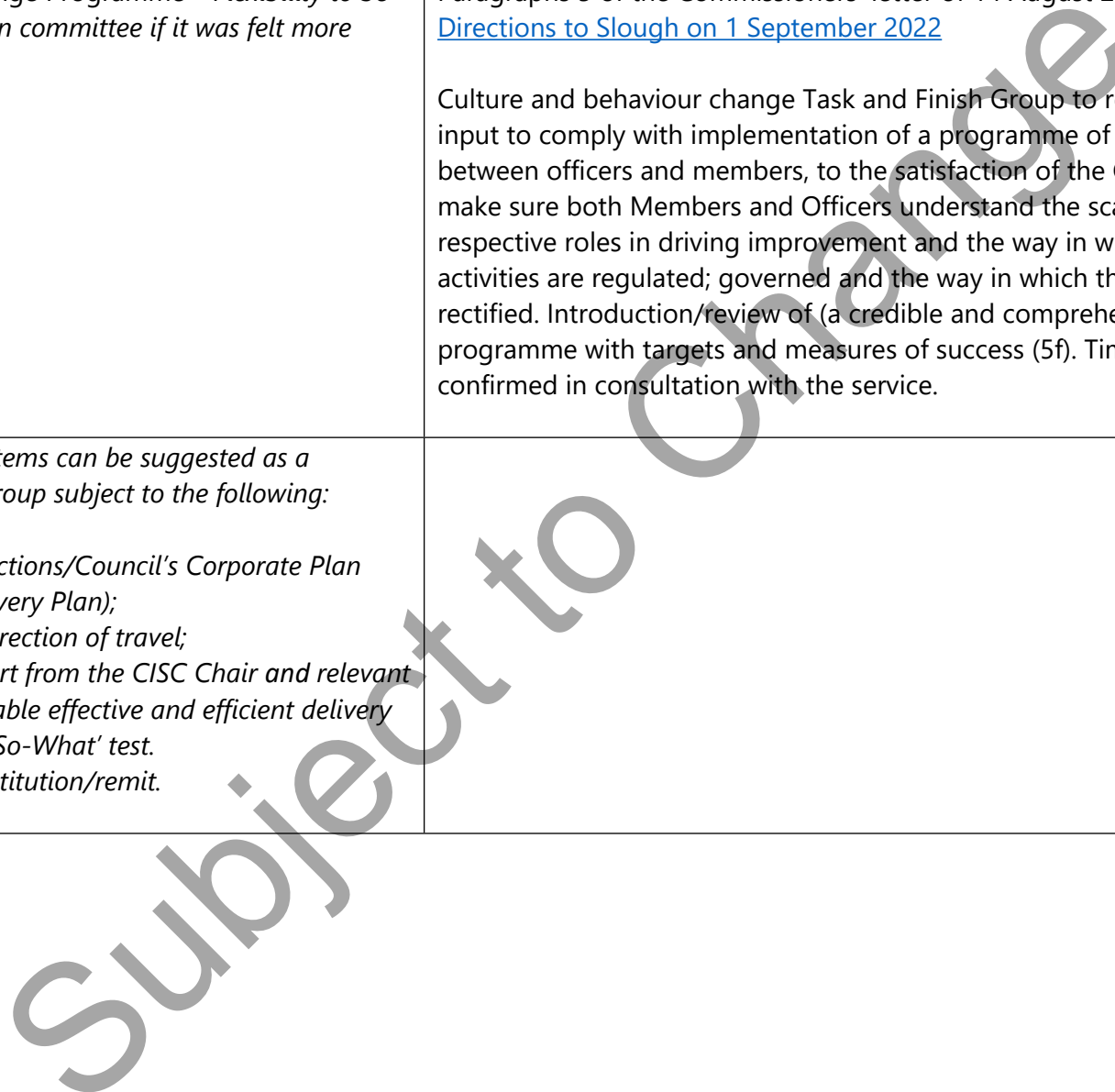
Organisational Culture Change Programme – *Flexibility to be taken as a report to the main committee if it was felt more appropriate.*

Paragraphs 5 of the Commissioners’ letter of 14 August 2023 as well as [Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022](#)

Culture and behaviour change Task and Finish Group to review progress and provide input to comply with implementation of a programme of cultural change to rebuild trust between officers and members, to the satisfaction of the Commissioners. This should make sure both Members and Officers understand the scale of the challenge and their respective roles in driving improvement and the way in which the Authority and its activities are regulated; governed and the way in which this is monitored, and breaches rectified. Introduction/review of (a credible and comprehensive) culture change programme with targets and measures of success (5f). Timing and the form to be confirmed in consultation with the service.

*Any appropriate deep dive items can be suggested as a proposal for a future T&F Group subject to the following:*

- *Alignment with the Directions/Council’s Corporate Plan (Improvement and Recovery Plan);*
- *Slough’s progress and direction of travel;*
- *Commitment and support from the CISC Chair and relevant Executive Director to enable effective and efficient delivery to add value – ‘But-For/So-What’ test.*
- *Statutory guidance/constitution/remit.*



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## Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

26<sup>th</sup> September 2023

item	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
	<p>Council-wide <b>Improvement and Recovery</b> monitoring following Government Directions.</p> <p>Financial sustainability; closure of long-term budget gap across the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS); and balanced financial forecast for 2023/24. <b>(Annex A, Paragraph 3a of <a href="#">Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</a>)</b></p> <p>Proper functioning of scrutiny. <b>(Annex A, Paragraph 3c of <a href="#">Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</a>)</b></p>	<p><b>Scrutiny Challenge – Quarterly Improvement and Recovery</b></p> <p><b>Budget Monitoring Q1 23/24 and Budget Outturn 22/23</b></p> <p><b>Revised Scrutiny Forward Work Programme</b></p>	<p>To receive a report – scrutinise key areas and monitor progress of actions relating to improvement and recovery.</p> <p>Strategic scrutiny and budget monitoring of 23/24 and 22/23 Outturn as this will inform the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for 24/25 and beyond which will underpin the Council's budget proposals.</p> <p>To agree the revised CISC Forward Work Programme after Commissioners' feedback.</p>	<p>Holding to account – oversight, monitoring and scrutiny</p> <p>Holding to account – oversight, monitoring and scrutiny.</p> <p>Critical friend role.</p> <p>Forward Planning</p>	<p>Stephen Brown, Chief Executive</p> <p>Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement</p> <p>Adele Taylor, S151 Officer and Executive Director</p> <p>Alex Polak, Statutory Scrutiny Officer Kunwar Khan, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager</p>

## Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

24 October 2023					
	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ICT strategy that enables service delivery and communications with residents.</li> </ul>	<b>Direction Deep Dive on: ICT; and</b>	To receive a report about the Council's ICT and procurement (including contract management) functions as identified in the priority area/reference column by the Government and Commissioners.	In-depth review of the progress against the directions. Holding to account – oversight, monitoring and scrutiny.	Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvements in relation to the proper functioning of the procurement and contract management function. (<b>Annex A, Paragraph 3e of <a href="#">Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</a></b>)</li> <li>To meet the Council's <b>statutory responsibility</b> to publish equality information and objectives.</li> </ul>	<b>Procurement</b>		pre-decision scrutiny and policy development. Critical friend role.	Clare Priest, Head of Commercial Services
		<b>Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and Council Decision-making (compliance and new objectives)</b>	To receive a report providing assurance to CISC on the Council's specific duties under the Equality Act to help comply with the public sector equality duty. Public authorities must publish equality information at least once a year to show how they've complied with the equality duty; they must prepare and publish equality objectives at least every 4 years.		Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement

## Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

28 November 2023					
	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
4	Financial sustainability; closure of long-term budget gap across the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS); and balanced financial forecast for 2023/24.	<b>Scrutiny of Council's 2024/25 Budget setting process</b>	To receive a report about the budget setting process 2024/25. Seeking assurance in line with Directions relating to finance, MTFS and budget. Final details of the item to be confirmed by finance.	Oversight, monitoring and policy development. Pre decision scrutiny, oversight and monitoring	Adele Taylor, Executive Director and S151 Officer <b>(Annex A, Paragraph 3a of <a href="#">Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</a>)</b>
5	ASC CQC new inspection regime – The ASC assurance programme touches a number of key improvement and recovery areas.	Adult Social Care and the new CQC Regime – Report back from T&F	To receive a report with recommendations from the ASC T&F as the parent committee before it goes to Cabinet.	development; in-depth review and critical friend role.	T&F Chair: Christine Hulme Marc Gadsby, Executive Director, Adult Social Care Amanda Halliwell, CQC Project Manager /CQC workstream.
6	Improving public trust and engagement with residents to enable better service delivery as part of wider organisational change.	Launch T&F 2 – Resident	To agree topic and scope of the T&F work.		Sarah Hayward, Executive Director Strategy and Development Caroline Adlem, Head of Communications and Resident Engagement

## Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

## 4 January 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
3	Council-wide Improvement and Recovery monitoring following Government Directions.	<b>Quarterly Scrutiny Challenge – Improvement and Recovery</b>	To receive a report – scrutinise key areas and monitor progress of actions relating to improvement and recovery	Holding to account – oversight and monitoring	Stephen Brown, Chief Executive Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement
4	Assurance that <b>HR function is fit for purpose</b>	<b>Deep Dive on Human Resources – Direction of travel and ‘fit for purpose’</b>	To receive a report providing assurance and progress ensuring that business support services such as HR are ‘fit for purpose’	Holding to account – oversight and monitoring.	Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement

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## 30 January 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
3	To scrutinise key areas and seek assurance that Adult Social Care Service is undertaking the necessary improvement work to reduce the risk of poor CQC inspection outcome.	<b>Adult Social Care Transformation Programme</b>	To mitigate the risk of poor <b>CQC inspection</b> outcome for Adult Social Care (ASC) services.	Oversight, monitoring and critical friend. Policy development.	Marc Gadsby Executive Director, Adults (People)
4.	Financial sustainability; closure of long-term budget gap across the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS); and balanced financial forecast for 2023/24. <b>(Annex A, paragraph 3a of <a href="#">Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</a>)</b>	<b>Scrutiny of Council’s Draft Budget Proposals 2024/25 (Capital and Revenue – Savings, Growth, EqIA, Risks and MTFS)</b>	To receive a report about the Council Draft Budget Plan 2024/25.	Pre decision scrutiny Critical friend and budget recommendations to Cabinet.	Adele Taylor, S151 Officer and Executive Director



## Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

22 February 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
	Practice improvement for Children with SEND – <b>Ofsted</b>	<b>Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).</b>	Report on practice improvement for children with SEND – monitoring of actions taken and progress made to address the priorities identified by Ofsted and CQC in their inspection report	Oversight and monitoring.	Sue Butcher Chief Executive, Slough Children First. As it stands this is too big and wouldn't be adding value. Hold as marker for childrens but prob not this exactly
Page 111	Improving public trust and engagement with residents to enable better service delivery as part of wider organisational change.	<b>Report from the T&amp;F 2 (Resident engagement and building public trust) launched in October 2023.</b>	Reporting progress to the parent committee.	In depth review; policy development and monitoring	Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement Chair of T&F Cllr Manku, Chair of CIS

Subject to Change

## Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

26 March 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
1	Participation/engagement is identified as an area of development by Ofsted	<b>Launch of Task and Finish Group 3 – Journey to Good – SCF</b>	To provide input to develop a plan of engagement with local communities including faith, disabled LD and other relevant groups.	Policy development and critical friend role.	Sue Butcher Executive Director – Children’s Services, Chief Executive, Slough Children First. Chair of CISC, Cllr Manku
	Implementation of an estates strategy to make clear how the Council will use its assets to enable service delivery. ( <b>Annex B, 2b of <a href="#">Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</a></b> )	<b>Scrutiny of Council’s Estate Strategy and its implementation</b>	To receive a report on the implementation of the Council’s estates strategy to review how the Council is using its assets to enable service delivery; value for money; impact on resident and council’s finances – what external validation or checks are in place; what have been/are the key challenges and opportunities.	Oversight, monitoring and critical friend.	Patrick Hayes, Executive Director Housing and Property

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Subject to Change

## Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

23 April 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
	Council-wide Improvement and Recovery monitoring following Government Directions.	<b>Quarterly Scrutiny Challenge –Improvement and recovery progress</b>	To scrutinise key areas and gain wider insight into progress of actions relating to improvement and recovery.	Oversight, monitoring and policy development.	Stephen Brown, Chief Executive  Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement
	<b>Statutory scrutiny responsibility</b> for crime and disorder functions.	<b>Crime and Disorder/Policing Report</b> (Timing TBC, subject to all Member briefing)	To receive a report with a view to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions.	Monitoring and oversight. Annual attendance at scrutiny.	Matthew Barber, Police and Crime Commissioner  Superintendent Lee Barnham

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Subject to Change

## Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

May 2024 Onwards					
	<p><b>Annex A, Paragraph 6 of <a href="#">Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</a></b></p>	<p><b>Governance and operation of subsidiary companies</b></p>	<p>To receive a report demonstrating that Council has compiled or adequately progressing with the letter and spirit of the Direction 6 relating to review by Authority of its companies, including any subsidiaries but excluding Slough Children First (SCF). For those companies that it is agreed to continue, make sure that the Directors appointed by the Authority are appropriately skilled in either technical or company governance matters to make sure each Board functions effectively. For those companies which it is determined not to continue with in this form, to establish a plan to internalise, close or sell as appropriate.</p>	<p>Oversight and Monitoring.</p>	<p>Patrick Hayes, Executive Director Housing and Property</p>
	<p><b>Annex A, Paragraph 7 of <a href="#">Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</a></b></p>	<p><b>Data and Insight Report</b></p>	<p>To appraise and reassure the Committee as to what steps have been taken to enable evidence-based decision making, including enhancing the data and insight functions to</p>	<p>Oversight and monitoring.</p>	<p>Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement</p>

## Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 115</p>	<p><b>Annex A, Paragraph 3f of <a href="#">Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</a></b></p> <p><b>Monitoring of Corporate Performance</b></p>	<p><b>Progress against Directions:</b></p> <p><b>Scrutiny of ICT and HR improvements progress</b></p> <p><b>Quarterly Corporate Performance Report Organisational Culture Change Programme –</b> <i>Flexibility to be taken as a report or a T&amp;F.</i></p>	<p>enable more effective decision making.</p> <p>To review and scrutinise progress relating to HR and ICT directions/commentary/report by Commissioners.</p> <p>To receive a quarterly performance report in order to review and scrutinise council's performance. A report to the main item or a T&amp;F – TBC.</p>	<p>Oversight and monitoring.</p> <p>Oversight and monitoring.</p> <p>Policy development. Critical friend role.</p>	<p>Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement.</p> <p>Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement.</p> <p>Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement.</p>
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## Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

Task and Finish Group Topics 'Taxi-rank' in Priority Order	
Topic / Issue	Comments
Adult Social Care (ASC) Assurance Programme/New CQC regime  Page 116	<p>The ASC assurance programme touches a number of key improvement and recovery areas.</p> <p>CQC will place a lot of emphasis on the importance of good Leadership and Culture as well as on Customer Service and experience.</p> <p>The initial assessment suggests opportunity for value to be added through scrutiny/T&amp;F. Timely scrutiny engagement, through this Task and Finish Group will help assure that the service is focussing on the right priorities and making required improvements. This will also offer critical friend challenge around assurance programme and delivery of the outcomes through an action plan. Starting in September 2023.</p>
Resident Engagement and Building Trust	Building and maintaining public trust through resident engagement is an important component for SBC. Agreement in principle with the service.
Journey to Good – Slough Children First	<p>Participation/engagement is identified as an area of development by Ofsted so a T&amp;F can add real value.</p> <p>A Task and Finish Group focussing on developing community and faith groups involvement in improving children services. This will ensure that enhanced partnerships bring different skillsets and experiences. Agreement in principle with the service.</p>
Organisational Culture Change Programme – <i>Flexibility to be taken as a report to the main committee if it was felt more appropriate.</i>	<p>Paragraphs 5 of the Commissioners' letter of 14 August 2023 as well as <a href="#">Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</a></p> <p>Culture and behaviour change Task and Finish Group to review progress and provide input to comply with implementation of a programme of cultural change to rebuild trust between officers and members, to the satisfaction of the Commissioners. This should make sure both Members and Officers understand the scale of the challenge and their</p>

**Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023**

	<p>respective roles in driving improvement and the way in which the Authority and its activities are regulated; governed and the way in which this is monitored, and breaches rectified. Introduction/review of (a credible and comprehensive) culture change programme with targets and measures of success (5f). Timing and the form to be confirmed in consultation with the service.</p>
<p><i>Any appropriate deep dive items can be suggested as a proposal for a future T&amp;F Group subject to the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Alignment with the Directions/Council's Corporate Plan (Improvement and Recovery Plan);</i></li> <li>• <i>Slough's progress and direction of travel;</i></li> <li>• <i>Commitment and support from the CISC Chair and relevant Executive Director to enable effective and efficient delivery to add value – 'But-For/So-What' test.</i></li> <li>• <i>statutory guidance/constitution/remit.</i></li> </ul>	<p>TBC.</p>

Subject to Change

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# Appendix C Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee:



## **SELECTING TOPICS FOR SCRUTINY**

### **A GUIDE FOR SCRUTINY COUNCILLORS**

November 2023

This guide has been designed to support Scrutiny Councillors in Slough as they develop the scrutiny forward work plan. It does not directly apply to scrutiny of policy development, although many of the principles would also apply.

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## 1.0 The role of scrutiny.

Your key responsibilities, as a member of the Council's scrutiny committee are:

- To reflect residents' concerns about public services in Slough, either because they are failing to deliver as expected across the borough or that certain communities of place, interest or association are receiving a poorer service than others;
- To hold the Leader, Leadership Team and senior Council officers to account for their decisions;
- To contribute to the development of policy and the improvement of services by investigating issues of local concern;
- To review Council policy, the way policies are implemented and their impact on local people; and
- To scrutinise decisions before they are made and implemented or to scrutinise the implementation of decisions.

As you consider the prioritisation of the scrutiny work programme, you will want to consider these responsibilities. Councillors best carry out these responsibilities when they drive scrutiny with an independent mindset (as the statutory guidance requires), amplifying the voices and concerns of local people, driving improvement in service provision for them, and providing constructive challenge to the Leadership Team.

Scrutiny does not mean a generalised oversight of the Council and its partners or mirroring their agendas. Often there is a belief that trying to do anything "less" would result in key issues falling between the gaps. In fact, keeping a general watching brief over everything in the local area would not be possible. As the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) notes, if you try to do that it would greatly reduce the impact of scrutiny<sup>1</sup>.

Whilst the Leadership Team is an important partner, it should not direct your work, nor should you shadow their agenda.

### 1.1 The forward plan

It is usual that a Forward Plan is shaped in June-July each year. The initial draft will draw upon: Mapping legislative and constitutional requirements; Horizon scanning by directorate (performance reports, inspections, risks); Reviewing issues identified by residents (inc. surveys, complaints, member enquiries, FOI); Members proposals; Review of last year's work programme and 'leftover' topics and any ongoing investigations; A long list will then be subject to prioritisation to deliver an annual programme of, on average 2 key topics per Committee meeting. Members should also consider the format of the investigation.

The resulting forward work plan should be constantly checked to ensure that items remain relevant, and that there is the opportunity to reprioritise items or address new unexpected issues as and when necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> CfGS, Good Scrutiny Guide, pg. 22-23 [www.CfGS.org.uk/the-good-scrutiny-guide/](http://www.CfGS.org.uk/the-good-scrutiny-guide/)

## 2.0 What topics are suitable for scrutiny?

“Scrutiny has the power to look at anything which affects the area or the area’s inhabitants”

This means that scrutiny is not limited to reviewing Council Services. Topics that scrutiny could consider are:

- High profile issues in the borough and high-profile national issues impacting the borough, issues of local political contention, issues on which people hold strong views and areas of local community concern<sup>3</sup>
- Investigations that “follow the council pound” from the bottom-up – i.e: scrutiny of organisations that receive public funding to deliver goods and services in the borough<sup>4</sup> from the perspective of local people at the receiving end;
- Topics with a ‘focus’ for scrutiny chosen by you and fellow scrutiny councillors. Statutory guidance suggests that selecting a focus, such as ‘risks’, ‘authority’s finances’ or ‘the working with partners’, can help you filter the right topics for the authority at a given time and cutting across substantive topics/areas; and.
- Residents’ suggestions, risk and complaints data, council priorities outlined in the Council Plan, emerging policies and strategies, and ward councillor suggestions are all potential sources of topics for the work programme.

## 3.0: Proposing a topic

A member can propose a topic for scrutiny at any time and, in doing so, should consider the criteria set out in Section 4.0 and Figure 1. A template is available (Appendix A) for you to complete that will provide important information relating to key scrutiny criteria, upon which the Committee will accept or reject your proposal.

In submitting a topic for the Committee's consideration, you should provide as full an account as possible of the issue you are concerned about, providing any relevant evidence you can.

Once you have completed the Scrutiny Topic Proposal Form (Appendix A), you should email it to the Committee Chair (copied to the Governance and Scrutiny Officer (GSO)). The Chair will probably contact you to discuss the topic before it is put before the Committee at the next available meeting.

<sup>2</sup> MHC&LG, Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities, paragraph 49-51, p21 [www.gov.uk/government/publications/overview-and-scrutiny-statutory-guidance-for-councils-and-combined-authorities](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overview-and-scrutiny-statutory-guidance-for-councils-and-combined-authorities)

<sup>3</sup> CfGS, Good Scrutiny Guide, [www.CfGS.org.uk/the-good-scrutiny-guide/](http://www.CfGS.org.uk/the-good-scrutiny-guide/)

<sup>4</sup> MHC&LG, Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities, paragraph 46 pg.20 [www.gov.uk/government/publications/overview-and-scrutiny-statutory-guidance-for-councils-and-combined-authorities](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overview-and-scrutiny-statutory-guidance-for-councils-and-combined-authorities)

### 3.1 Deciding Scrutiny Topics: Work Programming<sup>5</sup>

“Effective work programming is the **bedrock** of the scrutiny function. Done well it lays the foundations for **targeted, incisive** and **timely** work on issues of local importance, where scrutiny can add value. Done badly, scrutiny can end up wasting time and resources on issues where the impact of any work done is likely to be minimal.”

When choosing topics for the work programme, members should:

- Prioritise topics where scrutiny can make an **impact, add value** or contribute to policy development;
- Achieve a **balance** between the **kinds of tasks** undertaken to fulfil your responsibilities;
- Achieve a balanced **spread of items** over the year;
- Incorporate a **range of methods and tools** to carry out scrutiny work; and.
- Leave some **space for urgent response** to changing events.

The work programme should **not** include information items – relevant background information will be communicated to you regularly, but it should not be part of committee meetings.

### 3.2 Saying “No”

It will **not** be possible to tackle every topic suggested for the long list. Just like Parliamentary Select Committees, scrutiny needs to look at the right things in a detailed way. This means that scrutiny councillors must prioritise some topics over others, through shortlisting. Shortlisting is necessary ‘to ensure the scrutiny function concentrates on delivering work that is of genuine value and relevance to the work of the wider authority’.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.3 Criteria for selection of topics (Fig 1.)

<sup>7</sup> “Scrutiny members should accept that shortlisting can be difficult. Scrutiny committees have finite resources and deciding how these are best allocated is tough. They should understand that, if work programming is robust and effective there might well be issues that they want to look at that, nonetheless are not selected”

You must be highly selective and apply common criteria to the decision process to be certain that the very best topics are chosen. You may proceed by answering systematically key questions about each topic.

<sup>5</sup> CfGS, Good Scrutiny Guide, pg24 [www.CfGS.org.uk/the-good-scrutiny-guide/](http://www.CfGS.org.uk/the-good-scrutiny-guide/)

<sup>6</sup> MHC&LG, [Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities](#), paragraph 11, pg.8

<sup>7</sup> MHC&LG, [Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities](#), Paragraph 57, pg.23

Firstly, consider:

- Does this issue affect a significant number of borough residents?
- Are some residents in a community of place, interest or association not getting the same service as others?
- Is there any initial evidence that suggests there is an issue that warrants the committees attention? and
- Can scrutiny add value, for example by contributing to better performance?

If you have answered no, then **leave those topics out**, but consider alternative courses of action (Fig. 1.). If you have answered yes, then proceed to the next stage (Section 4.0) and prioritise when and how scrutiny will be carried out.

#### 4.0 Prioritising a scrutiny topic. (Fig 2)

If the key criteria set out in Section 3.0 are broadly met when evaluating an issue/topic, then the Committee must decide the level of priority it should be afforded. If a topic does not duplicate others' work in the organisation, prioritisation can be determined considering the following issues:

- Is the issue strategic and significant?
- Is it an issue of concern to stakeholder organisations and/or external partners?
- Is the scrutiny timely/what does it take precedence over?<sup>8</sup>
- Are the resources available to conduct a scrutiny investigation
- What would be the most appropriate way to conduct a scrutiny investigation

As scrutiny in Slough takes shape it will look to increase local community involvement, inviting members of the public to suggest topics themselves. It will then become increasingly important to be able to show why and how decisions have been reached.

During prioritisation discussions you should be prepared to put the arguments in favour of including a topic or outlining the potential risks and disadvantages. It will require careful thinking to prioritise topics that will add the most value and have the greatest impact on local people's lives. The flowcharts (Figs. 1 and 2) at the end of this guide are designed to help you do that in a systematic way.

#### 5.0 What methods and techniques are available for scrutiny work?

As you decide what and how many topics to prioritise for inclusion in the work programme, you will need to consider the amount of work required to review each one, and the best way to conduct the work. The amount of time and resources needed to conduct each review will have an impact on the number of items you can include in the work programme.

Scrutiny Committee will gather evidence, hold meetings in the community, seek external expertise and look at practice elsewhere as they undertake detailed reviews of the topics members have identified to address the priorities reflected on the work programme.

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<sup>8</sup> Normally there will be an average of 2 key agenda items per meeting. It therefore follows that if a new scrutiny topic is proposed then a topic currently on the forward plan must be sacrificed.

The Committees can draw upon a variety of methods and tools, in designing to each topic and feasibility considerations driving the design of each review. The list below provides examples without being exhaustive:

- Task and finish group reviews with a few members meeting informally over a period to scrutinise one topic in depth;
- A short scrutiny review: A short, sharp review might take a few weeks, with members meeting two or three times over that period. It might be possible to transact such a review between the meetings of a formal committee (so, one meeting involves a review being commissioned, and the next sees the report of that review group coming back to committee for approval).
- A “Roundtable” bringing together councillors, experts, local people, and others;
- A series of single-issue non-committee meetings with various forms and participants;
- A single-issue committee meeting;
- Focus groups, workshops or a survey of people affected by an issue;
- A standing panel or (notionally) time-limited committee. When scrutiny is shadowing long-term working (for example, a major NHS reconfiguration or Budget setting) setting up a more open-ended arrangement may be appropriate.
- Targeted site visits;
- A ‘hearing’ at a committee meeting to ask key questions on a decision’s implementation, risks and measures of success;
- A longer-term detailed scrutiny review (lasting a few months);
- An agenda item at an ordinary committee meeting; and
- A mix of the above.

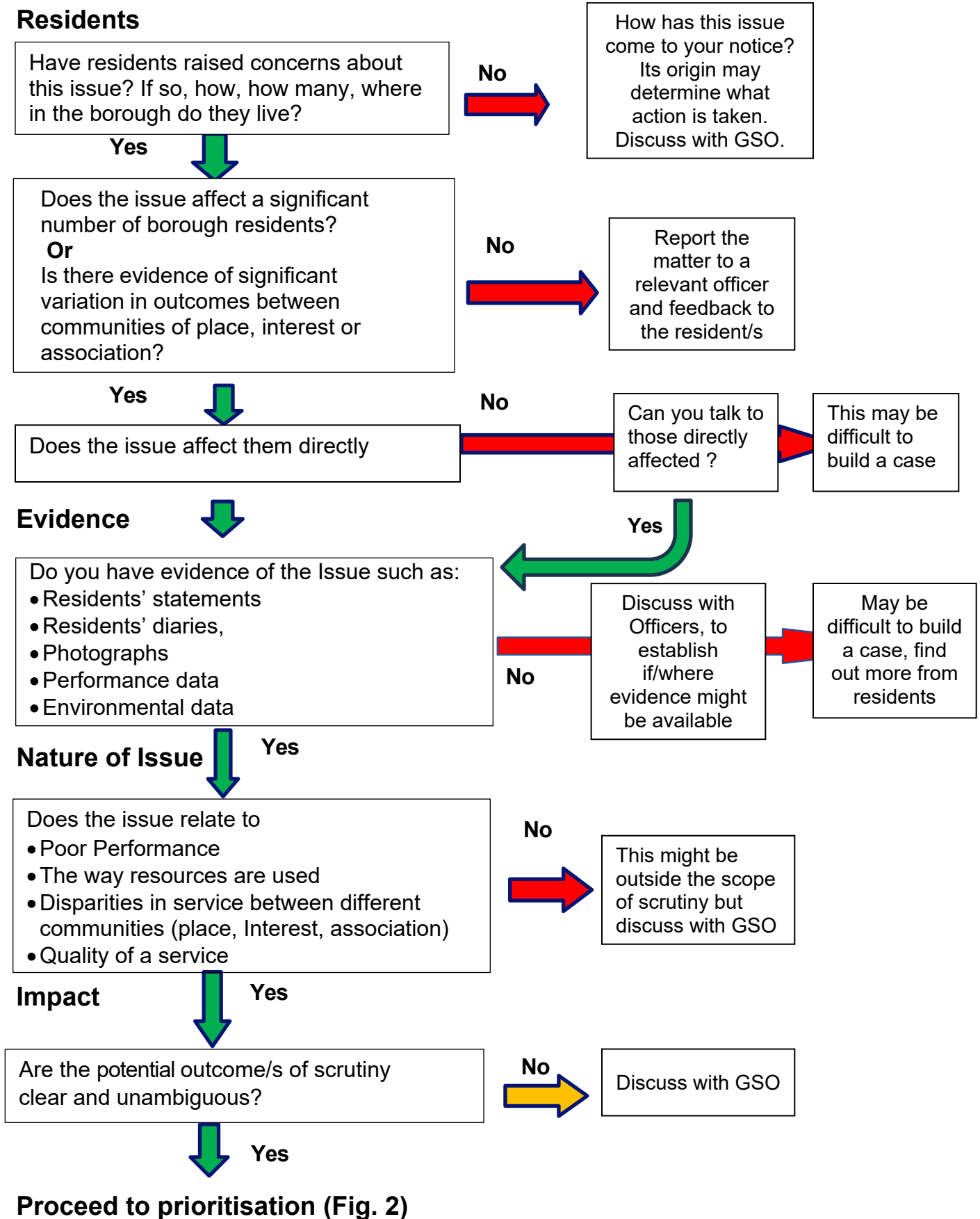
Key to producing useful recommendations is that scrutiny uses these techniques to involve residents, councillors, officers and stakeholders, to learn from their expertise, experiences and perspectives.

In selecting their approach to scrutiny, members will need to draw upon the skills, knowledge, and experience of officers in relevant departments as well as the Governance and Scrutiny Officer. It will be important to discuss, with these officers, their current and future work pressures in coming to a conclusion about the approach and timing of each scrutiny review, especially if it is new to the existing work programme.

Well thought-through and well-planned inquiries will ensure a focused and business like review that will have an impact in:

- Setting the agenda around which decisions are taken; and
- Requiring the Leadership Team to explain their decisions and, in doing so, helping them improve their actions.

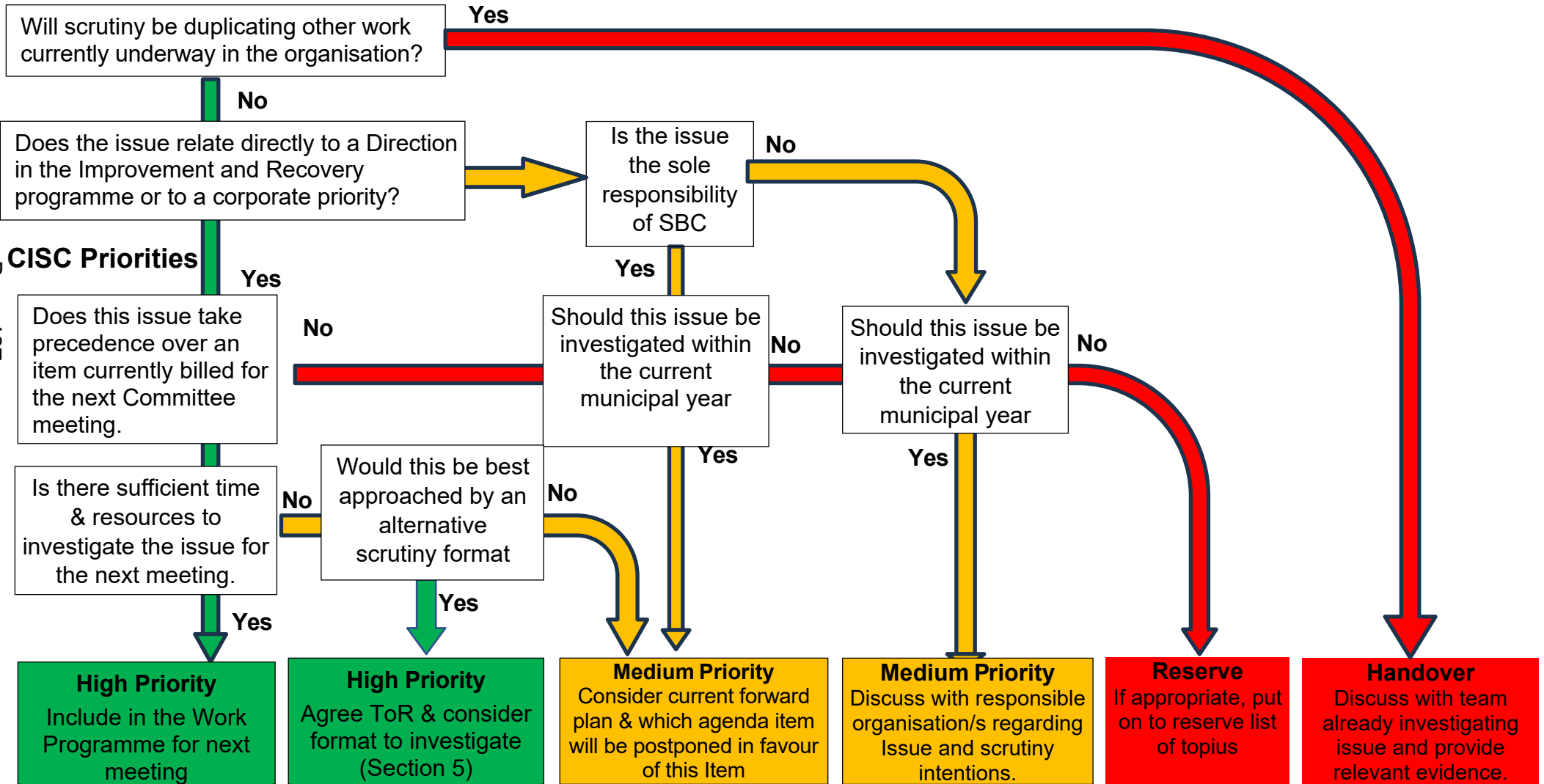
**Figure 1. CRITERIA FOR SCRUTINY TOPICS**





**Figure 2. PRIORITISATION**

**SBC Priorities**



**Name**

**Date:**

**Brief description of Issue**

**How did this issue come to your attention?**

**What proportion of the borough;s residents are affected?**

**EVIDENCE:** Set out /Point to the evidence you have in relation to this issue

**OUTCOME/S:** What improvement/change could scrutiny achieve

## **CISC Member evaluation of topics**

### **Evaluating Proposals: Key principles**

- a. Acknowledge that evaluation is largely subjective
- b. Addresses 2 key questions:
  - a. Is the proposal a good scrutiny topic in principle
  - b. Where does it fit amongst items already on the forward plan or do we add to discussion re 2024-25 FP in May/June
- c. Attempt to convert subjective views (about validity, evidence, impact, urgency and fit) into collective grading to allow workable/acceptable means to compare topics
- d. Also need to avoid parallel/duplicate investigations and allow for partner orgs to be engaged if implicated
- e. Incorporation into the forward plan is on basis of 1 in 1 out & 2 key items per meeting

### **Process**

1. Proposers to summarise briefly with Q&A from colleagues
2. Each member to score each proposal for Validity, Evidence, Impact, Urgency and Fit, based upon your personal assessment of the information in each document
3. Combine and collate individual scoring to come to final average score and ranking for each proposal.
4. Discussion on outcome of ranking and recommendations for changes to Forward plan Feb-April to CISC on 4 Jan if appropriate
5. After this review, will need to advise relevant directors of changes

.NB: this is similar to that undertaken in June/July and is based on CfGS guidelines

**CISC Member evaluation of topics**

**Appropriateness for CISC**

Proposal	<b>Validity</b> of issue for scrutiny (thinking about borough-wide impact or inequality of service)	Score	The degree to which there is sufficient <b>Evidence</b> to proceed at this stage	Score	Potential <b>Impact</b> of Scrutiny	Score	TOTAL SCORE <b>A/300</b>
	Your notes	x/100	Your notes	x/100	Your notes	x/100	x/300
<b>A</b>							
<b>B</b>							
<b>C</b>							
<b>D</b>							

**Partners and alternative investigations**

	Are other organisations also implicated?	If Yes: Which organisations	Could / Is this issue be/ing investigated elsewhere?	If Y: Where?	<b>Conclusion</b> Proceed Refer Defer
	<b>Y?N</b>		<b>Y/N</b>		
<b>A</b>					
<b>B</b>					
<b>C</b>					
<b>D</b>					

**Priority**

	<b>Urgency</b> Degree of urgency to address the issue	<b>Fit:</b> Relevance to improvement and recovery and or corporate priorities	<b>Total B</b>	Which item might this replace on Feb/March/April draft agendas	Total score/ <b>A+B</b>	<b>Recommendation</b> Replace Defer Other
	Score /100	Score /100	Score /200	Date and item	Score /500	
<b>A</b>						
<b>B</b>						
<b>C</b>						
<b>D</b>						

**MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE RECORD 2023/24**  
**CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**

	COUNCILLOR	27 June 2023	25 July 2023	26 Sept 2023	24 Oct 2023	28 Nov 2023
1.	Manku (Chair)	P	P	P	P	P
2.	Shaik (Vice-Chair)	P	P	P	Ap	P
3.	Escott	AP	P	P	P	P
4.	Hulme	P	P	P	P	P
5.	Iftakhar	P	P	P	P	P
6.	Mann	P	P	P	Ap	P
7.	Matloob	P	P	P	P	P
8.	Mohindra	P	P	P	P	P
9.	O'Kelly	P	P	P	P	P
10.	Stedmond	P	P	AP	AP	P

**MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE RECORD 2023/24**  
**CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**

P = Present for whole meeting  
P\* = Present for part of meeting  
Ap = Apologies given  
Ab = Absent, no apologies given