

Date of issue: Monday, 26 February 2024

MEETING:	CABINET (SPECIAL)	
	Councillor Smith	Leader of the Council – Improvement & Recovery, Performance, Governance and Young Futures
	Councillor Chahal	Deputy Leader of the Council – Finance, Council Assets, Procurement and Revenue & Benefits
	Councillor I. Ahmed	Community Cohesion, Public Health, Public Protection, Leisure and Planning
	Councillor Bedi	Education and Children’s Services
	Councillor Kelly	Highways, Housing and Transport
	Councillor Manku	Environment, Environmental Services and Open Spaces
	Councillor Muvvala	Customer Service, Resident Engagement, Digital, Data & Technology
	Councillor Wright	Adult Social Care, Mental Health & Learning Disabilities
DATE AND TIME:	TUESDAY, 5TH MARCH, 2024 AT 6.30 PM	
VENUE:	COUNCIL CHAMBER - OBSERVATORY HOUSE, 25 WINDSOR ROAD, SL1 2EL	
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER: (for all enquiries)	NICHOLAS PONTONE	07749 709 868

NOTICE OF MEETING

You are requested to attend the above Meeting at the time and date indicated to deal with the business set out in the following agenda.



STEPHEN BROWN
Chief Executive

AGENDA

PART I

<u>AGENDA ITEM</u>	<u>REPORT TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>	<u>WARD</u>
	Apologies for absence.		
1.	Declarations of Interest	-	-
	<i>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.</i>		
2.	Slough Autism Strategy 2024-29	1 - 48	All
3.	Direct award of Contract for Housing Related Support service for homeless people (HRS)	49 - 70	All
4.	Housing Homelessness Residents in Affordable rented Housing widening the housing Choice for Slough Residents	71 - 90	All
5.	Berkshire Prosperity Board	91 - 104	All
6.	Capital Point, 33 Bath Road, Slough – Lego Reversionary Leases	To Follow	All
7.	Exclusion of Press and Public	-	-
	It is recommended that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the item in Part 2 of the Agenda, as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding the information) as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (amended).		
PART II			
8.	Direct award of Contract for Housing Related Support service for homeless people (HRS)	105 - 108	All
9.	Capital Point, 33 Bath Road, Slough – Lego Reversionary Leases - Appendices	To Follow	Chalvey

Key decisions shown in bold.

Press and Public

Attendance and accessibility: You are welcome to attend this meeting which is open to the press and public, as an observer. You will however be asked to leave before any items in the Part II agenda are considered. For those hard of hearing an Induction Loop System is available in the Council Chamber.

Webcasting and recording: The public part of the meeting will be filmed by the Council for live and/or subsequent broadcast on the Council's website. The footage will remain on our website for 12 months. A copy of the recording will also be retained in accordance with the Council's data retention policy. By entering the meeting room and using the public seating area, you are consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings.

In addition, the law allows members of the public to take photographs, film, audio-record or tweet the proceedings at public meetings. Anyone proposing to do so is requested to advise the Democratic Services Officer before the start of the meeting. Filming or recording must be overt and persons filming should not move around the meeting room whilst filming nor should they obstruct proceedings or the public from viewing the meeting. The use of flash photography, additional lighting or any non hand held devices, including tripods, will not be allowed unless this has been discussed with the Democratic Services Officer.

Emergency procedures: The fire alarm is a continuous siren. If the alarm sounds Immediately vacate the premises by the nearest available exit at either the front or rear of the Chamber and proceed to the assembly point: The pavement of the service road outside of Westminster House, 31 Windsor Road.

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SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO:	Cabinet
DATE:	5th March 2024
SUBJECT:	Slough Autism Strategy 2024-29
CHIEF OFFICER:	Marc Gadsby, Executive Director People Adults
CONTACT OFFICER:	Jane Senior, Director of Commissioning Giuseppe Di Martino, Learning Disability and Autism Commissioner
WARD(S):	All
PORTFOLIO:	Cllr Anna Wright, Social Care and Public Health
KEY DECISION:	YES
EXEMPT:	NO
DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN:	YES
APPENDICES:	Appendix 1 – Equalities Impact Assessment Appendix 2 – Autism Strategy Appendix 3 – Autism Strategy Consultation

1 **Summary and Recommendations**

This report requests approval of the Autism Strategy 2024-29 including an Autism Action Plan. The Strategy sets out how the Council, working with its partners, will support and encourage autistic adults to live as independently as possible, actively engage with the wider community, maximise their potential, fulfilling their needs and aspirations, manage their own health and wellbeing, and ensure that that right support is known about, accessible, and available at the right time.

The aim of the strategy is to ensure that Slough is a place where autistic people live a long and purposeful life, experiencing good health and achieving a desired quality of life. Importantly, the Strategy seeks to minimise the negative impacts of social isolation and loneliness and seeks to prevent or delay crises.

The Strategy has been informed by engagement events with autistic adults and the wider Community, both in person and online, and with active support and participation from Co-Production Network, DWP, Autism Berkshire, SCVS, East Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, and the Local Authority. In addition, autistic people, their families and carers, and relevant professionals were asked open questions via a survey about their views and experiences which also underpin this strategy. This was co-designed with support from the Co-Production Network and other partners.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Slough Autism Strategy 2024-29 set out at Appendix 2.
2. Note that a report will be brought back to Cabinet annually setting out the progress against the Action Plan and recommending any amendments to the Strategy.

Reason:

To ensure that a fit for purpose Slough Autism Strategy with a clear action plan, and deliverables is in place.

Commissioner Review

No specific comments to add to the report.

2 Report

Publishing the Autism Strategy 2024-29 contributes to the following priorities:

Slough Corporate Plan

A town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives

- Working with partners to target health inequalities and promote well-being.
- Supporting residents to be as independent as possible whilst providing quality services for the most vulnerable.

Staying healthy, remaining independent at home, and meaningfully engaging with the community are important elements in achieving a good quality of life. For Autistic people, this is likely to be more challenging than for others due multiple factors such as health inequalities and barriers in accessing the community.

Our Corporate Plan sets out a vision for Slough where **residents can live healthier, safer and independent lives**. The Autism Strategy outlines 8 key priorities to support this vision and to address the needs of those who might require additional support by working with the wider community. These priorities were borne out of national and local drivers set out in the JSNA and Observatory Data and importantly through consultation with Autism stakeholders.

Slough Wellbeing Strategy 2022-25

Priority 2: Integration

- Increase the number of people living independently at home and decrease the proportion needing specialist services.
- Increase the number of people managing their own health and care needs.
- Increase employment opportunities to enhance people's independence.

Options considered

Option	Pros	Cons
<p>Option 1</p> <p>Approve and implement the Autism Strategy 2024-29.</p> <p>Recommended</p>	<p>Up to date Autism Strategy in place which is informed by community engagement.</p> <p>Implementation of an Autism Strategy Action Plan to be overseen by a new Autism Steering Group comprising Autistic People, Carers, the Co-Production Network, Council officers and professional stakeholders and reported through existing and new Council governance arrangements.</p>	<p>No clear disadvantage to approving and implementing the Strategy.</p>
<p>Option 2</p> <p>Do not approve Autism Strategy 2024-29.</p> <p>Not recommended</p>	<p>No clear advantage</p>	<p>There is no Autism Strategy and Action Plan currently in place</p> <p>Missed opportunity to implement an effective strategy which is aligned to the Corporate Plan and the Slough Wellbeing Strategy and thereby supports the delivery of broader corporate objectives.</p>

Option 1 is recommended.

Background

- 2.0 The Autism Strategy 2024-29 provides an opportunity to strengthen the Autism offer within the town - based upon evidence and information obtained through engagement. The Strategy sets out 8 key priorities for Autism in Slough which are aligned to intended Corporate Objectives. The priorities are:

Priority 1: Promote Independent Living

This priority regards how to navigate life and society independently and includes the co-production of dedicated initiatives with the autistic community (nothing about us without us), improved information in accessible format (e.g. video, simple language) regarding services available and how to access these, improved awareness of autism needs and adaptations within the community and concerning fundamental services (e.g. housing maintenance support).

Priority 2: Providing quality support in the community

This concerns themes such as the creation of dedicated spaces, online and in person, where to access advocacy, information; and events that meet the needs of the autistic community (e.g. low arousal environment), increase awareness of autism in the wider population, peer-mentoring programmes for support and advice.

Priority 3: Implement the integration of Health and Social Care

Engagement feedback has revealed the need to work with health partners to improve assessment pathway for diagnosis, better training opportunities for health and ASC staff to accommodate autistic needs in mainstream services, improved and accessible communication among professionals and with the autistic community.

Priority 4: Pathways for Transition to Adulthood

Transitioning to adulthood is always a complex time of changes, and this is even more significant when neurodivergent. Autistic people have expressed the need for a clearer pathway to adulthood which should include, among other priorities, early planning, timely referral, and improved and clearer communication between adult and children teams, and with carers.

Priority 5: Pathways to support Employment, skill development, and training

Access to meaningful employment and skill development pathways is a priority both for the Government and the Autistic community in Slough. To achieve this, autism stakeholders have noted the need for tailored local programme of skill development, mentoring opportunities (e.g. expert by experience), and resources to improve Autism awareness, and the accommodation of autistic needs (e.g. sensory, communication) in the workplace and in educational settings.

Priority 6: Empowering people to stay safe and free from abuse

Data suggest that between 50% to 89% of autistic adults have been victim of discrimination or victimisation with negative consequences for their mental health¹. This confirms the need for improved awareness of Autism needs within the wider community, pathways for self-protection, self-advocacy, abuse awareness from a young age, improved access to reporting, and support when abuse takes place.

Priority 7: Prevent Loneliness and Social Isolation

Loneliness has been one of the most heartfelt topics during engagement events. Autistic people in Slough feel the need for improved road safety to access the community, the creation of dedicated urban spaces in town that cater for the needs of autistic people, and community initiatives (e.g. special interests, sensorial, communication, environmental) to promote socialisation and prevent isolation.

Priority 8: Improving communication and information sharing

Improved access to information and communication has emerged as a clear need in all priorities discussed during engagement events. The feedback has been unanimous: it is an absolute priority to improve accessibility and availability of information in suitable formats (e.g. videos), as well as providing additional clarity on how to access communication and information about services (e.g. some people may not read, others may not be comfortable talking on the phone).

Further detailed information concerning each of these priorities is found in the Strategy.

¹ Reuben KE, Stanzione CM, Singleton JL. Interpersonal Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress in Autistic Adults. 2021

The Strategy contains an “Autism Strategy Action Plan” setting out a range of initiatives which will be implemented to deliver against the priorities. These include mapping the customer journey and developing a clearer set of operational pathways for Autistic people especially in key areas such as Employment, Education, Skills development.

One of the key elements of the action plan is to take a targeted approach that promotes and enables people’s autonomy and independence by working together with the territory to prevent Crises and deterioration of needs across health and social care, to tackle social isolation and loneliness, and to ensure meaningful lives for Autistic People within their communities.

This Strategy links closely with the Carers Strategy 2023-2028 to ensure that their needs can be met as we often find Carers play an important role in the adult social care economy especially for Autistic People and their caring can prevent the cared for person moving into expensive residential care.

The Action Plan will be overseen through a new Autism Steering Group comprising of Autistic People, Carers, the Council, and its partners with responsibility for delivering against the strategy resting with the People Strategy and Commissioning Team.

The Strategy has been shaped by diverse engagement events with Autism stakeholders and the wider community. This included an online event via Microsoft Teams, an event in person at Observatory House, and a written questionnaire circulated online and in paper format developed with the support of the Co-Production Network volunteers. Engagement events have been promoted across the community with the support of SCVS organisations, East Berkshire NHS, ICB Frimley, Healthwatch, DWP, CPN, Housing Department, Business Networks, and other relevant community groups and stakeholders. Furthermore, commissioners have actively participated to other community initiatives to extend awareness of the events and gather local feedback. Autistic people and the wider community have come together to share how they feel about Autism services, their needs, priorities, and what is their view of making Slough an Autism friendly town and community, and the participation has been remarkably high. The multimedia and multimodal approach has facilitated a wider active participation from the Autism community and their carers. Some of the consistent themes emerging from the engagement were the issues around isolation/loneliness, to provide more accessible information (not just digital) and about relevant and current issues e.g. employment, social participation, etc. Full information concerning feedback from the engagement, including cross-referencing back to the Strategy, is contained at Appendix 3 to the Strategy.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

Whilst there are no financial implications directly relating to the publication of the Autism Strategy, it is intended that implementation of the action plan will deliver cost efficiencies to the Council and deliver on our best value duties. Like other Adult Social Care service users this will be through promoting independence (for example through increasing the use of assistive technology and skill development initiatives), progressing integration (for example through the establishment of a more robust customer journey across health and social care) and to prepare more effectively to meet the future needs of Autistic People within the community, including more

complex needs (for example by early planning with Public Health, Children Services and the NHS to target early identification). Cost efficiencies will be confirmed against each of the relevant workstreams once the new Autism Strategy Steering Group takes shape. Progress will be reported into Cabinet on an annual basis.

3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 The Care Act 2014 contains duties to actively promote wellbeing and independence and to provide services, facilities, or resources to prevent, delay or reduce the need for care and support. This prevention duty is distinct from the assessment and meeting eligible needs duties. The Strategy and Action Plan set out a clear intention to further promote independence by supporting autistic people to self-advocate and to ensure the development of fundamental life skills.

3.2.2 The Care and Support Statutory Guidance refers to the prevention and promoting wellbeing duties as aimed at individuals with no current health or care and support needs. Universal services include but should not be limited to information and advice. Services can include supporting safer neighbourhoods, promotion of healthy and active lifestyles, reducing loneliness or isolation and encouraging early discussion in families. Priority 1 is focused on promoting independence and Priority 3, 5, and 7 on a sense of purpose, participation, and good health.

3.2.3 Effective intermediate and reablement services are also referred to in the Guidance as key to delaying the need for care and support services. These are services often provided for a limited period and are excluded from personal budgets. They are an effective way of preventing needs escalating and supporting individuals to maintain or regain the ability to live independently.

3.2.4 The Guidance refers to the need for strategies and plans to be aligned with other Council strategies and to take account of local differences. This requires the following principles to be met:

- involvement of local people who use the services and representative organisations,
- ensuring services are available at the right time in a range of formats and channels, meeting the needs of distinct groups,
- being clear, comprehensive and impartial,
- being consistent, accurate and up to date,
- being based on detailed analysis,
- directing people to sources of further information,
- being used to inform future planning,
- ensuring appropriate quality assurance and review, including customer feedback to make sure the Council learns from experience and continuously improves.

3.2.5 The Autism Strategy has been produced following consultation and engagement with Autistic People and the wider community, and it will be reviewed periodically to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the population and focuses limited resources in the right areas. Information consultation and engagement which has taken place is contained both within the Autism Strategy and its appendix 3. It is proposed that the annual review is brought back to Cabinet with an update on progress against the Action Plan and recommendations for any changes to the Strategy.

3.2.6 Section 12 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 introduced a duty at Section 2B of the NHS Act 2006 for the council to take appropriate steps to improve the health of the people who live in its area. The Autism Strategy places an emphasis upon Autistic People health and wellbeing. It is proposed that the annual review is brought back to Cabinet with an update on progress against the Action Plan and recommendations for any changes to the Strategy.

3.3 Risk management implications

Overall, the risks associated with approving the Slough Older People Strategy are set out below.

Risk	Assessment of Risk	Mitigation	Residual Risk
Insufficient staffing resource to implement the Action Plan.	Medium	<p>Full use of commissioning staffing budget over 2024-25 to support commissioning initiatives.</p> <p>Cross-council approach as necessary to support implementation of elements of the Autism Action Plan.</p> <p>Acknowledgement that progress will be negatively impacted if staffing resource is insufficient.</p>	Low / Medium
Unwillingness of partners to engage with and support the strategy and implementation of the action plan.	Medium	<p>Ongoing engagement through formal partnerships arrangement including the Health and Social Care Partnership Board and East Berkshire Directors meetings, and reporting through established governance arrangements eg the Slough Wellbeing Board.</p>	Low / Medium
Insufficient budget to support any commissioning intentions arising out of the Autism Action Plan.	High	<p>Budget availability to be confirmed in advance of commencement of any commissioning project.</p> <p>Ensuring best value considerations.</p> <p>Robust analysis as part of project of effectiveness and efficiency of any existing current supply.</p>	Medium

3.4 Environmental implications

There are no environmental implications.

3.5 Equality implications

Approval and implementation of the Autism Strategy should have a positive impact in regard to protected characteristics and is tailored to supporting residents from different ethnicities and faiths. It is intended that the Strategy will have a positive impact upon the lives of autistic people by supporting individuals to manage their own health and wellbeing needs and to access the right support at the right time. This applies to Autistic People of any sexual orientation, including Autistic People who are married or in a civil partnership.

The Strategy sets out a particular commitment to understand how people in Slough can access opportunities to actively engage within their communities and to ensure that their needs can be met. This will be enabled through co-produced initiatives with the wider stakeholder community.

A full Equalities Impact Assessment is set out at Appendix 1.

4. Background Papers

None

Appendix 1

Equality Impact Assessment

Directorate: People Strategy & Commissioning People (Adults)							
Service: Autism Strategy 2024-29							
Name of Officer/s completing assessment: Giuseppe Di Martino							
Date of Assessment: 20/12/2023							
Name of service/function or policy being assessed: Autism Strategy							
Page 9	1.	<p>What are the aims, objectives, outcomes, purpose of the policy, service change, function that you are assessing?</p> <p>The Strategy sets out how the Council, working with its partners, will support and encourage carers to manage their own health and wellbeing, and ensure that that right support is known about and available at the right time.</p> <p>The aim of the Strategy is to ensure that Slough is a place where Autistic People can live their best live and where we intervene early to reduce or delay the development of crises across health and social care.</p>					
	2.	<p>Who implements or delivers the policy, service or function? State if this is undertaken by more than one team, service, and department including any external partners.</p> <p>Delivery of the Autism Action Plan contained within the Strategy will be overseen by a new Autism Steering Group comprising of Autistic People, Carers, the Co-Production Network, SCVS, Council officers and other professional stakeholders including representatives from Frimley ICB. It is intended that reporting will take place into the Slough Wellbeing Board.</p>					
	3.	<p>Who will be affected by this proposal? For example, who are the external/internal customers, communities, partners, stakeholders, the workforce etc. Please consider all of the Protected Characteristics listed (more information is available in the background information). Bear in mind that people affected by the proposals may well have more than one protected characteristic.</p> <p>The Strategy affects Autistic People in Slough and their carers.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; margin-top: 10px;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 20%;">Characteristic</th> <th style="width: 20%;">Positive , Negative, Neutral or</th> <th style="width: 60%;">Rationale for Assessment</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Characteristic	Positive , Negative, Neutral or	Rationale for Assessment		
Characteristic	Positive , Negative, Neutral or	Rationale for Assessment					

	Unknown Impact	
Age	Positive	It is intended that the Strategy will have a positive impact upon the lives of Autistic People by supporting individuals to manage their own health and wellbeing needs and to access the right support at the right time.
Disability	Positive	About 40% of autistic people also present a learning disability. The Strategy therefore directly benefits disabled people as it seeks to address and prevent a range of Long-Term Conditions and crises by working in an integrated way across the NHS and Social Care.
Gender Reassignment:	Positive	The Strategy will benefit all Autistic People including those who have undertaken gender reassignment.
Marriage and Civil Partnership:	Positive	Some Autistic People support a partner. The Strategy is likely to have a benefit upon those who are married or in a civil partnership as it will support Autistic People within their caring roles.
Pregnancy and maternity:	Positive/ Neutral	N/A
Race:	Positive	The Strategy sets out to inclusively understand the difficulties which Autistic People from black and minority ethnic people can experience. The Strategy should have a positive benefit.
Religion and Belief:	Positive	Autistic People of any religion and belief should benefit from the Strategy.
Sexual orientation:	Positive	Autistic People of any sexual orientation should benefit from the Strategy.
Other:	Positive	
4.	<p>What are any likely positive impacts for the group/s identified in (3) above? You may wish to refer to the Equalities Duties detailed in the background information.</p> <p>Better support to individuals across all equalities categories to enable Autistic People to receive the right support at the right time.</p>	

5.	<p>What are the likely negative impacts for the group/s identified in (3) above? If so then are any particular groups affected more than others and why?</p> <p>There will be no negative impact.</p>
6.	<p>Have the impacts identified in (4) and (5) above been assessed using up to date and reliable evidence and data? Please state evidence sources and conclusions drawn (e.g. survey results, customer complaints, monitoring data etc).</p> <p>There has been a range of engagement activities to support the development of the Strategy including the Priorities. The Strategy contains a commitment to gather further information on the needs of Autistic People from diverse communities in order that we understand the needs of Slough communities.</p>
7.	<p>Have you engaged or consulted with any identified groups or individuals if necessary and what were the results, e.g. have the staff forums/unions/ community groups been involved?</p> <p>The Strategy has been shaped by engagement with Autistic People. Implementation of the Autism Action Plan will be overseen by a new Autism Steering Group comprising of Autistic People, Carers, the Co-Production Network, SCVS, Council Officers, and other professional stakeholders including representatives from Frimley ICB.</p>
8.	<p>Have you considered the impact the policy might have on local community relations?</p> <p>A demonstrable commitment to delivering the strategy should have a positive impact upon community relations.</p>
9.	<p>What plans do you have in place, or are developing, that will mitigate any likely identified negative impacts? For example what plans, if any, will be put in place to reduce the impact?</p> <p>There are no identified negatives.</p>
10.	<p>What plans do you have in place to monitor the impact of the proposals once they have been implemented? (The full impact of the decision may only be known after the proposals have been implemented). Please see action plan below.</p> <p>Implementation of the Autism Action Plan Oversight by a new Autism Steering Group It is also proposed that progress against the Autism Action Plan is reported through the Slough Wellbeing Board.</p>

What course of action does this EIA suggest you take? More than one of the following may apply	✓	Action Plan and
Outcome 1: No major change required. The EIA has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken.	✓	
Outcome 2: Adjust the policy to remove barriers identified by the EIA or better promote equality. Are you satisfied that the proposed adjustments will remove the barriers identified? (Complete action plan).		
Outcome 3: Continue the policy despite potential for adverse impact or missed opportunities to promote equality identified. You will need to ensure that the EIA clearly sets out the justifications for continuing with it. You should consider whether there are sufficient plans to reduce the negative impact and/or plans to monitor the actual impact (see questions below). (Complete action plan).		
Outcome 4: Stop and rethink the policy when the EIA shows actual or potential unlawful discrimination. (Complete action plan).		

Timetable for Implementation

At this stage a timetabled Action Plan should be developed to address any concerns/issues related to equality in the existing or proposed policy/service or function. This plan will need to be integrated into the appropriate Service/Business Plan.

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Action	Target Groups	Lead Responsibility	Outcomes/Success Criteria	Monitoring & Evaluation	Target Date	Progress to Date

Name: Giuseppe Di Martino Signed: (Person completing the EIA)
Name: Signed: (Policy Lead if not same as above)
Date: 20/12/2023

Slough Adult Autism Strategy 2024 – 2029

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1. Executive Summary

This strategy sets out our vision and priorities for Slough Borough Council and its partners to reduce health inequalities for autistic adults so that more people can live well in the community and with the right support. This strategy aims to ensure that autistic adults experience equal rights and have the same opportunities as those who do not have a learning disability.

Autism touches the lives of many people in Slough and population data projects that the number of autistic people will increase year on year. It is therefore important that we have a strategy which enables us to work in partnership with autistic adults, our health partners, and the wider community to recognise and support the needs of autistic adults in Slough in the most effective way possible. This includes raising awareness and understanding of autism in the wider community, ensuring that autistic people live a good quality of life, reach their educational potential, gain employment, and can access the right support at the right time to be as independent as possible.

We want Slough to be an autism-friendly borough in which autistic adults can live fulfilling and rewarding lives within a society that accepts and understands them, and where everybody can reach their full potential at all stages of their lives.

In December 2023, with active support and participation from Co-Production Network, DWP, Autism Berkshire, SCVS, East Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, and the Local Authority teams, we have consulted with Autistic people and the wider Community, both in person and online, and developed a strategy for the next five years for autistic adults by taking into consideration their needs and priorities.

This strategy outlines intentions, key priorities, and action plan for autistic adults in Slough, to enable people to live independent and healthy lives. We will encourage people to take positive risks and responsibilities for managing their lives that is appropriate to their age and need (working with the relevant legal frameworks), and will continue to protect autistic adults with learning disabilities when they are vulnerable or where there are safeguarding risks.

To address the inequalities and challenges currently faced by autistic adults in Slough, we have co-produced with our community eight priorities: Promote independent living; Providing quality support in the community; Integration of Health and Social Care; Pathways for transition to adulthood; Support employment, skill development, and training; Empowering people to stay safe and free from abuse; Prevent loneliness and social isolation; Improving communication and information sharing.

Engagement activity concerning this Strategy has identified the need to establish an Autism Steering Group to bring together autistic people, their carers, statutory services (e.g. Health, ASC), officers from the People (Adults) directorate, the co-production network, and key professional stakeholders to ensure that autistic people's voices are at the heart of service design and implementation and to oversee the delivery of this strategy.

2. Introduction

This strategy focuses on autistic adults, with some references to young people in transition. The purpose of the strategy is to ensure that all autistic adults, their carers and families in Slough are supported to live a full, safe, happy and healthy life within their communities. It identifies the strategic challenges faced and some of the potential solutions and improvement plans to make Slough a welcoming place for autistic people and those who care for them.

There has been a focus on improving outcomes for autistic people in Slough since the publication of our *Joining the Dots: Slough's Joint Autism Strategy* (2014). This strategy outlines the commitment in Slough to do more to help autistic adults navigate the community and live fulfilling lives. It sets out the objectives and strategic direction across the local area over the next five years.

The strategy is aligned to the *Slough Adult Learning Disability Strategy (2023 - 2028)* which supports an estimated 20-30% of autistic people who also have a learning disability.¹ For the large proportion of the autistic population without a learning disability it is recognised this strategy must champion their voice for improvement. The aim is that changes promoted by the strategy will benefit autistic people and other neurodivergent people whether or not they have a formal autism diagnosis by making Slough a neurodivergent-friendly town and community.

In July 2021, the Government published the new *National Autism Strategy*² which covers people of all ages in England for the first time. 'The strategy must put in place the right health, care and education services, reduce social isolation and open up opportunities for autistic people of all ages. In Slough, we want to ensure that throughout the delivery of the strategy for autistic adults in the next five years, their families and carers have a clear understanding of how and where improvements are being made.

The strategy will be delivered via an accompanying action plan to ensure local priorities are met over the next five years. We will drive and deliver positive change for our autism community.

¹ Emerson, E. & Baines, S. (2010) *The Estimated Prevalence of Autism among Adults with Learning Disabilities in England*. Improving Health and Lives: Learning Disabilities Observatory.
http://www.wecommunities.org/MyNurChat/archive/LDownloads/vid_8731_IHAL2010-05Autism.pdf

² The national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026>

3. Our Vision

The vision of this strategy is to enable autistic adults living in Slough to live their lives as they choose, as part of their community, with the right support at the right time, and within an environment that is safe, informed, and accessible.

Our vision is for Slough to be a place that offers opportunities for people to live healthy and fulfilling lives, where contributions to local communities are welcomed, supported, and valued, and no-one is left behind. These opportunities should extend to all autistic adults including those without a diagnosis.

We are committed to ensuring that the vision and priorities will be delivered across the next five years and bring organisations and partners together in implementing this strategy.

The development of the strategy has been centred around autistic adults, their families and carers, and how we can drive change within the wider community to make Slough an Autism friendly town.

The implementation of this strategy will continue by creating and growing a robust partnership network and by engaging with the community as much as possible to coproduce initiatives and ensure that Slough is a place that is aware, accepting and has the right tools and knowledge to supports all its diverse community.

4. Purpose of the Strategy

We know that there are significant barriers to achieving the vision across the system and the wider community for autistic adults in Slough. Addressing these barriers in Slough will require better understanding of autism and culture change across Slough's services and in the wider community. These are not quick things to deliver, but we know that with focused leadership across the health and social care systems over time and co-production endeavour with statutory partners and autism stakeholders, autistic adults in Slough can be supported to achieve better outcomes.

The work of the strategy will need to be embedded in organisations and the wider community so that it is sustained and can be built on. We want to identify the needs of autistic adults earlier in life and improve their living condition, physical and mental health, improved access and participation, and better understand the inequalities autistic adults face. Slough Borough Council is committed to bringing the right people together in a new dedicated Steering Group to break down barriers to community access and use our resources effectively to deliver the support that people need. Our strategy is here to focus the action of all the partners across Slough who will work together to make the changes we need to see.

5. Autism – An overview

Background

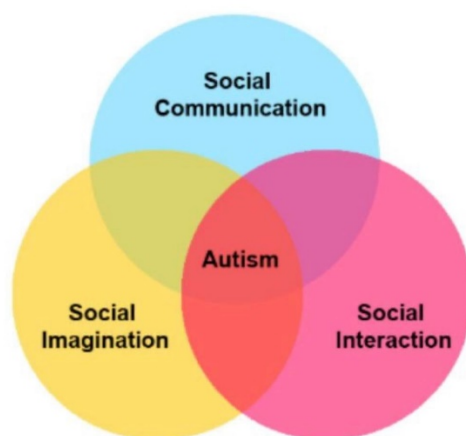
Autism is a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world. According to the National Autistic Society, one in 100 people are on the autism spectrum and there are around 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK. Autism is described as a spectrum condition and affects people in

different ways. Like all people, autistic people have their own strengths and weaknesses.

Historically there have been a few different names given at the point of diagnosis. An individual may have received a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome, Classic Autism or even High Functioning Autism. Nowadays there is one diagnosis/description given and that is Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Whilst autistic individuals share certain difficulties, the condition can affect them differently. Common core features are persistent difficulties in social interaction and communication and the presence of stereotypic (rigid and repetitive) behaviours, resistance to change or restricted interests. Additionally, autistic individuals may have difficulty in processing everyday sensory information such as sounds, sights and smells. This is usually called having sensory integration difficulties, or sensory sensitivity. A person's senses are either intensified (hypersensitive) or lack sensitivity (hyposensitive).

Figure 1: The Triad of Impairments



The Triad of Impairments

The three main areas of difficulty which all autistic individuals share is known as the “triad of impairments”.

These are:

- **Social communication** – Autistic individuals may have difficulty using and understanding verbal and non-verbal language, such as gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice; as well as jokes and sarcasm. Some autistic people might not speak or have limited speech. They may understand what people say to them but prefer to use alternative forms of communication, such as sign language.
- **Social interaction** – Autistic people may have difficulty recognising and understanding people's feelings and managing their own feelings. They may, for example, stand too close to another person, prefer to be alone, behave inappropriately and may not seek comfort from another person. This can make it hard for them to make friends.

- **Social imagination** – Autistic individuals may have difficulty understanding and predicting other people’s intentions and behaviour and imagining situations that are outside their own routine. This can mean they carry out a narrow, repetitive range of activities. A lack of social imagination should not be confused with lack of imagination. Many autistic people can be very creative.

Diagnosis

To receive a diagnosis of ASD a person will need to present with differences in the area of:

- Social communication and social interaction
- Repetitive and restrictive behaviours.

Autistic people may also be over or under sensitive to sensory stimulation (or fluctuate between the two). They may be highly focused on particular interests and hobbies and many report struggling with high anxiety levels, especially in social situations.

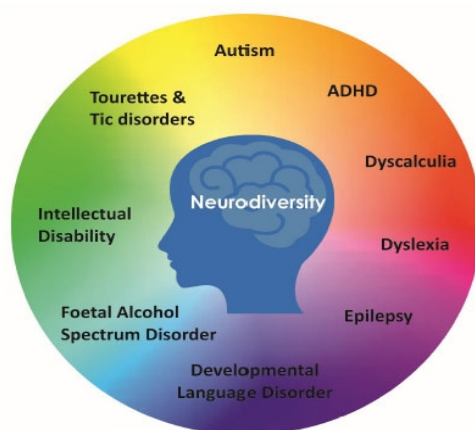
Boys and men are more likely to receive a diagnosis than girls and women and the ratio is thought to be three to one. Girls/women may present differently to boys/men and are known to mask their challenges, especially in social situations.

We know that not all autistic people have had or would like a diagnostic assessment. The aim is that changes promoted by this strategy will benefit the autistic community as a whole and other neuro divergent people, whether or not they have a diagnosis.

Neurodiversity

Neuro developmental conditions (neuro diversity) are caused by differences in early brain development and can affect the way a person processes information, thinks and learns, Autism is one such condition. Other conditions include specific learning difficulties (dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Tourette Syndrome. Autistic people may have additional learning disabilities, and this accounts for 20 to 30% of the population.

Figure 2: Neurodiversity



Source: Psychiatry-UK

Neurodiversity is a relatively new term, thought to have been coined in the 1990s by Judy Singer (an autistic individual, parent of an autistic child and Sociologist). It was originally used by the autistic community, who were keen to move away from the medical model and dispel the belief that autism is something to be 'treated' and 'cured', rather than an important and valuable part of human diversity.

The idea of neurodiversity has now been embraced by many other groups, who are using the term as a means of empowerment and to promote the positive qualities possessed by those with a neurodevelopmental difference. It encourages people to view neurodevelopmental differences as natural and normal variations of the human genome. Furthermore, it encourages them to reject the culturally entrenched negativity which has typically surrounded those that live in, learn from and experience the world in a particular way that is sometimes perceived as different.

Co-occurring Conditions

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) estimates that around 70% of autistic people have an additional condition, which is "often unrecognised".³ 4 The main conditions that co-occur more frequently in people who have Autism compared with the general population can include:

- Mental health conditions. Research suggests that 70% of autistic people may have a mental health condition, and that 40% may have two or more.
- Autistic People are up to four times more likely to have anxiety, and twice as likely to have depression.
- Research has shown that autistic people are more vulnerable to negative life experiences, which may also impact mental health. Compared to the general population.
- Autistic people report having a lower quality of life.

6. Policy Guidance: National and Local Context

The Autism Act 2009 led to the development of the Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives - The 2010 Autism Strategy⁵ which identified the need to improve care and access to services to support all autistic people. An updated strategy, The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults: 2021 to 2026 was published in 2021.

National Autism legislation and policy timeline

- 2009 - Autism Act⁶ in England. This guaranteed the rights of Autistic adults in England.
- 2010 - This act led to the first Autism strategy- Fulfilling and Rewarding lives: the strategy for adults with Autism in England.

³ [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(2017\). Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: recognition, referral and diagnosis. National Institute Health and Care Excellence.](#)

⁴ [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(2012\). Autism: Recognition, Referral, Diagnosis and Management of Adults on the Autism Spectrum.](#)

⁵ [Fulfilling and rewarding lives: The strategy for adults with autism in England](#)

⁶ [Autism Act 2009 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

- 2014 - A review of the act led to an update of the strategy called 'Think Autism'. Reviewing the strategies impacts across country and influencing the release of Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and NHS bodies in implementing the Strategy.
- 2016-18 - The Self-Assessment framework (SAF)- Public health initiated and led engagement of Local Authorities in self assessing their implementation of the Adult Autism strategy locally.
- 2019 Autism was included as a priority in NHS England's Long-Term Plan. This means that NHS England have to plan how to provide better healthcare for Autistic people.
- In 2019 the Department of Health and Social Care committed to refreshing the 'Think Autism' strategy and extend scope to all ages.
- 2021- National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults, a five-year plan 2021-2026. The first of its kind for all ages. Supported by an additional plan which outlines the first two years implementation 2021-22.

Local context

The Slough Adult Autism Strategy 2024 – 2029 is based upon collaboration, learning and developing a Slough shared approach to service provision and commissioning where this makes sense. This strategy links closely with a number of other programmes of work and should be considered in context.

This strategy is written with regard to the following local strategies:

- Slough Corporate Plan 2023-2027 ⁷
- Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy 2020-25 ⁸
- Slough Health and Care Plan ⁹

It is also written with regard to the following commissioning strategies:

- Adult Learning Disability Strategy 2023-2028 ¹⁰
- Strategic Commissioning Framework
- Prevention Strategy
- Carers Strategy 2023-2026 ¹¹
- Older People Strategy 2023-2026 ¹²
- Mental Health Strategy (to be developed in 2024)
- Equalities Position Statement ¹³
- Market Position Statement 2020-2023¹⁴.

⁷ [Layout 1 \(slough.gov.uk\)](#)

⁸ [Slough Wellbeing Strategy, 2020 – 2025](#)

⁹ Slough Health and Care Plan [PowerPoint Presentation \(slough.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁰ [Slough Adult Learning Disability Strategy | 2023-2028](#)

¹¹ <https://www.slough.gov.uk/downloads/file/3903/adult-carers-strategy-2023-2026>

¹² [Older People Strategy 2023 – 2026 \(slough.gov.uk\)](#)

¹³ [equalities-in-commissioning-2023-2026 \(slough.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁴ [SS-6476 2020-23 Layout 1 \(slough.gov.uk\)](#)

It is also written with regard to the following national guidance:

- Integrated Commissioning for Better Outcomes ¹⁵
- Strategic and Collaborative Planning and Commissioning ¹⁶
- Shifting the Centre of Gravity, making place based, person-centred health and care a reality. ¹⁷
- The Better Care Fund Framework 2022-23 ¹⁸

7. Population Data

The prevalence of autism in adults (aged 18 and over) in Slough is estimated to be 0.7% (1,076 adults).

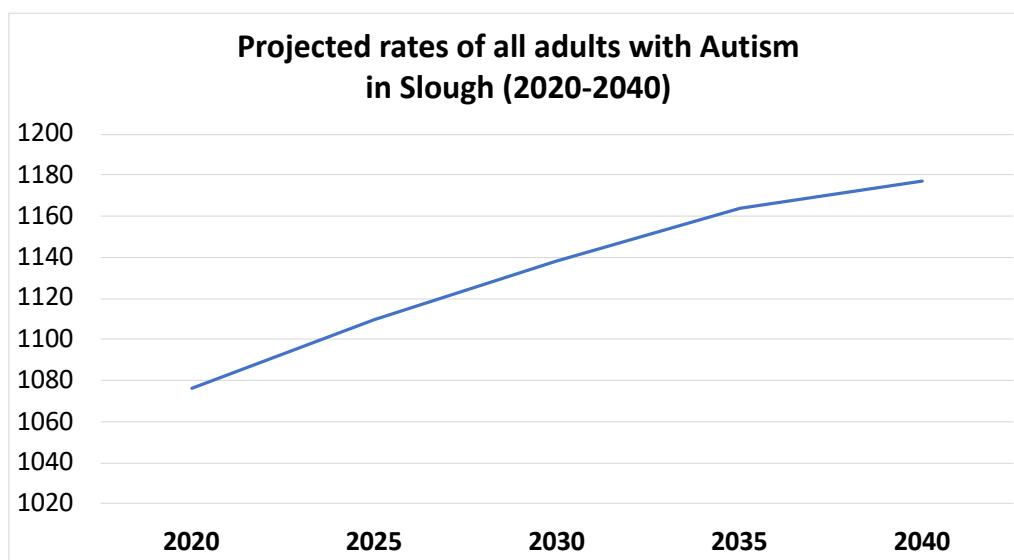
The following table, from the Projecting Adult Needs and Service Information System (PANSI) and Projecting Older People Population Information (POPPI) indicates the numbers and predicted numbers of adults aged 18+ who have autism in Slough.

Table 1: Slough adult autism population data (2020)

Age range	18-24	35-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	Total
Number of autistic adults	111	202	273	202	142	86	60	1076

Source: PANSI / POPPI. 18 years and above estimated to have autism spectrum disorders in Slough in 2020, by age

Figure 3: Projected rates of all autistic adults in Slough (2020-2040)



Data source: PANSI and POPPI. Accessed in March 2023

¹⁵ [Integrated Commissioning for Better Outcomes - a commissioning framework | Local Government Association](#)

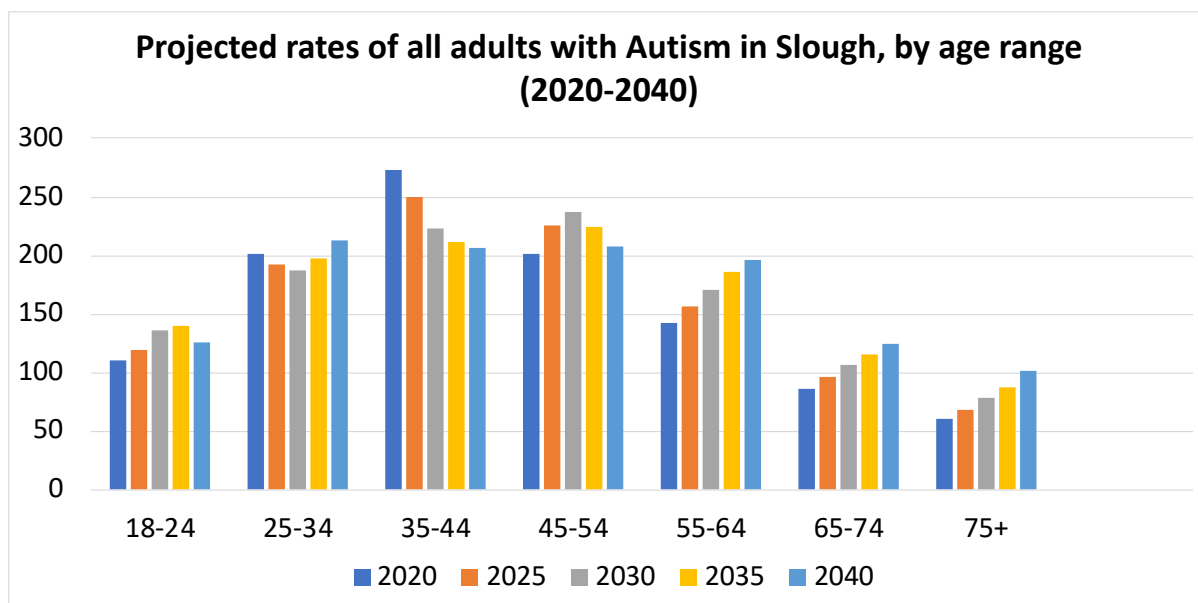
¹⁶ [Strategic Collaborative Planning and Commissioning](#)

¹⁷ [Shifting the Centre of Gravity, making place based, person centred health and care a reality.](#)

¹⁸ [Better Care Fund Framework 2022-23](#)

It is important to note that there may be challenges in identifying autism in adults, as many individuals may have been undiagnosed or misdiagnosed earlier in life. Therefore, it is important for Slough Borough Council and its health partners to ensure that healthcare providers and other professionals in Slough are trained to recognise the signs and symptoms of autism in adults, and that autistic individuals are provided with access to diagnostic assessments and support services as needed.

Figure 4: Projected rates of all autistic adults by age range (2020-2040)



Data source: PANSI and POPPI. Accessed in March 2023

8. Our Priorities

In response to legislative requirements, the new Autism Strategy (July 2021), local knowledge and stakeholder engagement we have developed the following eight priorities. Secondary analysis was undertaken by reviewing existing data, information and reports to enable a broader understanding of issues related to autistic people, both locally in Slough and nationally.

These priorities based on the views and feedback we have received that have helped to develop an understanding of what needs to change or improve to make Slough aware, inclusive, and open opportunities for our autistic adults. It is recognised that over the five years of this strategy, needs may arise and can be added as part of the Autism Strategy and Action plan. There are some areas of work that straddle more than one priority. In addition, there are some themes that cross all priorities.

The Priorities are:

Priority 1 – Promote independent living.

Autistic adults and their carers to have access to resources, information, and advice on what is available to them within the community along with access to coproduction opportunities. We will focus on developing skills and capacities within the community, and work with our partners to improve accessibility features that meet the needs of Autistic adults in Slough.

Priority 2 – Providing quality support in the community.

We will ensure that autistic adults will live independent and fulfilling lives within their community and close to their carers. We understand the need to increase autism awareness within the wider population and want to work with autism stakeholders to coproduce initiatives that address the challenges faced by autistic adults concerning accessibility, sensory needs, communication. Working with CVS organisations, we aim to develop dedicated spaces that provides advice, support, and promotes self-advocacy, and we will explore the potential of technology to provide tailored support.

Priority 3 – Integration of Health and Social Care.

We will be working alongside health colleagues to reduce health inequalities for autistic adults in Slough to ensure their health needs are not neglected or misunderstood. Our aspiration is to progress an integrated offer for autistic adults that accounts for environmental and communication adaptations to facilitate access to services, treatments, and assessment pathways.

Priority 4 – Pathways for transition to adulthood.

The planning for young autistic people for adulthood will start at a much earlier stage with involvement of all key stakeholders. Autistic people's views and their carers' will be listened to and acted upon, enabling young people to make choices about their future. There will be an embedded culture of the 'presumption of achievement' for all autistic people, where positive risk taking to build resilience is the norm.

Priority 5 – Support employment, skill development, and training.

Working with commercial and institutional partners, we will promote the employment, skills and training opportunities with attention to accessibility requirements. We will work with local providers and businesses to increase awareness of autistic needs and the range and nature of opportunities available across pathways, sector and qualifications, ensuring the support to autistic adults and their carers meets individual needs and secures appropriate outcomes to access employment at all ages.

Priority 6 – Empowering people to stay safe and free from abuse.

Taking appropriate measures to keep autistic adults safe requires a partnership approach aimed at increasing autism awareness within the wider community together with co-producing self-advocacy initiatives to improve awareness of abuse and its signs. To help autistic adults to stay safe from harm we will make sure that there are clear pathways to reporting concerns as well as harnessing the potential of technology to promote safe and positive risk taking towards independence and self-advocacy.

Priority 7 – Prevent Loneliness and Social Isolation.

We want to promote engagement and participation of autistic adults and their carers within the wider community. This can be achieved by ensuring enhanced clarity and accessibility of communication, by coproducing initiatives aligned with their interests and by providing spaces and opportunities to come together to prevent social isolation and fulfil their social and emotional needs with attention to environmental adaptations that can facilitate participation.

Priority 8 – Improving communication and information sharing.

Following unanimous feedback from autistic adults and their carers, we recognise the need to improve how communication and information are produced and distributed, as well as how autistic adults can access such information and communication independently, or advice when needed. We will work with autism stakeholder to co-produce accessible and adapted communication and information in multimodal and multimedia formats and will work with our institutional partners to develop clear guidelines and alternative form of contacts.

9. Our Local Offer

As set out in this strategy, our approach is to develop Slough in a more inclusive community aware of Autism and autistic needs, and with positive local initiatives that will provide a strong foundation for the strategy to grow from.

Some of the services currently provided in Slough include:

- **Autism Berkshire**

Founded by a group of parents of autistic children, related conditions, and challenging behaviours. They are the leading autism charity in Berkshire and deliver quality specialist services, training, and social and leisure activities throughout the county, guided by a team of trustees with personal and professional experience of autism. Their mission is to “help and support autistic people of all ages in Berkshire and their families. To enhance the current provision of services and support, with the purpose of improving autistic people’s quality of life and giving them maximum independence.

Services provided:

- Providing information and advice through a helpline, events, workshops and newsletters.
- Running accessible social and leisure activities for children, adults and families.
- Providing autism-specific training and support.
- Working with education, health, emergency and employment services and the six main local authorities in Berkshire to deliver autism-appropriate services.
- Raising awareness of autism in the wider community to promote greater understanding.

- **GEMS4Health**

GEMS provides autism and ADHD support services in East Berkshire. GEMS offers information & support to parents & carers of children with, or likely to have autism &/or ADHD within East Berkshire. On offer are, workshops and courses for parents & carers, and social activities for children aged 5 years and above. GEMS interactive workshops, courses and animations, are available weekdays and evenings, face to face and online.

- For parents and carers, a programme of workshops, courses and animations.
- For children and young people aged 5-25, a programme of social activities.

- For adults aged 25+, a programme of social groups and signposting to local and national services.

- **Community Mental Health Team**

Services are provided by Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust supporting people with severe mental health difficulties and referral to other services where appropriate. Services provided also include Talking Therapies (access to IAPT) and The Gateway which provides a new single referral pathway for adult mental health referrals across Berkshire. There is also a Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment Team (HTT).

We recognise the need to improve the local offer by involving the wider community and autism stakeholders in the coproduction of new initiatives in lines with the priorities outlined in this Strategy.

Identified areas for investment

- **Dedicated Autism Initiatives**

As part of our ongoing partnership working, we will collaborate with our partners to seek investment opportunities through fundraising initiatives or third-party funding to provide resources toward additional community solutions that could cater for the needs of Autistic Adults in Slough. We will scope the coproduction of community spaces, explore alternative ways of providing access to resources and advice, and support community initiatives that will improve inclusion, access, self-advocacy, and increase awareness of autism within the community.

10. Autism Diagnosis Service

Whilst people who have autism and their families report that while a diagnosis is an important step in understanding the challenges experienced by their autistic person, a diagnosis alone is not sufficient to meet their needs while there remain gaps in specialist support and in the capability of mainstream services to appropriately support autistic people.

There is no autism diagnostic service in Slough. Autism diagnosis referrals are made via GPs and sent to an external service (a clinical psychologist) in Reading who has a one year waiting list. This is an area for improvement and for action to take forward as set out in this strategy. There are systems in place for people to self-refer and refer via their GP.

The Autism Steering group will work with its members and other commercial and statutory partners to scope the development of more accessible assessment pathways to reduce waiting lists and prevent crises.

11. Health Inequalities

Autistic people may experience inequalities that are health care related; die younger, are more likely to be admitted to hospital than the rest of the population, and more

likely than other groups to experience delays in receiving a diagnosis.¹⁹

The causes of inequalities in healthcare are well recorded²⁰ and include:

- Delayed diagnosis or misdiagnosis.
- Lack of reasonable adjustment to accommodate environmental and communication needs.
- Poor co-ordination of care planning for individuals with complex physical and mental health needs.
- Lack of robust transition planning for young people moving into adult services.
- Absence of annual health checks.
- Poor understanding of the Mental Capacity Act and Best Interest Decisions.

The steering group will collaborate with health partners to design actions to address those challenges, especially concerning waiting times for assessment and reasonable adaptations for appointments.

12. Accommodation

With the right support, autistic people can most often find a place to call home by renting or buy housing in the same way as other people, or they can move into to specialist housing with care and support, like supported living or shared lives, when more support is needed. Sometimes people decide to continue live with family members. The key point is that where people live should be their choice, and support should be available to make that choice and achieve that goal.

We intend to provide the right support in accessing resources and information by working together with our commercial and institutional partners. We will coproduce initiatives with the autistic community to increase awareness of their needs and fair access to services and information in different formats to promote independence and inclusivity. This will include exploring the use of technology that enhance independent living.

13. Employment

Autistic people process the world around them differently and this often gives them areas of particular strength and ability e.g., strong attention to detail, honesty and punctuality. Despite this very few autistic adults enjoy fulltime paid work. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published data that shows only 22% of autistic adults are in any kind of employment. Employment for autistic adults is one of our priorities in this strategy. We will work to promote employment opportunities and the independence and wellbeing of autistic adults in Slough of all ages by promoting and coproducing skill development and placement opportunities with our partners.

14. Transport

¹⁹ [Better health and care for all Health and care services for people with learning disabilities | February 2020](#)

²⁰ [LeDeR Programme at University of Bristol - Findings and Annual Reports - 2015-2021](#)

Good transport links are crucial for maintaining independence, enabling people to seek and sustain employment, access education, health services, and socialise. Many autistic adults do not drive and depend on public transport, or on family members, friends, or carers. This often prevent them to fully participate in their community life. The Autism steering group will work closely with institutional and commercial partners to maximise efficiency of transport links and increase awareness of autistic needs among transport personnel and the wider public to ensure accessibility of public transports and the safety of autistic people and the wider public.

15. Accessible environments

Autistic individuals may experience challenges in processing everyday sensory information such as sounds, sights and smells. This is usually called having sensory integration difficulties, or sensory sensitivity.

Slough Borough Council will be working with partners to ensure these requirements are better understood in consultation with autistic stakeholders, and that reasonable adjustments are happening in Slough to make sure that all public spaces can be inclusive of the need of autistic people to promote and maximise their community participation.

16. Accessible information

From 1 August 2016 onwards, all organisations that provide NHS care and/or publicly funded adult social care have been legally required to follow the Accessible Information Standard. The Standard sets out a specific, consistent approach to identifying, recording, flagging, sharing and meeting the information and communication support needs of patients, service users, carers and parents with a disability, impairment or sensory loss.²¹

The Accessible Information Standard builds on the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, which is explicit about the provision of information in an accessible format. In addition, the Care Act 2014 details specific duties for local authorities with regards to the provision of advice and information, setting out that, “Information and advice provided under this section must be accessible to, and proportionate to the needs of, those for whom it is being provided.”

Over the next five years Slough Borough Council will work with partners and stakeholders to coproduce solutions that can address tailored communication needs within the community. The Autism steering group will advise and supervise the development of inclusive form of communication that address the needs of autistic people and are delivered in multimodal and multimedia format with the support of the most recent technologies.

17. Transition to adulthood

We want to support young people and their families to be aspirational for their futures. We believe that all young people should have the opportunity to live as independently

²¹ [NHS England Report Template 1 - long length title](#)

as possible, have access to good health and social care services, with employment and educational opportunities and to be included in their local communities.

We recognise that transition from childhood to adulthood can be a worrying time for young people and their families. It is a time of significant change. Educational provision, support services and the way that decisions are made, will all change as a young person becomes an adult. Slough Borough Council will work with its partners to ensure that young people and their families are supported to actively prepare for their future as adults.

Over the next five years we will take the following actions:

- Improve the information available to young people and their families about the transition process and how Slough Borough Council and its partners will support young people to prepare for adulthood.
- Engage with young people and their families, ensuring their views are listened to and acted on.
- Empower young people to develop fundamental life skills since school age.
- Ensure that young people are at the heart of the preparation for adulthood journey, supported to make choices and to be more in control of their future.
- We will start the transition process at an earlier stage, so that young people and their families are clear about what will happen when the young person reached adulthood.
- Work with our colleagues in education, children's social care services, health, housing and local service providers to create a seamless pathway for young people, so that the young person's needs can be met locally, reducing the need to move out of the borough.

18. Criminal Justice System

The criminal justice system can be challenging for autistic adults, who may have difficulty navigating the system and understanding their rights.

The criminal justice system (CJS) is failing autistic people, argue researchers at the Autism Research Centre, University of Cambridge, after a survey of lawyers found that an overwhelming majority of their clients were not provided with adequate support or adjustments.²²

Slough Borough Council will work to support the rights and well-being of autistic adults in the criminal justice system. We will work in partnership with local autism advocacy organisations and autistic adults to ensure that their perspectives and experiences are fully incorporated into policies and procedures.

19. Safeguarding

Safeguarding autistic adults is a critical priority for Slough, as autistic individuals may be vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and exploitation. We will continue to develop our training for safeguarding professionals. We will provide support for families and carers of autistic adults to help them identify and report instances of abuse or neglect. We

²² [Autistic defendants are being failed by the criminal justice system](#)

will develop communication strategies to enable autistic adults to communicate their needs and concerns effectively. This may include access to communication aids, such as pictorial communication systems, and training for carers and professionals on how to effectively communicate with autistic individuals.

We will also improve access to services to ensure that autistic adults have access to essential services, such as healthcare and education, and that these services are appropriately tailored to meet their individual needs. This may include the provision of reasonable adjustments, such as sensory-friendly environments within the community or alternative forms of communication.

20. Action Plan

Rather than by priorities, the following actions have been organised following the most pressing topics and themes which are common across several themes as emerged during engagement events. This allows a clearer and structured view of how we will achieve specific goals in those areas.

Furthermore, we acknowledge that the change process must occur within the whole Slough Borough Council. Therefore, actions are aligned with promote such positive changes by internally implementing actions and progress to then extend these within the wider community to share best practices and lead by example.

1. Partnership working

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
Foster collaboration between stakeholders through regular meetings, working groups, and other forms of engagement.	Engagement with autistic adults, families and carers
Develop a shared vision for improving services and support for autistic adults in Slough. This could involve working with health partners, SBC disability forum, and ASC to set common goals and objectives and identifying strategies for achieving these goals together.	Engagement with health partners and statutory stakeholders
Share resources and expertise between stakeholders, including information, best practices, and training opportunities. This can help to build capacity and improve the quality of services and support available to autistic adults.	Engagement with community and commercial partners
Engage in joint projects and initiatives that aim to improve services and support for autistic adults in Slough. This could involve collaborating on research projects, developing new service models, or launching community programs and initiatives to increase autism awareness and improve inclusivity and access.	Co-production of initiatives to improve how organisations work together.

2. Phased approach in the delivery of our priorities

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>We recognise that developing a phased approach to delivering priorities for autistic adults in Slough will require ongoing engagement and collaboration with key stakeholders. We will take a systematic approach and prioritise the most pressing issues and work towards improving services and support for autistic adults in the community.</p>	<p>Engagement with autistic adults, families, and carers</p> <p>Reporting to cabinet annually on progress</p> <p>Progress through governance routes to update throughout the year (quarterly)</p>

3. Establish a steering group with oversight of this strategy.

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>We will establish a steering group co-chaired by autistic people, their families and carers to have oversight of this strategy.</p> <p>The steering group will be pivotal to ensure the strategy is delivered, it will ensure pressing priorities are addressed, and will co-produce actions that meet the needs of autistic people.</p> <p>The group will be made by autistic adults, their carers, statutory services, and key professional stakeholders.</p> <p>The steering group will ensure that autistic people voices are at the heart of service design and implementation, and will measure and evaluate the impact of partnership working, service initiatives, and support for autistic adults in Slough.</p> <p>The group will involve specific workstreams or advisory committees to oversee initiatives and ensure that the needs and priorities of the autistic community are represented.</p> <p>The steering group will help to identify areas for improvement and refine partnership working strategies over time.</p>	<p>Regular involvement of the right stakeholders as per priorities.</p> <p>Autistic Slough residents work with the council to take ownership to deliver the actions detailed in this plan.</p> <p>Engagement with autistic adults, families, and carers</p>

4. Train our workforce on autism - The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training Autism for providers

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>Oliver McGowan²³ training is an important initiative that will be included in the phased approach to delivering priorities for autistic adults in Slough.</p> <p>The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training for NHS Healthcare Providers is a new requirement from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) that aims to improve the quality of care for people with learning disabilities and autism.</p> <p>The training is named after Oliver McGowan, a young autistic man who died in 2016 following a seizure in hospital. His death was deemed preventable, and his family has been campaigning for improved training for health and social care professionals to better understand and support autistic individuals.</p> <p>The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training covers a range of topics, including autism awareness, communication and sensory issues, mental health, and reasonable adjustments. By ensuring that health and social care providers receive this training, they will be better equipped to provide high-quality, person-centred care to autistic adults, which can ultimately improve health outcomes and reduce the risk of preventable deaths like Oliver's.</p> <p>Incorporating the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training into the phased approach to delivering priorities for autistic adults in Slough can help to ensure that health and social care providers in the area are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to support autistic individuals. By working in partnership with local health and social care providers, Slough Borough Council will ensure that the training is effectively implemented and that its impact is monitored and evaluated over time.</p>	<p>Engagement with autistic adults, families and carers</p> <p>Training completed by health and social care staff within Slough.</p> <p>Improved access to mainstream health services and ASC for autistic individuals</p> <p>CQC rating and feedback</p> <p>Progress through governance routes to update throughout the year (quarterly)</p>

²³ <https://www.olivermcgowan.org/>

5. Autism awareness as an employer to ensure our staff recruitment is autism friendly.

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>We will raise autism awareness as an employer which will help to create a more inclusive and supportive workplace and ensure that staff recruitment is autism friendly.</p> <p>We will take the following steps:</p> <p>Develop an understanding of autism. We will be providing information and training to all staff members to ensure they have a basic understanding of autism, including common characteristics, communication and sensory differences, and how autism can impact individuals in the workplace.</p> <p>Create an autism-friendly recruitment process. We will consider how the recruitment process can be adapted to be more autism friendly. This could include providing clear and concise job descriptions, offering flexible interview formats for candidates, and ensuring that interviewers are trained to recognise and support autistic candidates.</p> <p>Develop strategies to support existing autistic employees. This could include providing reasonable adjustments such as flexible working arrangements, tailored training and development opportunities, and support for social communication and sensory issues.</p> <p>Encourage a positive work culture that promotes diversity and inclusion. This could involve developing an autism-friendly workplace culture, including clear communication, support for neurodiversity, and opportunities for feedback and input from autistic employees.</p>	<p>Feedback on our recruitment process and candidates' experience</p> <p>Training of Health and Social Care staff.</p> <p>Engagement with SBC HR department and Learning and Development Team</p> <p>Engagement with Community, Learning and Skill team.</p> <p>Engagement with community development team</p> <p>Engagement with DWP Autism champions in SBC</p> <p>Engagement with SBC Disability Forum</p>

6. Improve access to information and communication

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>We will be guided by the steering group on how to better address communication needs and preferences of autistic people in Slough by:</p>	<p>Engagement with autistic adults, families and carers concerning accessibility of communication and information</p>
<p>Making sure that contact details are clear and accessible in a variety of formats to be more inclusive of differences and preferences within our diverse community.</p> <p>Reviewing information on the Council website and make web pages accessible and easy read.</p>	<p>The use of videos and other multimedia resources to illustrate services and explain SBC policies to address augmented and alternative communication needs</p> <p>Engaging with SCVS to ensure that the directory of services is highlighting services for Autistic people, and it is accessible.</p>
<p>Producing autism-friendly literature that will be written in plain language (no jargons) about the services available and how to access these.</p> <p>Explore the implementation of autism-friendly technologies and adopting the use of different media such as videos.</p>	<p>Engage with co-production network to develop plain language resources</p>

7. Support in the community

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>We will work with our partners to:</p> <p>Create capacity for community support initiatives like Expert by experience or peer mentoring opportunity to promote independent living and receive ad-hoc support directly at home or with the implementation of tailored technology solutions.</p>	<p>Feedback from autistic adults, families and carers</p> <p>Exploring the use of technology to support people to stay at home.</p>
<p>Support the effectiveness of discharge processes from hospital for autistic people by improving awareness and quality of basic rehabilitation services. This include ensuring they can cater for the needs of autistic people and that adequate technological offer is available for autistic people to live within their community for as long as possible.</p>	<p>Training for hospital staff, ASC, and locality teams to consider how they can support Autistic residents who are leaving hospital. This will be part of the Oliver McGowan training.</p>
<p>Improve our offer for semi-independent accommodations dedicated to autistic individuals.</p>	<p>Engagement with housing department and design of solution to improve support for autistic people (e.g. maintenance).</p>
<p>Develop life-skills development opportunities and programmes within the community that promote self-advocacy and independent living.</p> <p>Scope the development of an Autistic Housing register to better address the housing needs of autistic individuals.</p>	<p>Engagement with Community, Learning and Skill team.</p> <p>Engagement with community development team</p>

8. Increase autism awareness within the wider population in Slough

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>We will co-produce community initiatives aimed at increasing autism awareness in the wider population in Slough.</p> <p>Initiatives includes and are not limited to:</p> <p>Develop autism awareness capacity for the wider community.</p>	<p>Feedback from autistic adults, families and carers.</p> <p>Engagement with the wider population.</p> <p>Hold an Autism Friendly day each year – this will take time to engage and plan so</p>

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>Dedicated autism-friendly days with involvement of commercial partners in Slough.</p> <p>The development of autism-friendly spaces in the town plannings.</p> <p>Engagement with authorities, education partners, housing department, and emergency services to improve understanding of autistic needs in the community.</p>	<p>may not be completed in the first 12 months of the strategy.</p> <p>Work with Supermarkets and other commercial partners in SBC to have a specific time of the day each week that is Autism Friendly – low lighting, no music.</p> <p>Provide Autism Awareness training for all SBC departments to complete.</p>

9. Enhance the employment, training and skills offer for autistic adults of all ages

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>We will:</p> <p>Develop partnerships with employers, training providers, and community organisations.</p> <p>Engage with employers to promote the benefits of employing adults with learning disabilities and dispel misconceptions or stereotypes.</p> <p>Provide training to employers to support inclusive practices.</p> <p>Offer specialised training and support to adults with learning disabilities to enhance their employability and retention in roles.</p>	<p>Engagement with autistic adults, families and carers</p> <p>Feedback from commercial and institutional partners.</p> <p>Work with DWP to review the numbers of Autistic people in employment.</p> <p>Engagement with Community, Learning and Skill team.</p> <p>Engagement with community development team</p> <p>Engagement with SCVS</p>

10. Transition to adulthood

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>We will ensure:</p> <p>Active engagement of the steering group with SBC SEND Board chaired by the Director of Children’s Services, and SBC / SCF Strategic Transitions Group – Jointly Chaired by AD</p>	<p>Engagement SEN/SCF</p> <p>Feedback from autistic young adults, their families and carers</p> <p>Clearer communications between ASC and SEN.</p>

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>ASC Operations and the Director of Operations (SCF)</p> <p>Early planning and early allocation to ASC staff where needed since the age of 17.</p> <p>Improved access to multimodal and multimedia for young autistic people and their carers, including a single and accessible point of contact for advice and advocacy.</p>	<p>Pathways / MOU between services. Focus on prevention and life skills training from a younger age.</p> <p>Direct engagement with colleges and mainstream education providers through the steering group</p>

11. Preventing Loneliness and social isolation

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>The steering group will engage with statutory services, SCVS, CPN, commercial partners and providers, and the wider community to:</p> <p>Co-design and develop initiatives that promote socialisation and community engagement that meet the needs of autistic people.</p> <p>Promote digital and in-person community opportunities that bring together autistic individuals and promote self-advocacy.</p> <p>Support and enhance already existing community initiatives that support autistic adults to socialise.</p> <p>Scope the creation of a multi-functional hub that can provide single point of access for autism-related resources and initiatives.</p> <p>Develop a mentoring programme (EBE) to support confidence building and promote self-advocacy and representation.</p> <p>Actively engage with town planning and transport authorities to ensure spaces and services address the needs of autistic people.</p>	<p>Engagement with autistic adults, families and carers</p> <p>Develop community opportunities – consider models to support autistic people to be independent.</p> <p>Use of technology to prevent loneliness and social isolation.</p> <p>Engagement with town planning to create more inclusive space for autistic adults that cater for sensory and environmental needs</p> <p>Engagement with transport department to improve service reliability to facilitate access to the community for autistic people</p> <p>Engagement with CPN, SCVS, DWP</p>

12. Safeguarding autistic adults

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>We will:</p> <p>Develop an autism-specific safeguarding policy that recognises the unique needs and vulnerabilities of autistic adults. This could involve working with local advocacy organisations and autistic individuals to ensure that their perspectives and experiences are incorporated into the policy.</p> <p>Provide training for staff members who work with autistic adults, including educators, social workers, and support workers. This will include training on recognising signs of abuse or neglect, communicating with autistic individuals, and making reasonable adjustments to ensure that autistic individuals can access services and support.</p> <p>Promote awareness of safeguarding among autistic adults and their families. This will involve providing accessible information about safeguarding, developing outreach programs to reach underserved communities (BAME, LGBT etc.), and working with local advocacy organisations to raise awareness of safeguarding issues.</p> <p>Ensure that autistic adults have access to appropriate support services, including counselling, advocacy, and crisis support. This can help to prevent abuse and provide timely support in cases where abuse or neglect has occurred.</p> <p>Collaborate with partner agencies, including law enforcement, to ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures are coordinated and effective. This can help to ensure that all relevant agencies are working together to protect autistic adults from harm in Slough.</p> <p>Progress opportunities for funded pilots of technology programmes dedicated to autistic people in Slough as part of the ASC Transformation Programme.</p>	<p>Engagement with autistic adults, families and carers</p> <p>Engage with Safer Slough Partnership, Berkshire Safeguarding Board and ASC Safeguarding to consider a Autism specific safeguarding policy</p> <p>Training needs – engage with Safeguarding Partnership Training and Development Manager</p> <p>Work with the Criminal Justice Service to ensure they are accessing training and raise awareness. Involve the CJ system in the Autism awareness days.</p> <p>Technology as safety mechanism – focus on Autistic people that engage with ASC to reduce, delay, and prevent the need for ASC intervention.</p> <p>Engage with Police and other emergency service to increase autism awareness and de-escalation techniques and strategies to support autistic people in distress and defuse crises.</p>

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13. Health inequalities

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>Health inequalities are a significant issue for autistic adults, who may face barriers to accessing healthcare services and experience poorer health outcomes than the general population.</p> <p>To address these issues in Slough, we will:</p> <p>Identify the barriers that prevent autistic adults from accessing healthcare services, including issues such as communication difficulties, sensory processing issues, and a lack of understanding among healthcare professionals about the needs of autistic patients.</p> <p>Develop autism-specific services that are designed to meet the unique needs of autistic adults. This will involve creating sensory-friendly environments, providing access to communication aids and support, and training professionals on how to effectively support autistic adults.</p> <p>Work with health colleagues to tackle waiting list for autism assessment and develop more accessible pathways to diagnosis in Slough.</p> <p>Provide training for healthcare (and social care) professionals to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills needed to effectively support autistic patients. This could include training on communication, sensory processing, and strategies for supporting autistic patients during medical procedures.</p> <p>Promote health education and awareness among autistic adults and their families, including information on healthy lifestyle choices, preventative care, and how to access healthcare services.</p> <p>Address social determinants of health that may impact the health outcomes of autistic adults,</p>	<p>Engagement with autistic adults, families and carers</p> <p>Engage with and support the Public Health development of a dedicated Autism Needs assessment.</p> <p>Engage with Healthwatch to promote improved access to mainstream services and GP appointments.</p> <p>Improved communication with health partners and mainstream health services</p> <p>Engage with ICB to scope the development of facilitated pathways to access diagnostic services for autism.</p> <p>Pathways / MOU between services.</p>

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>such as poverty, unemployment, and housing insecurity. This could involve working with voluntary organisations in the community to provide support for these issues.</p> <p>Collaborate with partner agencies to coordinate efforts to address health inequalities among autistic adults in Slough.</p>	

14. Future commissioning intentions towards the development of an all-age approach and opportunities for integrated provision between health and social care.

What we will work on to achieve these actions	How we will know if we are making progress
<p>Although this strategy is focused on autistic adults only and there are currently no plan for a joint strategy with SCF, the ambition of Slough autism stakeholders would be that the next strategy would be an All-Age Autism Strategy. This will require a significant investment of time, resources, and expertise. We will involve a wide range of stakeholders in the process to ensure that the strategy is comprehensive, evidence-based, and addresses the diverse needs and experiences of autistic people across the lifespan.</p>	<p>We will scope feasibility in due course and set a target completion date</p>

APPENDIX TO AUTISM STRATEGY

CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

Feedback from Online Engagement Event with Autistic people, their carers, members of the co-production network, officers from Slough Borough Council, Slough CVS organisations, and other relevant stakeholders on 15th December 2023

An engagement event took place via Microsoft Teams in October 2023. The event was attended by Autistic Adults, carers of Autistic individuals, Care Providers operating in the Slough area, Slough CVS organisations, officers from Slough Borough Council, and other relevant community stakeholders. The engagement event was positive, and attendees broadly agreed on eight priorities and a series of actions to address their needs and priorities.

The following suggestions on actions which should be taken under each of the priority areas that have been used to inform this Strategy are summarised below:

Priorities	Feedback	Minimum Inclusion in Strategy (Page Number)
Promote Independent Living	Community engagement to plan and communicate initiatives	3
	Improved accessibility features in the community (sensory)	16
	Improved access to services and information.	13
	Opportunities to develop skills toward increased levels of independence (functional, social, emotional, etc)	12
	More opportunities for people to get together in the community	13
	Peer support and Expert by Experience initiatives for day-to-day management	Action Plan
	Improved universal education about Autism in the community	11
	Improved transport network to navigate the community	16
Providing Quality Support in the Community	Community awareness of Autism difficulties	11
	Dedicated sensory spaces in the community	Action Plan
	Improved communication in accessible format	16
	Dedicated Autism-friendly days (shops, entertainment, etc)	Action Plan
	Valuing Carers involvement	3
	Creating value and improve self-advocacy through peer-mentoring support	Action Plan
	Improved Autism assessment pathways in the community	12

	Improved Response timing from locality teams and SEN	Action Plan
	Alternative contact for professional support (not only emails)	16
	Dedicated person to access for information and help	Action Plan
	Autism HUB development (EBE staffed)	Action Plan
	Digital community resources to access information and support (peer-led)	Action Plan
Integration of Health and Social Care	Improved awareness of Autism adaptations for health appointments	12
	Improved collaboration to reduce waiting lists	12
	Improved access to learning opportunities for Health and ASC staff	Action Plan
	Alternative form of communication (no more long letters)	15
	Improved communication between GP surgeries and ASC teams.	15
	Improved assessment pathways (joint assessment)	12
Pathways for transition to adulthood	Implement discussion forums to work together	3
	Involving carers in the decision-making process together with the person	3
	Timely referral and single point of contact	Action Plan
	Network engagement among Special Education Needs, children, and adult services	Action Plan
	Creation of skill building and employment opportunities	17
	Pathways for skill development since school age	17
	Improved involvement of housing department and SEN	17
	Pathway for early preparation to support the passage to adulthood	12
	Improved information sharing in multimedia format	12
Support employment, skill development, and training	Promote people’s independence and autonomy at all ages	3
	Creation of a community network to develop tailored opportunities	16
	Resources and Autism Awareness for organisations and businesses	Action Plan

	Skill development programmes within the community	16
	Creation of local programmes for Autistic People over 30	12
	Expert by experience trainings and mentoring support at work	Action Plan
Empowering people to stay safe and free from abuse	Community Awareness of Autistic needs	11
	Awareness pathways to promote self-protection to start early in life (childhood)	12
	Improved road safety	Action Plan
	Improved access and awareness of technology that can support safety	Action Plan
	Single point of contact to report abuse and concerns	12
Prevent loneliness and social isolation	Availability of special interest groups and activities in the community	Action Plan
	Improved transport link to access activities in the community	16
	Peer mentoring programmes to develop confidence	Action Plan
	Implementation of befriending-like services dedicated to Autism	Action Plan
	Improved communication on community initiatives and participation	13
	Sensory adequate spaces in the community	16
Improving Communication and Information sharing	Single point of contact for support and information access	13
	Information available in different formats	16
	Different options to get in contact with services (not only emails)	Action Plan
	Creation of one-stop shop or HUB in the community for support and information sharing	Action Plan

Feedback from In-Person Engagement Event with Autistic people, their carers, members of the co-production network, officers from Slough Borough Council, Slough CVS organisations, and other relevant stakeholders on 18th December 2023

An engagement event took place at Observatory House on 18th December 2023. The event was attended by Autistic Adults, carers of Autistic individuals, Care Providers operating in the Slough area, Slough CVS organisations, officers from Slough Borough Council, and other relevant community stakeholders. The engagement event was positive, and attendees broadly agreed on eight priorities and a series of actions to address their needs and priorities.

The engagement event was positive, and attendees broadly agreed with the eight priorities. The following suggestions on actions which should be taken under each of the priority areas that have been used to inform this Strategy are summarised below:

Priorities	Feedback	Minimum Inclusion in Strategy (Page Number)
Promote Independent Living	Improved access to information on available services and local resources.	13
	Creation of partnership board for autism stakeholders to influence decision making	3
	Single point of contact within the council – must include housing support	13
	Improve access to adaptation and communication (not only letters or emails)	16
	Improved awareness of Autism in the community	11
	Improved maintenance response and communication for council tenants	15
	Improved access to technology to facilitate independent living	15
	Improved tailored housing options (living close to relatives and carers)	15
	Development of a peer-support network	Action Plan
Providing Quality Support in the Community	Community initiatives for support (EBE)	Action Plan
	Dedicated rehabilitation services - basics	Action Plan
	Improved offer of semi-independent accommodations (peer support)	Action Plan
	Skill development initiatives in the community (i.e. travel training)	Action Plan
	Improved autism awareness in the wider community and professionals	11

	Single point of access for information, advice, and support	Action Plan
	Creation of HUB for support groups, activities, events, etc.	Action Plan
	Development of the Autistic Housing Register	Action Plan
Integration of Health and Social Care	Improved professional communication (tell your story once)	15
	Creation of a register shared between GPs and ASC for people who have additional needs	Action Plan
	Improved access to information and relevant professionals in different multimedia formats	15
	Improved sensory adaptation for health appointments	12
	Improved awareness of Autism needs in health settings	12
Pathways for transition to adulthood	Basic functional life skills programme	17
	Effective handover of information between children and adult professionals	17
	Single point of contact for advice and support	17
	Early planning and timely referral	17
	Improved communication (not only letters and emails)	17
	Mentoring programmes	Action Plan
Support employment, skill development, and training	More opportunities for 30+	12
	Improve awareness of accessibility needs and reasonable adaptations	12
	Improve awareness of augmented and assisted communication tools	12
	Peer mentoring support and EBE for career advice	Action Plan
	More variety of placements	16
Empowering people to stay safe and free from abuse	Improved road safety	Action Plan
	Improved transport network	16
	Revamping of town centre to facilitate access	Action Plan
	Raise awareness of Autism in the wider community	11
	Improved access to information and communication	Action Plan
	Exploring technology that could support safety in the community	Action Plan
Prevent loneliness and social isolation	Improved access to information	13
	Creation of HUB for activities, advice, events, etc	Action Plan

	Improved offer of Autism dedicated clubs (including youth clubs)	Action Plan
	Improved awareness of Autistic needs in the community	11
	Improved sensory adaptations in the community	16
	Creation of dedicated Autism-friendly day to facilitate community access	Action Plan
	Improved transport network and accessibility features in town	16
Improving Communication and Information sharing	More direct communication and available in different multimedia formats	16
	Steering group to involve housing, employment, and other relevant sector to facilitate thriving of autistic people	3
	Raising Autism awareness in the community	11
	Single point of access for information, support, and advice	Action Plan

Open Feedback from Online and paper-based multilingual questionnaire issued to Autistic people, their carers, members of the co-production network, officers from Slough Borough Council, Slough CVS organisations, and other relevant stakeholders during December 2023

An easy-read and multilingual questionnaire with open ended questions has been issued to Autistic Adults, their families and carers, Care Providers operating in the Slough area, Slough CVS organisations, officers from Slough Borough Council, the Co-production network, including Hope College volunteers, Autism Group and other relevant stakeholders. The response rate was positive, and attendees broadly agreed on the eight priorities.

The following suggestions on actions which should be taken under each of the priority areas that have been used to inform this Strategy are summarised below:

Theme	Feedback	Minimum Inclusion in Strategy (Page Number)
Priorities to support the Autistic community	Improved Autism Awareness in mainstream services (hospital, police, schools)	11
	Skill development trainings for Autistic individuals	16

	Improved support initiatives to get Autistic people into work and social activities	12
	Creation of self-advocacy opportunities for Autistic People	3
Focus of support initiatives	Multimedia communication and multi-channel interaction to reach Autistic people effectively	16
	Keeping people safe by improving awareness, transports, and community services	Action Plan
How to make Slough an Autism-friendly community	Creation of Autism-friendly service directory in the community to facilitate community participation	Action Plan
	Autism awareness initiatives for the wider community	11
	Creation of accreditation system or certificate for businesses that support Autistic individuals	Action Plan
	Dedicated regular Autism events	Action Plan
	Creation of a hub run by Autistic individuals to deliver projects	Action Plan

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	5th March 2024
Subject:	Direct award of Contract for Housing Related Support service for homeless people-(HRS)
Lead Member:	Cllr Wright – Adult Social Care, Mental Health and Learning Disabilities
Chief Officer:	Marc Gadsby
Contact Officer:	Vicky Tutty
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	YES
Exempt:	No, except Appendices 3 and 4 which are exempt under paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 because they contain information relating to the financial and business affairs of 3rd parties and the Council
Decision Subject To Call In:	YES
Appendices:	Appendix 1 EQIA Appendix 2 2023 Procurement detail Exempt Appendix 3 Evaluation details Exempt Appendix 4 Post- procurement funding negotiations

1. Summary and Recommendations

The report requests approval to make a direct award of an 18- month contract to Look Ahead for an accommodation-based housing related support service for homeless people with complex needs. The service will operate out of a purpose-built property which has been used for this purpose for 17 years. This will ensure that the Council is able to meet its duty to support residents who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness and with complex needs, and for whom the Council holds a housing duty.

1.2 Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1) Approve an 18-month direct contract award for an accommodation-based housing -related support service for homeless people from 31st October 2024 to 30th April 2026.

- 2) Approve funding for the direct contract award of £415,500 for the 18-month period (£277,000 p.a. pro rata)
- 3) Delegate authority to the Executive Director for People (Adults) in consultation with the Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Mental Health and Learning Disabilities, Lead Member for Highways, Housing and Transport and the Lead Member for Finance, Council Assets, Procurement and Revenues to negotiate the final contract terms and to enter into the contract with LookAhead.

1.3 Reasons for recommendations

1.3.1 Direct award of the contract to Look Ahead will allow alignment with another contract of a similar type so that both contracts expire at the same time in 2026. This in turn will enable Commissioning to work with the Housing, Public Health and other statutory and voluntary sector partners to:

- Develop a place-based approach across health, social care, public health and housing towards preventing homelessness and rough sleeping and supporting homeless people with complex needs to become more independent.
- Develop a single homeless pathway for Slough residents
- Consider longer term housing solutions for homeless people
- Align commissioning intentions with the Housing Strategy, Homelessness Strategy and Drug and Alcohol Strategy (which are in development),

1.3.2 Direct award of the contract will enable continuity of service provision and retain the use of the purpose-built accommodation whilst the above collaborative commissioning work is undertaken and longer-term solutions explored.

Commissioner Review

No specific comments to add to the report.

Report

2. Introductory paragraph

2.1 The decisions requested within this report will support the following Council Priorities for 2023-26:

- **Outcome 2 : A town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives.**
 - Working with partners to target health inequalities and promote wellbeing.
 - Supporting residents to be as independent as possible, whilst providing quality services for the most vulnerable adults
 - Improving community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour – providing a safer town to grow up in.

- **Outcome 3: A cleaner, healthier and more prosperous Slough**

- Affordable, safe and healthy homes – improving the quality of council housing stock and the private rented sector

2.2 In addition, it aligns with key priorities within the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2019-2024

- increase access to housing options for residents
- reducing numbers and length of stay in temporary accommodation
- Increase tenancy sustainment and prevent repeat homelessness

2.3 Options considered

Option	Pros	Cons
<p>Option 1 Do nothing</p> <p>Allow the contract to expire on 31 October 2024 and do not retender.</p> <p>Not recommended</p>	<p>There would be a reduction in the direct cost of this contract of £185,000 per annum.</p> <p>Removes the need to undertake a re-procurement and thereby reduces the pressure of undertaking additional (repeat) activity on busy Commissioning and Procurement teams.</p>	<p>Any savings from this contract would create an additional pressure to the Council's Housing budget through greater demand for more expensive temporary accommodation, estimated at a net cost of £220,950 per annum.</p> <p>Temporary Accommodation will not provide the specialist support required for this client group and procurement of floating support would require a tendering exercise.</p> <p>The service forms a central plank of homelessness provision within the borough and prevents take up of long-term services. Does not support the key priorities within the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2019-2024</p> <p>Does not accord with the Council's Corporate Plan, specifically Outcome 2: A town where residents can live healthier safer and more independent lives – supporting residents to be as independent as possible whilst providing quality services to the most vulnerable adults.</p>

		The incumbent provider has indicated that they will not allow their building to be used by other providers making the service vulnerable to referrals from out of the SBC area and increasing future demand on limited affordable housing.
<p>Option 2</p> <p>Return to the market with an increased financial envelope for a contract of 18 months</p> <p>Not recommended</p>	Re-tests the market.	<p>A very limited number of suitable suppliers would be able to offer both support and accommodation or offer support and access suitable accommodation to the necessary standard within the available timeframes.</p> <p>Shortness of contract likely to be unattractive.</p> <p>Time and resource implications for staff.</p>
<p>Option 3</p> <p>Issue a direct award to the incumbent for an 18-month contract at the negotiated contract value.</p> <p>Recommended</p>	<p>Removes the need to undertake a re-procurement and thereby reduces the pressure of undertaking additional (repeat) activity on Commissioning and Procurement teams.</p> <p>Provides stability to Housing by retaining access to a purpose-built hostel whilst the wider Housing strategic review is developed supporting Outcome 3 of the Corporate plan</p> <p>Removes the risk of losing an important building asset in the medium to long term</p> <p>Prevents other local authorities from housing their vulnerable residents within the building and increasing demand on scarce Public Service resources.</p> <p>Offers continuity of the service</p>	Does not re-test the market.

	Contract monitoring will enable action to be taken should the service not perform as expected	
<p>Option 4</p> <p>Return to market with the revised financial envelope for a 10-year contract</p> <p>Not recommended</p>	<p>Allows for continuity of the service</p> <p>May encourage other providers to bid.</p> <p>Provides stability to both Housing and the provider. Encourages ongoing investment within the service by the provider to improved social value</p> <p>Break clauses can be introduced to allow a planned exit strategy if needed.</p> <p>Contract monitoring will enable action to be taken should the service not perform as expected</p>	<p>The previous procurement exercise demonstrated a lack of appropriate accommodation within Slough to host the service.</p> <p>Should another provider win the award, then SBC would lose access to the building, lose scarce homelessness beds and opens the service to other local authorities' homeless cohort. This will lead to</p> <p>Increased pressure on Council's housing budget should the current accommodation become available for out of area referrals</p>

2.4 Background

2.4.1 Accommodation-based housing- related support services in Slough work with people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, and who have complex needs, to develop the skills required to support themselves and maintain their own accommodation. They provide support to people for up to two years to allow stability and the development of tenancy support skills, as well as linking in with other supporting agencies, such as substance misuse and mental health services.

2.4.2 These services form a central plank of the Council's homelessness provision and prevent the take up of more expensive temporary accommodation. The continuation of the service is essential to ensuring that our most vulnerable individuals with complex needs are accommodated, stabilised and supported to become less marginalised within their local community.

2.4.3 The service ensures that those with continued experience of homelessness and rough sleeping are accommodated safely and appropriately, supported away from life on the streets and the attendant anti-social behaviour that impacts the wellbeing of all. The financial implications of accommodating 18 people within alternative temporary accommodation is significant with an indicative cost of c£6,000 / £4250 per week. This figure does not include the wider impacts to the public purse through 'blue light' services, community safety, mental health provision and substance misuse services.

2.4.4 On the 17th of May 2022, Cabinet approved the procurement of accommodation-based Housing Related Support Services for:

- Medium / high (complex) needs to a value of £185,000 per annum for a two year + six months period, at a total contract value £462,500 (Lot 1).
- Low to medium needs to a value of £111,000 per annum for a two year + six months period, at a total contract value £277,500 (Lot 2).

2.4.5 Both contracts were due to expire on 31st October 2023 and a procurement exercise was undertaken between March and July 2023 to secure new services to run for two years and six months. The contract length provided for the co-termination of the contracts and would allow for necessary strategic development of a revised approach to supporting vulnerable groups with housing needs. Any support provider needed to be able to access or supply suitable accommodation from which services could operate. The services being retendered operated out of buildings which were owned by the current support provider.

2.4.6 The Lot 2 procurement was successful and the incumbent provider and building owner (YMCA) secured the contract within the available financial envelope. However, no suitable bids were received for Lot 1, and the incumbent service provider notified the Council that they were unable to safely deliver services at or within the advertised contract value. Further details concerning the procurement exercise and the evaluation process are contained at appendix 2 and exempt appendix 3.

2.4.7 As a result of this outcome, officers entered into negotiations with the incumbent service provider to agree a price for contract extension of £277,000 per annum, until 31 October 2024, an increase of £92,000 per annum, with the increase being funded equally between Housing and Adult Social care.

2.4.8 This was subsequently approved via delegated authority to the Executive Director for People (Adults) in consultation with the Lead Member for Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

2.5 Housing Context

2.5.1 In the development of the re-procurement approach, a number of critical issues relating to Housing and homelessness accommodation sufficiency have been identified. The current, purpose- built accommodation of 18 units is owned and managed by the current service provider Look Ahead who has indicated that they will not allow their building to be used by other support providers who may win a future procurement exercise.

2.5.2 Should another provider manage to secure accommodation and be awarded the contract, the current provider will be able to use the building to accommodate single homeless people, including those with complex needs, from out of area. This would give significant potential to increase the cost to health and care services within Slough. The recent procurement demonstrated that no provider was able to offer both housing and support services to meet the necessary requirements.

2.5.3 Further discussion with Procurement colleagues has identified that the previous procurement exercise, although advertised at a lower contract value, highlighted the lack of suitable accommodation within Slough to present an alternative to the current service at this time, and the benefit of a second procurement exercise is limited, and does not remove the risk of the current building being used for out of area single homeless provision. A direct award would provide stability and reassurance within a time of huge uncertainty for housing and homelessness whilst development of a strategic housing with support approach is developed

2.5.4 Legal advice has indicated that a direct award to the incumbent, at the expiry of the current contract in October 2024 until mid-2026 to align with termination of the low to medium HRS contract can be justified on the basis there has been a failed procurement in 2023 and the Council needs to look at the procurement strategically with other contracts and align it to future strategies around housing and estates, and because the contract value would be below the financial threshold of £663,540 (inclusive of VAT) triggering a legal obligation to run a competitive procurement process under The Public Contract Regulations 2015.

2.6 Housing strategy and demand info

2.6.1 In the development of the approach to secure future provision, it is important to recognise the national experience and impact of homelessness nationally, as well as the factors that are individual to Slough.

The following housing circumstances are included to illustrate the breadth of the legal definition of homelessness as a household that has no home in the UK, or anywhere else in the world available and reasonable to occupy:

- Rooflessness – without a shelter of any kind, sleeping rough
- Houselessness – with a place to sleep, but temporary, in institutions, or a shelter
- Living in insecure housing – threatened with severe exclusion, due to insecure, tenancies, eviction, domestic violence, or staying with family and friends, known as ‘sofa surfing’
- Living in inadequate housing – in caravans on illegal campsites, in unfit housing, in extreme overcrowding

2.7 The National Picture

2.7.1 The number of people affected by homelessness and rough sleeping is difficult to quantify.

Official homelessness statistics do not present the complete picture and often reflect only those households that seek assistance from their local housing authority. This underestimates the level of homelessness for more hidden populations, such as young people aged 16 to 24. Rough sleeping figures only reflect the number of people identified as sleeping rough on the night of the national count.

2.7.2 National data that is available does indicate that there was a substantial increase in all forms of homelessness in the decade, leading up to the pandemic, peaking in 2019 (Public Health, England, 2019). Crisis (2023) explains that households in the most extreme form of homelessness (rough sleeping, living in unconventional, buildings, sofa, surfing, and unsuitable, temporary accommodation) will continue to increase due to the impact of the cost of living in crisis.

2.7.3 Health Inequalities

People experiencing homelessness experience significant health inequalities and poor health outcomes in the general population. The longer the person experiences homelessness, particularly from young adulthood, the more likely the health and well-being will be at risk.

Mortality

Mortality among people experiencing homelessness is around 10 times higher than the rest of the population and life expectancy is around 30 years less. In 2021, the average age at death amongst homeless people in England and Wales was 45.4 years for men and 43.2 years for women (Office for National Statistics, 2022)

Ill-health and Morbidity

Chronic homelessness has a higher risk of tri-morbidity (a combination of physical ill-health, mental ill-health, and drug and/or alcohol misuse). This is often associated with advanced illness at presentation (Pathway 2018) and leads to people facing early onset of frailty, and in health, compared to the general population, (Pathway 2020).

2.7.4 More detailed information on the health of the homeless can be found in Homeless Links homeless health needs audit -

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/unhealthy-state-of-homelessness-2022-findings-from-the-homeless-health-needs-audit/>

2.8 Local Health Inequality Data

2.8.1 Data based on 331 adults identifying as homeless - within the legal definition of homelessness - and registered with a GP practice based in Slough can be summarised through the prevalence of recorded health conditions for the local known homeless population, compared to Slough registered population, aged 18 and over:

Recorded health conditions and comorbidities

84% of people experiencing homelessness had at least one recorded health condition, compared to 50% of registered population. The level of comorbidities in the homeless population was also significantly higher with 70% of the homeless population, having two or more recorded health conditions, compared to 31% of the registered population

Mental health: 52% of people who were experiencing homelessness had diagnosed Depression and 17% had a diagnosed serious mental illness. These were over five times and 17 times higher than the registered population of Slough respectively.

Respiratory health: 10% of people who were experiencing homelessness had a diagnosed asthma condition and 5% had chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). These were two times and five times higher than the registered population of Slough respectively.

Smoking status: 63% of people who were experiencing homelessness were recorded as being current smokers, compare to 15% of the Slough registered population

2.8.2 This information can also be used to develop a population profile of those that are homeless or threatened with homelessness. By comparing this to the registered adult population, it is possible to identify groups that have higher levels of homelessness locally.

Sex and age:

69% of people recorded as homeless were male, and 31% were female.

Men aged 35 to 64, made up over 50% of all people recorded as homeless in Slough. This is an overrepresentation as this group only made up 25% of the registered adult population.

Men aged 18 to 24 had lower proportions of people recorded as homeless than would be expected compared to the registered adult population, those aged 25 to 34 and 65 and over were similar to the registered adult population.

Women aged 35 to 44, made up the largest proportion of females who were recorded as homeless at 12%. All female age groups were underrepresented in the number of people recorded as homeless.

This is at odds with data for England which has 73% of assessments for statutory homelessness aged 18 to 44 in 22/23 and the smaller age groups within this age band were also all overrepresented in the proportion of statutory homelessness applications, compared to what would be expected from the 2021 census population profile. People aged 16 to 17 and 45 and over were underrepresented.

Ethnicity

People from White British ethnic groups made up a higher proportion of those recorded as homeless, when compared to the registered adult population profile (36% of homeless; 16% of registered population). People from any other ethnic group, mixed/multiple and Black/Black British ethnic groups were also overrepresented in the proportion of people who are homeless.

People from Asian/Asian British ethnic groups made up lower proportions of people recorded as homeless, compared to what would be expected from the registered adult population profile

Source: Frimley system insights (20th October 23)

2.8.3 Again, this was at odds with England data, where people from Black/Black British ethnic groups and 'any other ethnic groups' have a higher proportion of homelessness assessments than would be expected compared to the 2021 census.

Source for England, National data Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities' (2023); statutory homelessness in England: financial year, 2022–23

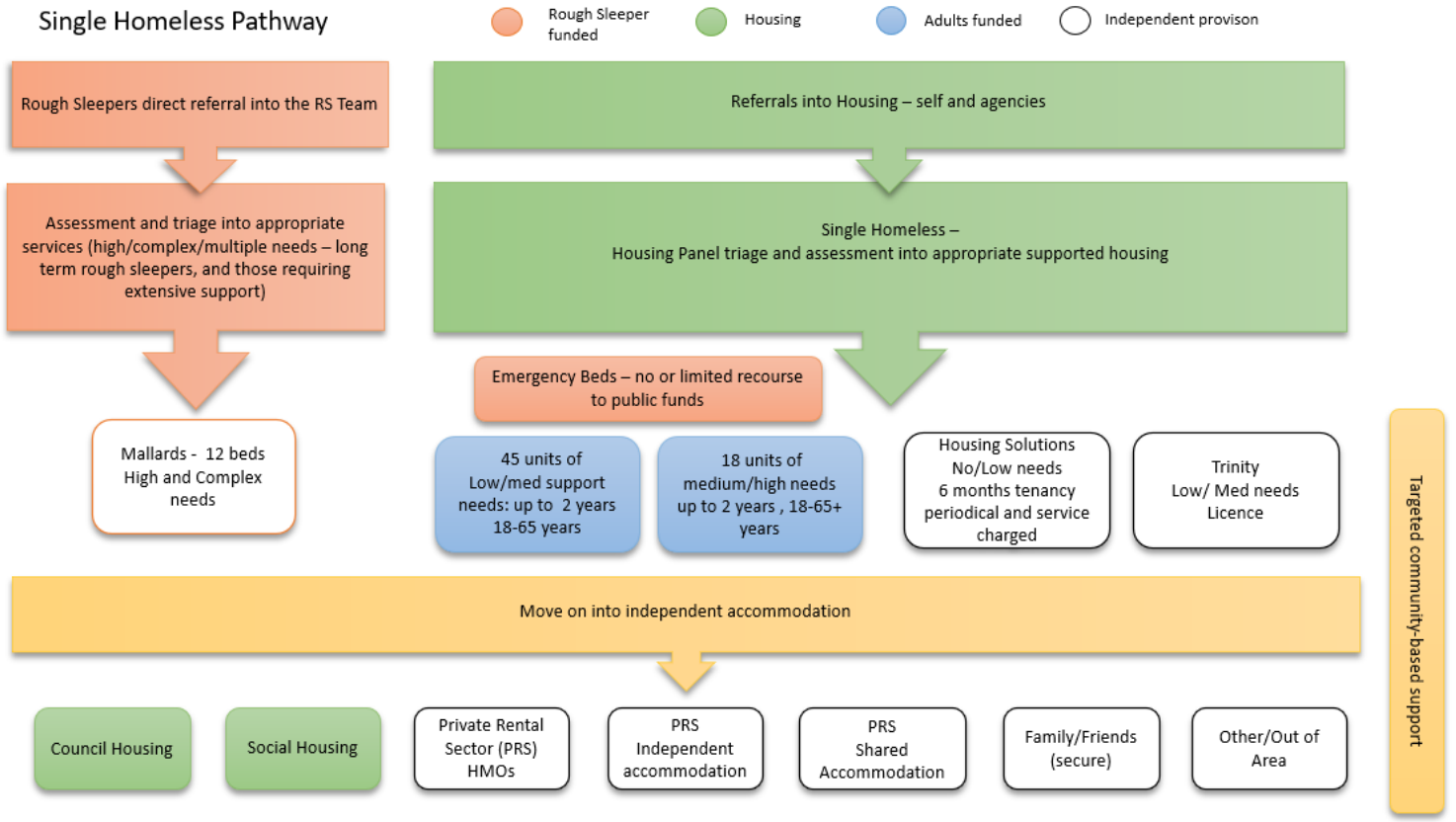
2.9 Demand in Slough

2.9.1 In Qtr. 4 2022/23, 211 households in Slough were assessed as being owed a duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act. 139 of these households were assessed as homeless and a further 71 were threatened with homelessness (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2023).

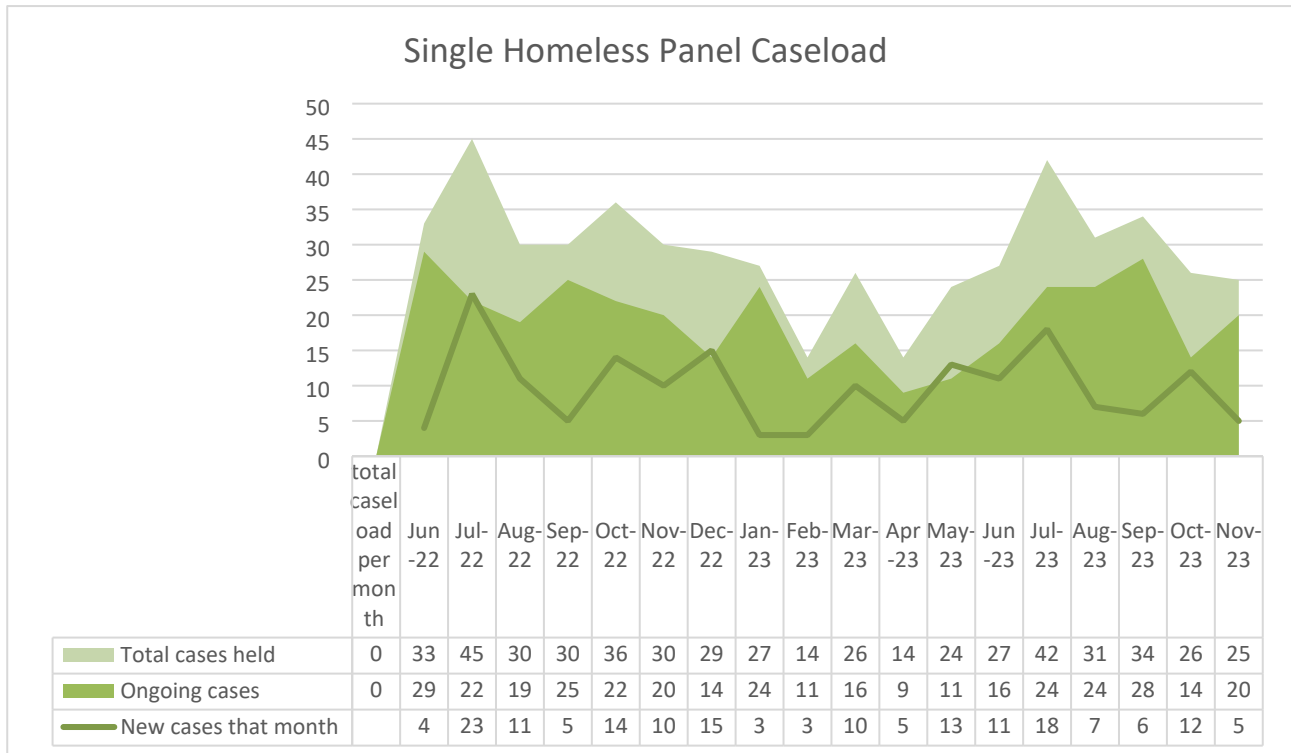
The rate of households assessed as homeless (owed a relief duty) in Slough was significantly higher than the national picture in 2022/23, whilst those threatened with homelessness (owed prevention duty) was like the national rates.

2.9.2 Households in temporary accommodation are those living in accommodation secured by the Local Housing Authority and the Homeless Reduction Act statutory duties. On 31st of March 2023, there were 378 households in temporary accommodation in Slough at the rate of 6.8 per 1000 households. This was significantly higher the national and regional rates. 213 (56%) of Slough temporary households included children. As of December 23, that figure stands at 500.

2.9.3 Single people are a subset of this wider cohort and those with support needs are assessed for vulnerability, and those requiring an element of supported accommodation (not care) are referred into the Single Homelessness Panel. This allows referrals to be made to range of supported housing as set out below:



2.9.4 There are currently 100 units of supported accommodation, 61 of which take referrals only via the Single Homeless Panel. The table below shows the demand for accommodation and the caseloads currently being managed by housing teams:



2.9.5 Slough Council has a dedicated Rough Sleepers units project funded by central government

which includes specific accommodation and support for 12 people and is able to access up to 4 emergency beds held for that use within the ASC funded provision. However, it should be noted that 89% of the current occupants of the High Need Housing Related Support service are formerly street homeless, some having multiple experiences of rough sleeping.

Former rough sleepers leaving services face issues in finding appropriate supported, or independent accommodation. The lack of sufficiency of stepdown beds, social housing and affordable, private rental sector accommodation impacts significantly on the ability of residents to move on in a planned way, leaving many reapplying to services and re-entering services.

2.9.6 Currently the data illustrating the pathway into and out of supported is not recorded challenging the understanding of the effectiveness of the service's ability to support people to sustain their own tenancies in the longer term. This would generally be after a period of stability, linking in with appropriate health services, and working on tenancy skills development.

2.9.7 There is very limited stock of social housing within Slough - currently numbering 5,700 units. There was a total of 1,638 households on the housing waiting list, equating to 29.7 per 1,000 households in Slough on 31 March for the year 2021/22. The average for Slough CIPFA nearest neighbours was 7,010, equating to 65.1 per 1,000 households.

Figures for 2022/23 are not available.

*Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, Dwelling stock (including vacants), **Data updated:** 23 May 2023*

*Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, Live tables on affordable housing supply, **Data updated:** 30 Nov 2023*

2.9.8 Most people leaving supported housing will need to access private rental housing which is also experiencing strong demand. Difficulties in accessing private rental sector accommodation is increased for those in receipt of benefits, where there is a significant gap between the rent charged, and the housing allowance rates as set by central government. The mean (average) gross monthly for one-bedroom properties on the private rental market in Slough for the period 2022/23 is £868 (**Source:** Office for National Statistics). The current local housing allowance for a one-bedroom flat is £798. For those under 25, the single room LHA rate is £449.

2.9.9 The impact of the recently announced increase of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates to the 30th percentile of local market rents from April 2024, is yet to be fully understood but is still expected to leave a significant gap between market rates.

2.9.10 For those with histories of rough sleeping, the ability to gain and maintain employment is challenging, requiring longer term interventions, thereby limiting this as an option to afford the current rent levels. This is exacerbated if there is no tenancy history, or if there have been negative incidents within the past.

2.9.11 Homelessness accommodation sufficiency therefore is a critical issue to Slough. Stability is essential to enable the additional support services to have a lasting positive impact on the health and wellbeing of Sloughs homeless population. This requires a collaborative approach to future provision, enabled by a strategic partnership of Housing, Adult Social Care, Public Health, Healthcare services, Community Safety, the Voluntary Sector and importantly, the people who rely on these services to provide a successful outcome.

2.9.12 The new Homelessness Prevention Strategy is under review and the work necessary to

support the revised single homeless and rough sleeping reduction plan will be time lined within that development work.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial Implications

- 3.1.1 The increased funding requirement for this service as detailed in Exempt Appendix 3 is £92,000 per annum, with the revised annual contract value of £277,000. The current Adult Social Care budget is £185,000 with a pressure reflected in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2024/25 to increase the budget to meet the budget requirement. The in-year pressure is being met from one-off funds within Adult Social Care and Housing for 2023/24.
- 3.1.2 Whilst there are no direct cost savings, there was a recognition that the overall cost to the Council would be greater if the service closed and the building is lost to Council referrals. The estimate market rate for similar provision would be in the region of £361,000 an additional cost of £84,000 per annum.
- 3.1.3 If access to the Hostel was no longer an option to Slough Borough and became available to out of area referrals, the additional cost pressure of introducing 18 vulnerable people into the Council area would be challenging to predict. The cost would be dependent upon individual circumstances but is likely to see individuals approaching Housing for support, including temporary accommodation.

3.2 Legal implications

- 3.2.1 The total contract value for the proposed direct award of £415,500 is below the current UK procurement threshold for Light Touch Regime Services of £663,540 (inclusive of VAT) above which The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 apply and require a competitive tendering process to be conducted. The contract will be prepared by HB Public Law.
- 3.2.2 The current contract for the provision of the housing related support service for homeless people with medium to high (complex) needs expires on the 31 October 2024. The proposed approach to issue a waiver for a direct award of 18 months is compliant with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules under **section 15.9 b) 'Demonstrable best interest:** justified on the basis there has been a failed procurement in 2023 and the Council needs to look at the procurement strategically with other contracts and align it to future strategies around housing and estates.
- 3.2.3 The principal statutory provisions relating to homelessness are set out in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (HA 1996) and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 Overall, the risks associated with the recommended can be themed as follows:

Risk	Assessment of Risk	Mitigation	Residual Risk
risk of challenge from other providers who would see this as a lack of transparency and equity in our procurement approach	medium	<p>The total contract value for the proposed direct award of £415,500 is below the current UK procurement threshold for Light Touch Regime Services of £663,540 (inclusive of VAT) above which The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 apply and require a competitive tendering process to be conducted.</p> <p>A waiver under the CPRs would be required and could be justified on the basis there has been a failed procurement in 2023 and the Council needs to look at the procurement strategically with other contracts and align it to future strategies around housing and estates.</p>	Low
The Council rejects proposals for enhanced housing fund for exempt accommodation (supported accommodation) which is a dependency for all potential providers	Low/medium	HB have indicated that this is unlikely as long as the service still meets the criteria of exempt accommodation	Low
Strategic housing development timelines are not aligned	Medium	ASC Commissioning will work collaboratively with Housing colleagues to support the development of a single person's homeless pathway,	Low

		including prevention and tenancy sustainment	
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3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 There are no environmental impacts

3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 Please see Appendix 1 for full Quality Impact Assessment

3.5.2 Whilst homelessness can affect all groups within society, evidence shows that particular groups are at greater risk of becoming serially homeless, as well as fairing less well in sustaining independent accommodation without significant support. Men are more likely to be street homeless than women, and those experiencing poor mental health are at greater risk.

3.5.3 Groups including adults who have lived through adverse childhood conditions resulting in long term trauma, people experiencing severe and enduring mental health issues, people living with undiagnosed neurodiversity such as ADHA, people who are dependent on substances including alcohol, and those with a history of offending are also at a higher risk. Many have co-occurring conditions that contribute to complex needs alongside behaviours that can challenge.

3.5.4 Services are developed to provide Trauma Informed Practice and Psychologically Informed Environments approaches that are evidenced based and proven to be more effective when working with people with complex needs.

3.6 Procurement implications

3.6.1 We have received procurement guidance which is supportive of pursuing a direct award on the basis that the Council needs to look at the procurement strategically with other contracts and align it to future strategies around housing and estates. A waiver under section **15.9 b) 'Demonstrable best interest'** of the CPRs would be required justified on the basis there has been a failed procurement in 2023 and subject to Cabinet approval.

4. Background Papers

None

**Appendix 1
Equality Impact Assessment**

Equality Impact Assessment

Directorate: People (Adults)	
Service: People, Strategy and Commissioning	
Name of Officer/s completing assessment: Diana Balsom Interim Commissioning Manager Prevention	
Date of Assessment: 27 09 23	
Name of service/function or policy being assessed:	
1.	<p>What are the aims, objectives, outcomes, purpose of the policy, service change, function that you are assessing?</p> <p>We are seeking to re-procure accommodation-based housing related support services for people with complex needs. Services work with people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to develop the skills required to support themselves and maintain their own accommodation. They provide support to people for up to two years (often for a much shorter period than this) to develop stability and tenancy support skills, as well as linking in with other supporting agencies. Services prepare them for their final stage of independence by empowering them to learn the skills required to maintain their accommodation and seek support when required. These services form a central plank of the Boroughs homelessness provision and prevent the take up of more expensive Temporary Accommodation.</p>
2.	<p>Who implements or delivers the policy, service, or function? State if this is undertaken by more than one team, service, and department including any external partners.</p> <p>The service is commissioned by Adult Social Care in collaboration with Housing via competitive tendering. We would with a wide group of stakeholders to develop service specifications that outline the service we require to meet the needs of those at risk of homelessness.</p>

3.	<p>Who will be affected by this proposal? For example, who are the external/internal customers, communities, partners, stakeholders, the workforce etc. Please consider all of the Protected Characteristics listed (more information is available in the background information). Bear in mind that people affected by the proposals may well have more than one protected characteristic.</p> <p>Homelessness can affect everyone but there are particular groups who are former rough sleeper and/or at risk of homelessness that this service seeks to support, who will have additional and often complex support needs:</p> <p>Age: x</p> <p>Disability: x</p> <p>Gender Reassignment: x</p> <p>Marriage and Civil Partnership: x</p> <p>Pregnancy and maternity: x</p> <p>Race: x</p> <p>Religion and Belief: x</p> <p>Sex: x.</p> <p>Sexual orientation: x.</p> <p>Other: Care leavers, People experiencing social deprivation/isolation, Veterans, People at risk of Offending</p>
4.	<p>Who will be affected by this proposal? For example, who are the external/internal customers, communities, partners, stakeholders, the workforce etc. Please consider all the Protected Characteristics listed (more information is available in the background information). Bear in mind that people affected by the proposals may well have more than one protected characteristic.</p> <p>Homelessness can affect everyone but there are particular groups who are former rough sleeper and/or at risk of homelessness that this service seeks to support, who will have additional and often complex support needs:</p> <p>Age: the service accepts Adults and Young People aged 18+ with additional support needs and will link in with relevant services dependent upon identified need – for example leaving care teams, education/training services, health services</p>

Disability: The service routinely accepts and works with People with mental health and addiction issues, hidden and undiagnosed neurodiversity conditions, Learning Disabilities, Dyslexia, people with long term health conditions, people living with HIV and HCV (Hepatitis C). The service can accept people with mobility issues but is not suitable for wheelchair users. However, this group are less likely to find themselves serially homeless and are likely to receive support within their own accommodation or within a care home. The service generally works with people with substance misuse issues and has 'in-reach' from substance misuse services, as well as those with enduring mental health issues.

Gender Reassignment: The service does not exclude people who have, or in the process of transitioning and will support access to services and support groups.

Marriage and Civil Partnership: The service does not exclude people based on their relationship status. However, bedrooms are for single occupancy only, so a couple entering together would each have their own room. The decision would be based on risk, looking at issues of domestic abuse.

Pregnancy and maternity: Whilst the service would not exclude someone due to pregnancy, the complex and sometimes challenging behaviour of some residents is likely to pose a risk and it is this risk that would support the final decision. Parents are not excluded but the service is not suitable for children. The service would support the resident to (re) establish contact with family including children where possible, and where no risk is identified – liaising with Childrens service were relevant.

Race: The service is accessible to all regardless of race and actively supports people whose first language if not English to access language training and interpreters

Religion and Belief: The service is accessible to all regardless of religion and belief. The service is not affiliated with any religious group and will support residents in meeting their faith needs.

Sex: The service is open to all people (men, women, non-binary). However, Hostel type services traditionally have a higher male percentage than other homelessness support. The service takes referrals from SBC Housing and access for underrepresented groups forms part of the Homeless Prevention strategy. The service itself will support residents to access specialist healthcare where necessary.

Sexual orientation: The service is accessible regardless of sexual- orientation. The service will support people to access appropriate support services and groups.

Other: The service works with many people impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences (abuse, addiction, domestic abuse) which often leaves people with trauma that can be triggered in adulthood and sometimes lead to challenging behaviours that makes people serially excluded.

This often results in undiagnosed and untreated mental health issues that some individual's self -medicate with substances.

	<p>Over time this produces co-occurring issues of mental ill health and addictions issues. Treatment for this 'dual diagnosis' is very limited, with Mental Health teams unable to treat an individual with substance issues and Substance Misuse agencies unable to treat the symptoms of mental health distress that can accompany a reduction in substance misuse. This can lead to a continuous cycle of chaotic behaviour that services struggle to support and lead people into long term homelessness.</p> <p>The service uses 'trauma-informed practice' an evidenced-based approach for working with people with complex needs, as well as a holistic approach– working with the whole person, rather than the individual symptoms.</p>
5.	<p>What are the likely negative impacts for the group/s identified in (3) above? If so, then are any particular groups affected more than others and why?</p> <p>We do not anticipate any negative outcomes from being supported within the service, but demographic and outcomes monitoring is used to understand whether there are different outcomes for different groups with protected characteristics.</p>
6.	<p>Have the impacts identified in (4) and (5) above been assessed using up to date and reliable evidence and data? Please state evidence sources and conclusions drawn (e.g., survey results, customer complaints, monitoring data etc).</p> <p>As noted above – this will form part of quarterly monitoring to ensure there is equity across groups with protected characteristics.</p>
7.	<p>Have you engaged or consulted with any identified groups or individuals if necessary and what were the results, e.g., have the staff forums/unions/ community groups been involved?</p> <p>Currently we are guided by national findings that indicate that some groups do not access the services- for example women. As the service takes referrals from the Housing team, this is a wider consideration than the service itself and will form part of ongoing development work with housing colleagues for future longer-term commissioning of the service.</p>
8.	<p>Have you considered the impact the policy might have on local community relations?</p> <p>The service itself supports a number of formerly homeless people with complex needs to stabilise. In doing this the service users are supported away from the street and the attendant anti-social behaviour that this can entail. This supports wider community safety. We are not aware of local issues with the siting of the accommodation itself. The accommodation has been in situ since 2006.</p> <p>We are introducing updates on comments, complaints and compliments into the monitoring process, and this can include comments from all stakeholders, not just service residents.</p>

9.	<p>What plans do you have in place, or are developing, that will mitigate any likely identified negative impacts? For example, what plans, if any, will be put in place to reduce the impact?</p> <p>Quarterly monitoring with the service provider alongside housing colleagues will provide insight and overview of the impact of the service on residents and whether patterns emerge regarding worse outcomes for identified groups. Regular service user feedback will support the process too, giving insight to support any necessary changes.</p>
10.	<p>What plans do you have in place to monitor the impact of the proposals once they have been implemented? (The full impact of the decision may only be known after the proposals have been implemented). Please see action plan below.</p> <p>This will form part of ongoing contract monitoring.</p>

What course of action does this EIA suggest you take? More than one of the following may apply	✓
Outcome 1: No major change required. The EIA has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken	x
Outcome 2: Adjust the policy to remove barriers identified by the EIA or better promote equality. Are you satisfied that the proposed adjustments would remove the barriers identified? (Complete action plan).	x
Outcome 3: Continue the policy despite potential for adverse impact or missed opportunities to promote equality identified. You will need to ensure that the EIA clearly sets out the justifications for continuing with it. You should consider whether there are sufficient plans to reduce the negative impact and/or plans to monitor the actual impact (see questions below). (Complete action plan).	
Outcome 4: Stop and rethink the policy when the EIA shows actual or potential unlawful discrimination. (Complete action plan).	

**Action
Plan and**

Timetable for Implementation

At this stage a timetabled Action Plan should be developed to address any concerns/issues related to equality in the existing or proposed policy/service or function. This plan will need to be integrated into the appropriate Service/Business Plan.

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Action	Target Groups	Lead Responsibility	Outcomes/Success Criteria	Monitoring & Evaluation	Target Date	Progress to Date
Establish groups that are not represented within the service and compare with homelessness data, local trends, and national trends. Where gaps do not align with local data, develop further understanding of causes through engagement and develop approaches to support those underrepresented	All groups in first instance to identify patterns in groups being referred, identifying those group not represented	Housing demand team and service contract officer and commissioner	Understand which groups need support but are not accessing the service. Understanding why they are not accessing the service. Identified strategies for supporting those groups. Greater take up of support from identified groups	Via qtly contract monitoring meetings	The meetings will be set up at the start of the service and collated to demonstrate any patterns emerging	

groups – either within this service or via others						
Quarterly monitoring of service outcomes for the service in relation to identified protected groups.	All groups	service contract officer and commissioner	Ability to match outcomes against protected characteristics. Groups with protected characteristics do not experience worse outcomes than other groups			

Name:
Signed: ...Diana Balsom.....(Person completing the EIA)

Name:
Signed:(Policy Lead if not same as above)

Date:

Appendix 2

2023 Procurement process

1. On the 17th of May 2022, Cabinet approved the procurement of the Housing Related Support Services for medium / high (complex) needs the Slough Hostel (Lot 1) to a value of £185,000 per annum for a 2.5-year contract, a total contract value £462,500.
2. The contract timeframe allowed both lots 1 and 2 to co-terminate, supporting the future strategic development of the services and ensuring a uniform approach to outcome measurement that would enable meaningful comparison for future service development. This would also allow the necessary time for evidenced-based models such as Housing First, or Housing-led models to be explored with wider stakeholders.
3. The proposal was in line with advice received from legal and procurement colleagues to test the market prior to the award of any future contract for these services. The table below shows the procurement timeline followed.
4. The procurement for the new services was conducted in line with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the council's Contract Procedure Rules with assistance from Procurement and HB Public Law.

Action	Actual or Current Projected Date
Market engagement events	28 03 23 – 12 04 23
*Find a tender and Contracts Finder Notice Published	10 05 23
Issue Invitation to Tender (ITT)	10 05 23
Deadline for receipt of written questions (by 12:00 hours)	22 05 23
Issue answers to clarification questions	24 05 23
Closing date for receipt of Tenders (by 12:00 noon)	12 06 23
Tender Evaluation Report Submitted for Approval	20 07 23
Notification of award	21 07 23
Alcatel period commences / Standstill	N/A
Alcatel period ends / Standstill	N/A
Commencement of New Contract	01 11 23
Contract Award Notice Published	02 08 23

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	5 th March 2024
Subject:	Housing Homelessness Residents in Affordable rented Housing widening the housing Choice for Slough Residents
Lead Member:	Cllr P Kelly, Lead Member for Highways, Housing & Transport
Chief Officer:	Pat Hayes, Executive Director, Regeneration, Housing & Environment
Contact Officer:	Chris Stratford, Associate Director, Housing
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	NO
Exempt:	NO
Decision Subject to Call In:	YES
Appendices:	<u>Appendix A</u>

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report proposes a revised placement policy to enable increased choice for those impacted by homelessness and which will enable the Council to secure access to affordable rented accommodation in areas outside the borough subject to the necessary criteria outlined in the placement policy. The proposed placement policy for Temporary Accommodation (TA) and Private Rented housing is attached as Appendix A to the report.
- 1.2 The approach will examine some of the core reasons for the substantially increased pressure on accessing temporary accommodation and more generally affordable rented housing within the Slough Borough Council area.

Recommendations:

- 1.3 Cabinet is recommended to:
- Approve the Placement Policy
 - Note that housing officers in placing clients out of borough will develop the necessary bespoke support arrangements consistent with the needs of residents and the local areas in which placements are made.

- Agree to a report on the progress made in implementing the new placement policy and its operational and financial impacts be submitted within 6 months from the date of implementation.

Reason:

- 1.4 The Council is presently facing a significant challenge in respect of its overall homelessness and TA budget which continues to show a significant deficit on the approved budget for 23/24. The current budget deficit is estimated at £6.7m and whilst action is being taken to achieve additional savings in 24/25 estimated at £1.6m in the full year and a further £1.3m over the next two years, it is not anticipated that these financial objectives will be sustainable over the medium to longer term using the current traditional operational model of service.
- 1.5 The shortage of affordable accommodation means that few households have the financial capacity and opportunity to move out of temporary accommodation once placed into this type of accommodation and are spending increasing periods of time waiting inevitably for social housing to become available as their long-term sustainable housing solution.
- 1.6 The supply of temporary accommodation has also become significantly more expensive, and landlords are now letting more of their available accommodation through agents and applying daily rates which have risen significantly over the last 12 months. These rates have now reached over £70 per day.
- 1.7 The number of households being accommodated in hotels has risen and is currently around 60 plus clients and as the demographics of those requiring TA and emergency accommodation has changed significantly in recent months either larger TA is required, or several hotel rooms need to be secured to accommodate larger families thus increasing expenditure even more.
- 1.8 The impact on families staying for extended periods in hotels is immense and this places extreme pressure on both the families and officers. Whilst this type of accommodation should only be for emergencies the reality is that it is being used more frequently for longer periods of time.
- 1.9 It is imperative therefore that particularly TA costs are brought under control, and overall reliance on hotel accommodation is reduced to ensure expenditure is controlled as the most expensive accommodation usage is reduced. This will initially be achieved by allocating some 60% of ready to let council owned properties for TA clients thus freeing up appropriate TA to remove families from hotel rooms and therefore securing cheaper day rate arrangements.
- 1.10 This however is not a medium to longer term solution to the problem and it is still anticipated that longer term housing choices for those in TA and emergency accommodation remain severely limited due to local housing allowance (LHA) rates falling well short of the private sector rents being charged. This will remain the case in Slough even when the new LHA rates are applied from April 2024.

Commissioner Review

No specific comments to add to the report.

2. Report

Introductory paragraphs

- 2.1 This report identifies reasons for the recommendations identified. The Council is now experiencing very significant pressures from residents who are losing their settled accommodation from within the private sector due to arrears and landlords using Section 21 notices ahead of the expected regulatory changes. This is during a time when overall the private rented sector has contracted locally, rents are rising significantly nationally estimated at some 12% over the last 12 months and there is a shortage of affordable private rented homes across Slough and the Southeast of England.
- 2.2 The shortage of affordable accommodation means that very few households have the financial means or opportunity to move out of the Council's TA when placed by the Council.
- 2.3 Welfare benefits play a key role in trapping people in temporary accommodation. Most people are aware of the benefit cap, and this limits welfare support to single people and households with more than two children who are not in employment. However, whilst a household is in temporary accommodation, they are entitled to full Housing Benefit provided they have a Universal Credit claim, regardless of their income. Their Housing Benefit is not included in the benefit cap calculation so if they move to a private rented property, they will be worse off as their housing costs will be included in the calculation. This effectively traps people on Universal Credit as it means that it is always cheaper for them to live in temporary accommodation than any other tenure.
- 2.4 The lack of alignment of the benefit system and temporary accommodation rents is therefore trapping households in temporary accommodation, as even households securing Council housing tenancies at social rent levels means even these clients can be financially worse off if they leave temporary accommodation.
- 2.4 The LHA rates presently applying are 1 bed units £184.11 per week, 2 bed unit £230.14 per week, 3 bed unit £293.42 per week and 4 bed unit £368.22 per week. Members will note the significant gap between the respective market rates and maximum cover provided by LHA, and this means that most clients seeking to secure private accommodation cannot meet the difference in costs given a typical 3 bed unit would be circa £1500 to £1900 per month depending on location. Clearly the new LHA rate increases to apply for those seeking private rented accommodation but will not be enough to provide local sustainable rented housing.
- 2.5 The lack of affordable accommodation in the local and regional area means that if we are to fulfil our statutory duties, we need to secure accommodation for households in parts of the country where Local Housing Allowance will cover all or most of the rent. Keeping families in hotel accommodation is only ever an emergency solution and it would be unfair to residents to imply unrealistic expectations about our ability to secure affordable accommodation locally.
- 2.6 The aim is therefore to start securing more properties further afield and to maximise choice for residents on these options. Where residents can secure accommodation more locally, we will continue to offer financial and practical support where it is

appropriate to do so. However, our primary focus will be on areas where rents are more closely aligned with Local Housing Allowance. For most residents in the future and in hotel and temporary accommodation this will mean relocating out of Slough and away from the southeast of England.

- 2.7 The new Placement Policy attached as Appendix A sets out the criteria that will be used to prioritise vulnerable residents for the extremely scarce supply of social housing local private rented accommodation, and temporary accommodation.
- 2.8 The aim is to end the use of hotel accommodation except for the use of critical emergencies by the end of 24/25 financial year and to deliver sustained reductions in the use of temporary accommodation and the subsequent level of cost in line with our stated savings objective of £1.6m for 24/25. This is a challenging objective but provides a necessary focus to support the need for rapid change.
- 2.9 To facilitate out of area moves and reductions in the use of temporary accommodation we will need to change the way in which the service operates and the way in which we support residents. We move to a position where the objective will be to secure alternative accommodation before the date the family are due to become homeless wherever we can. For many households this will be outside Slough and the southeast of England. It is intended that two reasonable offers of accommodation in accordance with the new approach.
- 2.10 At the relief and main duty stage, the initial focus will be on those households currently in hotel accommodation and residents in other forms of temporary accommodation. Where we will relocate households to private rented accommodation in areas where rents and LHA converge. The new approach will have at its core the following principles:
- The proposed changes will affect all homeless households from April 2024.
 - Staff will need to be supported with training and supervision on the approach.
 - We will support residents with relocation including.
 - Extending the search for accommodation nationally where rent deposits and rent in advance can be paid to landlords to support access to affordable private rented accommodation.
 - Identifying potential opportunities to work in partnership with Registered Providers to access social rented properties where there is availability.
 - Making financial payments to support residents with relocation costs.
 - Develop and provide Information on how to prepare for a relocation.
 - Ensuring that accommodation is of an acceptable quality.
 - Support to settle into a local area, to potentially find employment and access local services through partnerships with appropriate organisations such as BEAM.

Options Considered

- 2.11 Officers have considered four key options and have determined that a combination of implementing options 2 3 and 4 would achieve the most effective impact. Option 4 is a new policy initiative for placing clients in out of borough areas in a more positive way and is the core option for consideration and requires Cabinet approval.

Option 1: Accept the current position and continue to seek out TA and emergency accommodation in the same way. This was rejected given the continuing pressures on market rates for TA accommodation and anticipated rises well above the budget provisions

set by the council, and as LHA rates remain frozen there is little or no choice but for TA applicants to await social housing accommodation as any private rented options become further out of reach.

Option 2: Review the number of Ready to Let properties which will be available to TA occupants setting a minimum level of new let's for TA clients. This has now been set at 60% freeing up hotel rooms as these clients move into the TA made available from those moving into social housing. Complete an audit of all TA to ensure all accommodation is occupied as it should be. This is continuing with some 350 inspections completed and it is anticipated all visits will be completed by the end of February 2024.

Option 3: Introduce a maximum pricing strategy for all TA more closely aligned to LHA levels and seek to agree this approach with other Boroughs placing clients within Slough's boundary thus reducing the upward pressures associated with TA costs, and further begin using the Council's purchasing power along with other Boroughs and begin to apply this approach across the wider private sector to again begin to suppress the upward trend in private rents.

Option 4: Development of a new placement policy which will aim to place clients further afield and increase the affordable housing choices by placing clients in areas where LHA rates are more closely aligned with private sector rents. This revised policy is attached as Appendix A to this report.

3. Background

- 3.1 The background to the proposals within this report are the increasing pressures on in borough TA, the necessary and increasing use of emergency hotel accommodation that is impacting on the wellbeing of families placed in such accommodation, such facilities charging premium rates to house clients, and as placements are in rooms for extended periods the overall costs to the Council is increasing. The objective of the new placement policy is to reduce the average time spent in TA to below 12 months from the current three-year average and remove the use of hotel accommodation entirely except for critical housing emergencies.
- 3.2 The Council has a diminishing stock of social housing and whilst a higher base rate of re-lets has been set at 60% this is unlikely to be sustainable in sufficient numbers over the medium to longer term. Properties delivered through the planning system has diminished and often fails to provide affordable homes of the right type to meet the changing demographics associated homelessness priorities.
- 3.3 The overall position therefore and one mirrored by many local councils is of diminishing affordable rented housing choice locally now being further exacerbated by reducing private rented sector properties, and national policy which still does not provide a means by which social housing can be built at scale.
- 3.4 All this background has now led to many councils reviewing their traditional approach to homelessness and especially how their traditional operating service offers might be changed to take account of the ability to place people into areas where LHA rates are closely aligned with rents and therefore allows the council the ability to locate affordable housing which provides long term stable and decent homes for those residence where the authority owes a duty to re house.

- 3.5 The attached placement policy has carefully considered all the necessary regulatory statutory, partner consultation when considering placement, and partnering to support those placed out of borough, to allow such placements to be safely made and at the same time improve the longer-term affordable housing prospects for those placed.

4 Implications of the Recommendation

- 4.1 The primary implications of the new model approach are to fundamentally change the way the Council meets its housing obligations. It recognises that the current welfare benefit system inevitably traps clients in expensive TA accommodation for many months if not years as clients wait for a reducing number of social and affordable housing units to become available. As homes in the private rented sector in borough become more expensive for clients to access because of the gap between LHA rates and market rents, the recommendation requests Cabinet to approve the new placement policy as attached in Appendix A and note the other proposed actions to manage costs.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 Procuring properties at scale outside the Council's area should achieve both short- and long-term reductions in TA costs savings. It is envisaged that the new placement policy will go a long way to reducing cost pressures for hotel/bed & breakfast and other TA accommodations and enable the service to meet its savings objective of £1.6m for 24/25, £0.6m in 25/26 and £0.7m in 26/27.

5.2

The net costs of TA accommodation is estimated to be £6.7m in 23/24, as the average costs of paying for these accommodation continue to exceed the rents recovered from tenants mainly via Housing Benefit at the local housing allowance (LHA) rates. The current average provider unit cost for Hotel & B&B accommodation is £400 per week compared to an average income per week of £200 recovered from Housing benefit. The number in TA accommodation continues to grow and is currently over 700. It is anticipated that implementation of this policy will help drive net costs downwards from 24/25. To maximise costs reductions, it is anticipated that placements would target areas where provider costs are much closer to the income recoverable via housing benefits.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 Local Authorities have a duty to accommodate homeless people under the Housing Act 1996 (the "Act"). If an accommodation duty is owed the local authority must ensure that suitable accommodation is provided.
- 6.2 Section 208 (1) of the Act says, "so far as reasonably practicable a local housing authority shall in discharging their housing functions under this Part secure that accommodation is available for the occupation of the applicant in their district". This means that so far as reasonably practical a local council must try and provide accommodation in the local authority area.
- 6.3 In developing the new placement policy, the concept of "suitability" is central to the ways in which a local authority can discharge its housing duties. Section 182 of the Act requires that in exercise of their duty relating to homelessness a local authority shall have regard to the Secretary of State's "Homelessness Code of Guidance for

Local Authorities” (the “Code”). The Code states that local authorities who find it necessary to make out of district placements are advised to develop policies for the procurement and allocation of TA which will help to ensure the suitability requirements are met.

- 6.4 The Code also states that generally, where possible, housing authorities should try to secure accommodation that is as close as possible to where an applicant was previously living. Where it is not reasonably practicable to secure accommodation within the district and an authority has secured accommodation outside their district, the Code goes on to say the housing authority is required to take into account the distance of that accommodation from the district of the authority. Furthermore, where suitable and affordable accommodation is available nearer to the authority’s district than the accommodation it has secured, the accommodation it has secured is not likely to be suitable unless the application has specified a preference, or the accommodation has been offered in accordance with a published policy which provides for faire and reasonable allocation of accommodation that is or may become available to applicants.
- 6.5 Where homeless people are accommodated out of borough this will engage the duties under the Equalities Act 2010. The new placement policy will need to ensure it takes account of all these requirements to remain lawful.

7. Risk management implications

- 7.1 At present the risks associated with not getting the internal processes correctly applied are significantly of a financial nature and would impact significantly on the 24/25 financial savings target set at £1.6m for the full year. This is being mitigated by early action taking place now to create rent accounts and apply benefit entitlements for TA in a timely manner. There would also be the risk of legal challenges to out of borough placements if these are not made in accordance with the legislation/case law and the Code. There is further detailed re-engineering of processes underway and additional IT work around securing night rate charges in NEC is now well underway.
- 7.2 The report also identifies a need for an enhanced skill base amongst the officer workforce to implement the new operating model, especially around securing new properties with national agencies, support mechanisms required for clients, and ensuring implementation of the placement policy is strictly applied to avoid legal challenge, there is both a training development programme required and the potential recruitment in a timely manner new officer resources. Financial resources will be assessed quickly to achieve the objectives and the necessary business Case submitted.

8. Public Health Impacts

- 8.1 Poor quality housing and homelessness have been identified as key drivers and factors in public health inequalities. Through reducing the number of households reaching crisis point and increasing the choice and supply of affordable rented good quality housing we will significantly contribute to the reduction in poor quality housing being used and therefore the overall wellbeing of our residence.
- 8.2 The impacts and effects of household in hotel accommodation are extreme as in most instances there are no cooking facilities or very few private areas. The health

and wellbeing impacts are further made worse as residents and particularly children are likely to take advantage of poor takeaway food which also continues to impact on the family's financial stress.

9 *Equality implications*

9.1 The Council has a duty contained in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 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 and
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

9.2 The protected characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. An EIA will be completed in respect of the report proposals.

9.3 Inclusive and accessible engagement is one of the five themes of the Resident Engagement Strategy which seeks to reduce barriers to involvement for our diverse residents improve involvement of under-represented groups within Slough.

10 *Procurement implications*

10.1 None identified at this stage, but procurement policy may be required in the future once the immediate pressures and new service offer has been defined and approved.

11 *Workforce implications*

11.1 Implications for the workforce are considered positive through a more coordinated approach to the provision of TA accommodation combined with a revised placement policy which will widen and secure the choice of affordable housing. This should reduce overall pressure on TA staff particularly an allow a better customer journey to sustainable affordable rented accommodation. Further work is proceeding around any adjustments to the overall TA staffing structure and necessary amendments will be made.

11.2 There will be a need for staff training to understand the new homelessness rationalisation process and to understand a wider partnership working ethos for the new placement policy. This training programme will be considered carefully, and the necessary training plan will emerge as part of the implementation process. Any financial implications associated with the training plan will be recommend as indicated above.

12 *Property implications*

12.1 None identified at this stage, but clearly new affordable property choices will emerge through the new placement policy.

13. Background Papers

13.1 There are no Background papers.

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Proposed Revised Placement Policy for Temporary Accommodation and Private Rented Sector Offers.

Scope	<p>This policy explains how the Council will meet its statutory duties in locating accommodation, in accordance with Part VII of the 1996 Housing Act and the Homelessness Code of Guidance.</p> <p>It describes how officers will determine the suitability of temporary accommodation and provide detail as to how offers will be made into private rented accommodation as we expand our relationships with landlords in the private rented sector. This policy will apply to both existing and future applicants.</p>
Approved by	Slough Borough Council Cabinet
Approval date	Feb 2024
Document Author	Chris Stratford
Document owner – Corporate	Director of Housing
Document owner – Portfolio Holder	Cabinet Member for Housing
Review	It is proposed keep the policy under constant review. Updates will be based on any changes in legal or local context.

1 Introduction

Slough Borough Council is committed to using all its resources and creativity to make the experience of homelessness as stress free and as short an experience as possible. The Council is determined to enable everyone to eventually access a stable, secure, and decent home regardless of tenure. This is in the context of a severe shortage of rented accommodation in Slough and the wider Southeast region generally.

This policy covers two elements:

- **The use of short-term temporary accommodation**
- **The increased use of the private rented sector to provide a sustainable solution for people experiencing homelessness.**

This policy sets out how the Council determine the suitability of accommodation for households placed into either the private rented sector or temporary accommodation. The severe shortage of housing, rising rental costs, and growing pressures on local government funding mean that for most households in the future there is the potential need to move out of the borough and often away from Slough and the southeast of England.

This policy will apply to all those households that have been accommodated by the Housing Accommodation Service. The policy does not cover households who have secured their own accommodation in the private rented sector as the Council will not have been able to assess the suitability of accommodation in these circumstances. The policy may be amended according to changing levels of need or changes in legislation. Any changes will be approved either by the Cabinet Member for Housing or Cabinet depending on the nature of the proposed amendment.

1. Temporary Accommodation Offers

Temporary accommodation (TA) is not a long-term solution for residents. Hotel accommodation is reserved for emergency purposes only. The aim is that no household should spend longer than is necessary in temporary accommodation. Currently temporary accommodation occupation can expect to be for a period of over 3 years. This is unacceptable from the perspective of providing a stable decent home environment and a cost pressure perspective for the Council.

The objective of this policy initiative is to reduce time spent in temporary accommodation to less than 12 months over the next two financial years. The Council aim to ensure that the accommodation we offer, meets the needs of the household, and meets the suitability criteria set out below. Officers will usually only make one offer of temporary accommodation to a household, usually as an emergency response or where we have been unable to secure a suitable and affordable home. The household would normally be expected to accept it

immediately. The policy foresees that such accommodation may be out of borough in the future to achieve the objectives of providing longer term sustainable and decent homes for homelessness clients. Transport to such out of borough accommodation will be paid for by the Council.

1. Moving from one temporary accommodation property to another

In some cases, a household living in temporary accommodation may have to move to a different unit of temporary accommodation. Depending on the type of the accommodation and changes in the housing market, the Council may expect the households to move with short notice. In that case, we will give one offer of suitable alternative accommodation. If the household refuses the offer, we will not offer further accommodation and our duty to the household will come to an end.

2. Private Rented Sector Offers

At present the Council has only a limited amount of activity aimed at placing clients into the private rented sector (PRS). The Council's aim is to significantly increase the number of such placements and to prevent and relieve homelessness through assisting households to stay in their existing accommodation by way of more proactive preventative activities. This will also include PRS Leasing schemes which will be introduced during 2024/25

Where such a placement has not been possible and a household is either in temporary accommodation or will lose their existing accommodation, we will begin to assist them into a suitable private rented home as quickly as possible. This means that we will arrange for a private rented sector landlord to make an offer of an assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector for a period of at least 12 months. We will evaluate each offer both regarding needs of the household and the nature of the accommodation to be offered.

A maximum of two reasonable offers of affordable private rented housing will be made. Individual circumstances will be considered in making these offers, including time scale, affordability, household preferences and needs. An acceptance of any suitable offer will end the Council's statutory duty. When a second suitable offer is made, the household will be notified in writing and the Council's statutory duty will be formally ended, whether the offer is accepted or refused. This reflects the need to be robust about reducing live cases and working more strictly to the regulatory and statutory duties imposed on the Council.

If the household wants a certain type of property in the private rented sector or in a specific area, we will advise them to conduct their own search. This enables households to choose the property they want to live in. If they should subsequently find a property and it meets the suitability criteria, we will assist them in securing the tenancy. Households must not sign any tenancy agreement before Officers determine that the property is suitable, and the tenancy complies with certain conditions.

3. Suitability

The Council obviously needs to ensure that the accommodation offered is suitable for the households. In determining whether a property is suitable we will balance the needs of the household with the nature of the accommodation being considered. **A key factor in determining location is the availability of suitable affordable housing.**

Changes in the housing market, combined with a lengthy freeze on Local Housing Allowance (although this will cease from April 2024) have meant that there is very little accommodation available within Slough and the Southeast of England. **Most households in future therefore will be made an offer of affordable private rented accommodation in other parts of the country where Local Housing Allowance aligns closely with average rents.**

The extreme shortage of affordable accommodation within Slough and the Southeast means that the Council will prioritise some households ahead of others for the limited number of properties that become available.

The proposed factors considered to prioritise households are set out at 3 below.

3.1 Size of Accommodation

Accommodation must be of an appropriate size for household. The Council will calculate the number of bedrooms that a household will need by following the steps below **in order**:

Step 1: One bedroom for the applicant, and partner/spouse (if any)

Step 2: One bedroom for any additional adult couple

Step 3: One bedroom for any two additional people of the same sex

Step 4: One bedroom for any two additional people of the opposite sex aged nine and under

Step 5: One bedroom for any additional person

This calculation will not be used where there are safeguarding issues or concerns. In these circumstances the size of property will be determined by the Housing Allocations Manager, Housing (People) Services following a case conference and recommendations from the social worker from Adult Social Care or Children Services.

3.2 Standard of Accommodation

All properties offered must meet the necessary requirements of compliance and fitness standards. The Council will ensure the property certification is up to date in all respects and that it has adequate heating and ventilation and free from damp and mould. Periodic inspections will be made and a report on condition and standards submitted to the Council where appropriate.

3.3 Affordability

Before making an offer of accommodation, the Council will assess each household's income and expenditure. This is to ensure that the household can afford to pay the rent for the property.

We will aim to secure properties for rent within or close to the prevailing Local Housing Allowance rate as far as reasonably practicable so that they are affordable for people receiving housing benefit/ universal credit. Given the context of rising rents in Slough the Council will need to procure accommodation out of Slough to ensure a greater number of affordable accommodation.

In cases meeting the criteria set out in the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) Policy, The Council may award a time limited DHP to pay for shortfalls in Housing Benefit/ housing element of Universal Credit and Local Housing Allowance. The DHP Fund is a short-term emergency fund, awarded whilst the household takes action to resolve their housing problems in the longer term. This can include taking steps to find work; or taking steps to maximize their welfare entitlements in other ways.

3.4 Location

For residents reliant on benefits to cover their housing costs there is an extremely limited supply of properties. We will support households to move to accommodation outside of Slough in the following situations:

- Where there is an ongoing threat to the safety of a household if they remain in Slough. The Housing and Community Safety Team in partnership with the Housing service are in the final stages of approving a new Safe Homes Strategy. This will aim to provide a compliant strategy for consideration by member shortly and identify the Councils detailed approach to dealing with victims of violence.
- Where there is no suitable affordable accommodation within Slough available.

The nature of the housing crisis means that procurement activity will be focused on those areas of the country where Local Housing Allowance will still cover much of the rent.

The Council will support residents wishing to stay in or around Slough in finding their own accommodation through an improved Private sector Landlord referral service which is currently being established and expected to become operational in April 2024.

Section 208(1) of Housing Act 1996 states "so far as reasonably practicable a local housing authority shall in discharging their housing functions under this Part secure that accommodation is available for the occupation of the applicant in their district." This means that so far as reasonably practicable a local authority must try and provide accommodation in the local authority's area. The Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities also provides guidance regarding the suitability of out of borough placements. The current state of the housing market,

with the gap between benefits and rents increasing rapidly, mean that there is little or no accommodation that is affordable to low-income households within Slough and the Southeast.

The limited number of properties that the Council secures either as temporary or permanent housing in or around Slough will be reserved for households meeting the criteria set out below.

The Council will consider the factors below when determining the suitability of the location of the accommodation. The household may be asked to provide additional or updated information relating to their current circumstances to assist the Council in its determination.

In considering these factors the overriding issue is the availability of housing that is affordable to the household. For most households this will be the main factor in determining the suitability of an offer of accommodation.

Officers will refer to these factors when we explain to a household why they are being offered accommodation, and why an alternative was not offered if there is more than one property available.

3.1.1. Employment

When a member of the household or someone who is reasonably expected to live with the household, is in paid employment, the Council will consider the need to reach their normal workplace from the accommodation being considered. This also applies to people who have a confirmed start date of employment or are enrolled on a work readiness programme in Slough.

The Council will give priority for accommodation in Slough and its vicinity to households where a member of the household or someone who is reasonably expected to reside with the household, is in paid employment and a move out of Slough would result in termination of this employment with no prospects of finding employment in any new location.

3.1.2. Caring responsibilities

The Council will consider caring responsibilities on an individual basis when determining what would be a reasonable location for the household to live.

The Council will consider households with members who are registered carers in receipt of carer's allowance and provide care for a member of the family who is not part of the household but who resides in Slough. We will give priority for accommodation in Slough and its vicinity to the carer's household if the person being cared for would require statutory health and social support if the care ceased.

3.1.3. Education

The Council will take the age of the child and the stage of their education into consideration. If households include children who will take statutory exams within an academic year, Officers will aim to assist them in finding accommodation

within a reasonable travelling distance from their school. This includes children enrolled in GCSE, AS or A level courses (or Advanced British Standard) or post vocational qualifications in schools based in Slough. Households that include children who are not taking statutory exams within an academic year may have to move further away. In such a case, officers would advise that the children change schools.

The Council will give priority for accommodation in Slough and its vicinity to households with children taking statutory exams within the academic year. The Council will also give special consideration to households with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) who are receiving educational support from Slough Council.

We will give priority for accommodation in Slough and its vicinity if changing school would be detrimental to their education and well-being (for example, if they could not receive special educational needs support elsewhere). In some specific cases the family could benefit from a coordinated move to another area if a move would allow the family to live closer to specialist educational support. Housing services will work in partnership with children's and education services to determine this.

3.1.4. Children subject to a child protection plan

The Council will consider any cases where children are subject to a child protection plan on an individual basis. Social workers will advise on these cases, in order that the Council consider all safeguarding concerns and determine whether the household should be prioritised to stay in the borough. In some cases, the children may benefit from a move out of the borough, as that could eliminate the threat to their well-being.

3.1.5. Adults in education

The Council will consider the needs of any adult in the household who is in education. This includes adults in higher or adult education, vocational and professional training, or a recognised apprenticeship.

3.1.6. Medical facilities, medical and health issues

The Council will consider individual medical and health needs. We will consider any ongoing treatments and the implications of transferring to healthcare providers closer to new accommodation.

When determining suitability regarding the household's medical needs, Officers will consider whether the medical condition itself makes the housing and location offered unsuitable. If the household cites previously unidentified medical grounds as the reason for refusing the accommodation, Officers will ask the household to submit evidence within a reasonable period.

The Council will give priority for accommodation in Slough and its vicinity to households with members who meet at least one of the following conditions:

- **have a severe and enduring physical or mental health condition requiring regular specialist care that a move from Slough and its vicinity would significantly disrupt the individual or family**
- **have an enduring physical or mental health problem where a loss of local support network would severely impact their well-being**

3.1.7. Services, amenities, and transport

The Council will consider accessibility to local services, amenities, and transport.

3.1.8. Wider community support networks

The Council understand that some households rely on local support networks in their daily lives more strongly than others. The nature of the support varies. It includes but is not limited to childcare, membership of a religious community, or support for recovering drug addicts. Officers will consider any such circumstances on an individual basis. Therefore, officers will consider situations where a loss of local support networks would be significantly detrimental to the wellbeing of the household.

4. Support for Households

The Council will offer all households who move out of the borough and its vicinity relocation support. This is when households are moving further away than a neighbouring borough. The level of support will depend on the individual and collective needs of the household and the location. This may include financial support to enable a permanent move.

Relocation support may include information on:

- local schools
- Special Educational Needs support
- local childcare
- local GPs
- housing benefit as well as any other benefits the household may be entitled to
- information on their new local council, Council Tax, registering to vote and relevant local services
- community care services and social groups
- where relevant, information on local employment opportunities
- guaranteeing rent payments to landlords for up to a year where a resident is not able to provide evidence of income

5. Right to Review

Households have a statutory right to request an internal review regarding decisions we make on several issues. One of these is suitability of accommodation. If the outcome of the review is in the household's favour, this means that the decision to end our duty is set aside and we will then make a further offer of accommodation.

If the household is not satisfied with the outcome of the review, they can appeal to the County Court, but only if the Council has made a legal error when making the decision. An appeal must be brought within 21 days of notification. If the applicant has not been notified of the outcome within the prescribed time, an appeal must be brought within 21 days of when they should have been notified.

The following reasons are unlikely to be considered as acceptable reasons for refusal:

- the quality of decoration/furniture
- provision of parking
- lack of access to a garden
- any medical condition that is not directly impacted by the accommodation offered
- geographical location

6. Tackling fraud

It is an offence for any resident to knowingly make a false statement intended to induce the Council to believe that they or any others are entitled to accommodation. Where we suspect that a fraud may have been committed, this matter will be investigated and may lead to criminal proceedings being instigated.

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Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	5 March 2024
Subject:	Berkshire Prosperity Board
Lead Member:	Cllr Dexter Smith - Leader of the Council
Chief Officer:	Stephen Brown – Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Stephen Taylor – Monitoring Officer
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	YES
Exempt:	NO
Decision Subject To Call In:	YES for Cabinet decisions only
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Functions and Procedure Rules for Berkshire Economic Prosperity Board

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 The six Berkshire local authorities are proposing to set up a joint committee, known as the Berkshire Prosperity Board, to enable funding previously held by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to be provided for Berkshire wide prosperity projects. This report sets out details of the proposed governance structure and functions, with proposed delegation to officers to finalise these arrangements to take account of Government guidance and any grant conditions.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the setting up of a joint committee across the six Berkshire local authorities to exercise executive functions in relation to economic prosperity.
2. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to agree and enter into an inter-authority agreement between the six Berkshire local authorities to facilitate decision-making by the Berkshire Prosperity Board Joint Committee (BPB)

Recommend to Council:

3. Approval of the functions and procedure rules for the Berkshire Prosperity Board Joint Committee (BPB) as set out in Appendix 1 be added to Part 3.5 of the Constitution;
4. Delegated authority to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to amend the Constitution to make minor amendments to the functions and procedure rules for the BPB and to amend other parts of the Constitution, including

Article 13 – Decision Making, Part 4.2 - Access to Information Procedure Rules and Part 4.4 of the Executive Procedure Rules, to take account of the existence of the BPB.

Reason:

To facilitate the discharge of functions connected to economic prosperity across Berkshire, including functions currently held by the LEP.

Commissioner Review

No specific comments to add to the report.

2. Report

Introductory paragraph

- 2.1 The Thames Valley Berkshire LEP has held core functions in relation to economic prosperity, including being able to access Government grants on a regional basis. In response to the Government’s review of Local Enterprise Partnerships, it is proposed that a joint committee across Berkshire can effectively exercise these functions. This will enable the authorities across Berkshire to agree a shared vision of inclusive and sustainable economic prosperity, bid for Government and private sector investment, have a strong, collective voice in lobbying Government and other agencies and advantageously position Berkshire in readiness for proposed devolution proposals.

Options considered

Option 1 – To set up a joint committee – the legal power to establish a joint committee is well established and provides a simple way for local authorities to collaborate and make formal decisions across a region. This is a model which works well in other places, including in West London. **This is the recommended option.**

Option 2 – To delay implementation of a cross Berkshire committee and continue to operate under the informal Leaders’ Group – the Government guidance makes clear that funding for the LEP will cease from 1 April 2024. There may be opportunities to bid for funding to support economic prosperity across a region, which requires a formal decision-making structure to be in place. **This is not recommended** due to a risk that the council may not be able to bid for regional funding.

Option 3 – To submit formal devolution proposals to set up a statutory Economic Prosperity Board – it will take time to prepare such a proposal with limited additional benefits at this stage. It is unlikely that this will provide added value over and above the joint committee model and will take longer to set up. **This is not recommended.**

Background

- 2.2 Joint Department for Business and Trade and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Guidance was issued in August 2023 on Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and integration of functions into local democratic institutions. The Spring Budget 2023 proposals stated that the Government was minded to withdraw central government support (core funding) for LEPs from April 2024 and to transfer LEP functions to local authorities, where appropriate and where not already delivered by combined authorities. LEPs may choose to

continue operating but will no longer be eligible for Government funding. The functions delivered by LEPs, namely business representation, strategic economic planning and delivery of related Government programmes will be exercised by upper tier local authorities where not already delivered by a combined authority and these can be delivered by authorities working in collaboration with each other.

- 2.3 As there is already overlap between local authority functions and those exercised by the LEP, it is anticipated that there is greater scope for join-up, efficiencies and clarity for the private sector. Government is expected to provide funding in 2024/25 for local authorities to support them to deliver functions currently delivered by the LEP.
- 2.4 It is proposed that the BPB discharges the following functions on behalf of the participating unitary authorities.
- Work to a shared vision of inclusive and sustainable economic prosperity through working together to address challenges and meet opportunities.
 - Have a strengthened case to Government and private investors for greater investment into strategic projects across Berkshire.
 - Function as a vehicle to commission the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) core functions in response to the Government's review of Local Economic Partnerships.
 - Have a stronger, collective voice in lobbying Government and other agencies using a systems leadership approach.
 - Advantageously position Berkshire in readiness for potential devolution proposals to benefit from additional responsibilities and funding opportunities.
 - Progress joint working on the six identified work themes and be agile in responding to new opportunities as they arise.
- 2.5 The BPB will not discharge any non-executive functions and will not have any function permitting it to employ staff or make arrangements for the proper administration of the financial affairs of the authorities.
- 2.6 It will be necessary to put in place an inter-authority agreement setting out further detail on how the partnership will work, including setting out how liabilities will be shared and indemnity arrangements. The Berkshire Monitoring Officers are working on the agreement and delegated authority is sought to progress this.
- 2.7 It is likely that the functions of the BPB may evolve over time, leading to minor amendments to the functions and procedure rules. To facilitate this delegated authority is sought to amend the constitutional rules. More significant amendments to BPB will be taken through normal constitutional channels.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

3.1.1 It is proposed that the BPB will operate within existing budgets, utilising any transferred funding from the LEP and external grant funding. Any additional budgetary requirements will need to be agreed in accordance with the Council's financial procedure rules.

3.2 *Legal implications*

3.2.1 The joint committee is set up in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Arrangements for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012. As a formal committee is it required to comply with the same statutory rules as the Council's Cabinet and sub-committee.

3.2.2 The delegation of functions to the BPB does not preclude Cabinet from exercising those functions itself.

3.2.3 Further details on how the functions will be exercised and the relationship between the participating local authorities will be set out in an inter-authority agreement. This will include provisions are termination, liability and indemnities.

3.3 *Risk management implications*

3.3.1 The joint committee is not a separate legal entity and therefore decisions it makes are binding on the participating local authorities. The risk of this will be managed via the inter-authority agreement.

3.4 *Environmental implications*

3.4.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

3.5 *Equality implications*

3.5.1 The BPB will be obligated to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and assess the equality implications of any proposed decision.

3.7 *Procurement implications*

3.7.1 The setting up of the BPB is not a procurement activity. If there is a need to commission support, consideration will be given to which participating authority's contract procedure rules should be followed.

3.8 *Workforce implications*

3.8.1 There are no direct workforce implications arising from this report.

4. Background Papers

None

Part 3.5 - Joint arrangements for discharge of Executive Functions

Functions and Procedure Rules for the Berkshire Economic Prosperity Board (Joint Committee)

1. Functions

The Joint Committee will discharge on behalf of the Participating Local Authorities the functions listed below related to promoting economic prosperity in Berkshire:

- 1.1** Develop a shared, Berkshire-wide vision for inclusive and sustainable economic prosperity, together with a set of practical thematic priorities, that addresses the strategic challenges and opportunities that the area faces.
- 1.2** Agree to and making funding applications and/or investment bids to external bodies, in relation to economic prosperity for the benefit of the Berkshire.
- 1.3** Provide direction to the nominated Local Authority acting as the Accountable Body on the allocation of any funding awards/government grants received to appropriate projects for the benefit of the geographical area of the participating local authorities, including, where applicable, approving the approach to the procurement to be undertaken by Accountable Body Local Authority
- 1.4** Represent the participating local authorities in discussions and negotiations with regional bodies, national bodies, central government inward investors and others on matters relating to investment and funding for the benefit of Berkshire.
- 1.5** Co-ordinate work across the six participating authorities and other Berkshire Committees, networks, and other statutory providers where this can help to promote inclusive and sustainable prosperity and the delivery of priorities across the six programme themes.
- 1.6** Representing the participating local authorities in discussions and negotiations with regional bodies, national bodies and central government on matters relating to economic prosperity for the benefit of the local government areas of the participating authorities.
- 1.7** Provide the appropriate governance, accountability, and delivery mechanisms for any future Government funding and programme support, that could arise from the integration of the LEP, from future growth funding, from UKSPF Berkshire Wide programmes and from any subsequent devolution funding.
- 1.8** Seek to influence and align government investment in Berkshire in order to boost economic growth within the local government areas of the participating authorities.
- 1.9** Agree and approve any additional governance structures as related to the Joint Committee, or any sub-Committees formed by the Joint Committee.
- 1.10** Invite representatives of key stakeholders such as business associations, government agencies, the further education sector, higher education sector, schools, voluntary sector, and health sector to engage with the business of the Joint Committee including by attending meetings and commenting on proposals and documents.

For participating local authorities operating executive arrangements, only executive functions of each authority may be exercised.

2. Membership and Quorum

- 2.1 The membership will comprise of six members with each participating Local authority appointing one person to sit on the Joint Committee as a voting member.
- 2.2 Each participating local authority will make a suitable appointment in accordance with its own constitutional requirements. It is anticipated that, where practicable, the leader of each participating local authority will be appointed to the Joint Committee. Where the participating local authority operates executive arrangements, the voting member must be a member of the Executive.
- 2.3 Where a participating Local authority does not operate executive arrangements, the appointment of a voting member will be in accordance with the local authority's own procedures. It is envisaged that this will usually be one of its senior councillors.
- 2.4 In all cases, the appointed person must be an elected member (or their Deputy) of the council of the appointing participating local authority. Appointments will be made for a maximum period not extending beyond each member's remaining term of office as a councillor, and their membership of the Joint Committee will automatically cease if they cease to be an elected member of the appointing participating local authority and in the case of a participating local authority operating executive arrangements, they cease to be a member of the Executive.
- 2.5 Members of the Joint Committee are governed by the provisions of their own Council's Codes and Protocols including the Code of Conduct for Members and the rules on Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.
- 2.6 Each participating local authority will utilise existing mechanisms for substitution as laid down in their own Standing Orders. Continuity of attendance is encouraged.
- 2.7 Where a participating local authority wishes to withdraw from membership of the Joint Committee this must be indicated in writing to each of the Committee members.
- 2.8 The quorum for the Joint Committee is **six** members. If the Joint Committee is not quorate it cannot transact any business. If there is no quorum at the time the meeting is due to begin, the start of the meeting will be delayed until a quorum is achieved. If no quorum is achieved after 30 minutes has elapsed, the Committee secretary will advise those present that no business can be transacted, and the meeting will be cancelled.

3. Chair and Vice-Chair

- 3.1 The Chair of the Joint Committee will be appointed for 12 months and will rotate in turn between the six participating local authorities.
- 3.2 Unless otherwise unanimously agreed by the Joint Committee, each participating local authority's appointed person will serve as chair for 12 months at a time. Where the incumbent Chair ceases to be a member of the Joint Committee, the individual appointed by the relevant local authority as a replacement will serve as Chair for the remainder of the 12 months as chair.
- 3.3 The Joint Committee will also appoint a Vice-Chair from within its membership on an annual basis to preside in the absence of the Chair. This appointment will also rotate in a similar manner to the Chair.
- 3.4 At its first meeting, the Joint Committee will draw up the rotas for Chair and Vice-Chair respectively as well as the meeting schedule for the year.
- 3.5 Where neither the Chair nor Vice-Chair are in attendance, the Joint Committee will appoint a Chair to preside over the meeting where they are quorate.
- 3.6 In the event of any disagreement as the meaning or application of these Rules, the decision of the Chair shall be final.

4. Sub-Committees

- 4.1 The Joint Committee may establish sub-committees to undertake elements of its work if required.

5. Delegation to officers

- 5.1 The Joint Committee may delegate specific functions to officers of any of the participating local authorities.
- 5.2 Any such delegation may be subject to the requirement for the officer to consult with or obtain the prior agreement of an officer (or officers) of the other participating local authorities.
- 5.3 It may also be subject to the requirement for the officer with delegated authority to consult with the Chair of the Joint Committee and the Leaders of the one or more participating local authorities before exercising their delegated authority.

6. Administration

- 6.1 Clerking support for the Joint Committee, and accommodation for meetings, will be managed in the first year by Bracknell Forest Council working with the Chair and Vice-Chair.
- 6.2 In the first year, Authorities will where possible support the Joint Committee in kind by taking on responsibilities such as communications and clerking.

7. Financial matters

7.1 In the first year the costs of managing the Joint Committee will be contained within existing budgets and using an element of the shared prosperity fund. Beyond the first year, Council's will work within available budgets and funding sources.

7.2 When making a decision which has financial consequences, the Joint Committee will follow the relevant provisions of the Financial Procedure Rules of the Accountable Body Local Authority.

8. Agenda management

8.1 Subject to 8.2, all prospective items of business for the Joint Committee shall be agreed by a meeting of the Chief Executives of the participating local authorities or their authorised representatives.

8.2 It will be the responsibility of each report author to ensure that the impacts on all participating local authorities are fairly and accurately represented in the report. They may do this either by consulting with the monitoring officer and chief finance officer of each participating local authority or by some other appropriate method.

8.3 In pursuance of their statutory duties, the monitoring officer and/or the chief financial officer of any of the participating local authorities may include an item for consideration on the agenda of a meeting of the Joint Committee, and, may require that an extraordinary meeting be called to consider such items.

8.4 Each participating local authority operating executive arrangements will be responsible for considering whether it is necessary to treat prospective decisions as 'key- decisions' and follow any steps required by law such as inclusion in any Forward Plan. Each participating local authority operating a Committee system will apply its local procedures.

9. Meetings

9.1 The Joint Committee will meet as required to fulfil its functions. As a formal committee it will comply with the statutory rules, including under the Local Government Act 1972.

9.2 A programme of meetings at the start of each Municipal Year will be scheduled and included in the Calendar of Meetings for all participating local authorities.

10. Notice of meetings

- 10.1 On behalf of the Joint Committee, the Committee secretary will give notice to the public of the time and place of any meeting in accordance with Part 5A of the 1972 Act.
- 10.2 At least five clear working days in advance of a meeting the secretariate to the Joint Committee will publish the agenda via the website of secretariate's authority and provide the documentation and website link to the participating local authorities to enable the information to be published on each Participating Local authority's website.

11. Public participation

- 11.1 Unless considering information classified as 'exempt' or 'confidential' under the 1972 Act, all meetings of the Joint Committee shall be held in public.
- 11.2 Public representations and questions are permitted at meetings of the Joint Committee. Notification must be given in advance of the meeting indicating by 12 noon on the last working day before the meeting the matter to be raised and the agenda item to which it relates. Representatives will be provided with a maximum of 3 minutes to address the Joint Committee.
- 11.3 The Chair shall have discretion to determine the number of speakers per agenda item and to extend the time allowed for addressing the Joint Committee.
- 11.4 Where the number of public representations exceed the time / number allowed, a written response will be provided or the representation deferred to the next meeting of the Joint Committee if appropriate.
- 11.5 The Joint Committee may also invite special representatives of stakeholders such as business associations, government agencies such as DWP or Jobcentre Plus, the further education sector, voluntary sector, and health sector to take an interest in the business of the Committee including by attending meetings and commenting on proposals and documents.
- 11.6 The Chair shall have discretion to regulate the behaviour of all individuals present at the meeting in the interests of the efficient conduct of the meeting.

12. Councillor and officer participation

- 12.1 Any elected member of any of the participating local authorities who is not a member of the Joint Committee may ask a question or address the Committee with the consent of the Chair.
- 12.2 The participating authorities chief executive or other nominated officer may attend the meeting in an advisory capacity.

13. Business to be transacted

- 13.1 Standing items for each meeting of the Joint Committee will include the following:
- Minutes of the Last Meeting

- Apologies for absence
- Declarations of Interest
- Provision for public participation
- Substantive items for consideration

13.2 The Chair may vary the order of business and take urgent items their discretion. The Chair should inform the Members of the Joint Committee prior to allowing the consideration of urgent items.

13.3 An item of business may not be considered at a meeting unless:

- (i) A copy of the agenda included the item (or a copy of the item) is open to inspection by the public for at least five clear days before the meeting; or
- (ii) By reason of special circumstances which shall be specified in the minutes the Chair of the meeting is of the opinion that the item should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

13.4 “Special circumstances” justifying an item being considered as a matter or urgency will relate to both why the decision could not be made at a meeting allowing the proper time for inspection by the public as well as why the item or report could not have been available for inspection for five clear days before the meeting.

14. Extraordinary meetings

14.1 Arrangements may be made following consultation with Chair of the Joint Committee to call an extraordinary meeting of the Joint Committee. The Chair should inform the appointed Members prior to taking a decision to convene an extraordinary meeting.

14.2 The business of an extraordinary meeting shall be only that specified on the agenda.

15. Cancellation of meetings

15.1 Meetings of the Joint Committee may, after consultation with the Chairman, be cancelled if there is insufficient business to transact or some other appropriate reason warranting cancellation. The date of meetings may be varied after consultation with the Chairman and appointed members of the Joint Committee, in the event that it is necessary for the efficient transaction of business.

16. Rules of debate

16.1 The rules of debate in operation in the Chair’s authority shall apply.

17. Request for determination of business

17.1 Any member of the Joint Committee may request at any time that:

- The Joint Committee move to vote upon the current item of consideration.
- The item be deferred to the next meeting.

- The item be referred back to a meeting of the Chief Executives of the participating local authorities for further consideration
- The meeting be adjourned.

17.2 The Joint Committee will then vote on the request.

18. Urgency procedure

18.1 Where the Chair (following consultation with the appointed Members of the Joint Committee) is of the view that an urgent decision is required in respect of any matter within the Joint Committee's functions and that decision would not reasonably require the calling of an Extraordinary Meeting of the Joint Committee to consider it and it cannot wait until the next Ordinary Meeting of the Joint Committee, then they may request in writing the Chief Executive of each participating local authority (in line with pre-existing delegations in each local authority's Constitution) to take urgent action as is required within each of the constituent local authorities.

19. Voting

19.2 Where a vote is required it will be on the basis of one vote per local authority member. The Chair will take the vote by show of hands.

19.3 Decisions shall be decided by a unanimous vote where all six Members or member deputies are present and agree.

19.4 Any member can request that a recorded vote be taken.

19.5 Where, immediately after a vote is taken at a meeting, if any Member so requests, there shall be recorded in the minutes of the proceedings of that meeting whether the person cast his / her vote for or against the matter or whether he/ she abstained from voting.

20. Minutes

20.1 At the next suitable meeting of the Joint Committee, the Chairman will move a motion that the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed as a correct record. The meeting may only consider the accuracy of the minutes and cannot change or vary decisions taken at a previous meeting as a matter arising out of the minutes.

20.2 Once agreed, the Chairman will sign them.

20.3 There will be no item for the approval of minutes of an ordinary Joint Committee meeting on the agenda of an extraordinary meeting.

21. Exclusion of the public and press

- 21.1 Members of the public and press may only be excluded from a meeting of the Joint Committee either in accordance with the 1972 Act or in the event of disturbance.
- 22.2 A motion may be moved at any time for the exclusion of the public from the whole or any part of the proceedings. The motion shall specify by reference to Section 100(A) Local Government Act 1972 the reason for the exclusion in relation to each item of business for which it is proposed that the public be excluded. The public must be excluded from meetings whenever it is likely, in view of the nature of business to be transacted, or the nature of the proceedings that confidential information would be disclosed.
- 22.3 If there is a general disturbance making orderly business impossible, the Chairman may adjourn the meeting for as long as he/she thinks is necessary.
- 22.4 Background papers will be published as part of the Joint Committee agenda and be made available to the public via the website of each authority.

23. Overview and Scrutiny

- 23.1 Decisions of the Joint Committee which relate to the executive functions of a participating local authority will need to be in accordance with each of the six local authority's own democratic scrutiny procedures for agreement before implementation.
- 23.2 Decisions of the Joint Committee which relate to the executive functions of a participating local authority will be subject to scrutiny and 'call -in' arrangements (or such other arrangements equivalent to call-in that any participating local authority operating a Committee system may have) as would apply locally to a decision made by that participating local authority acting alone
- 23.3 No decision should be implemented until such time as the call-in period has expired across all of the participating local authorities.
- 23.4 Where a decision is called in, arrangements will be made at the earliest opportunity within the participating local authority where the Call-In had taken place for it to be heard.
- 23.5 Any decision called in for scrutiny before it has been implemented shall not be implemented until such time as the call-in procedures of the participating local authority concerned have been concluded.

24. Access to minutes and papers after the meeting

- 24.1 On behalf of the Joint Committee, the secretariate will make available copies of the following for six years after the meeting:
- (i) the minutes of the meeting and records of decisions taken, together with reasons, for all meetings of the Joint Committee, excluding any part of the minutes of proceedings when the meeting was not open to the public or which disclose exempt or confidential information.
 - (ii) the agenda for the meeting; and
 - (iii) reports relating to items when the meeting was open to the public.

26. Amendment of these Rules

- 26.1 These Rules shall be agreed by the Joint Committee at its first meeting. Any amendments to these rules must be agreed by each participating authority in accordance with its own constitutional arrangements.
- 26.2 These rules and arrangements shall be reviewed every 12 months at the start of the new Chair and Vice-Chair term.

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