

Date of issue: Friday, 7 October 2022

| MEETING | CABINET |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| | Councillor Swindlehurst Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Council Recovery, Forward Strategy & Economic Development |
| | Councillor Mann Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing & Planning |
| | Councillor Ajaib Customer Services, Procurement & Performance |
| | Councillor Akram Leisure, Culture & Community Empowerment |
| | Councillor Anderson Financial Oversight & Council Assets |
| | Councillor Bains Public Protection, Regulation & Enforcement |
| | Councillor Hulme Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills |
| | Councillor Nazir Transport & The Local Environment |
| | Councillor Pantelic Social Care & Public Health |
| DATE AND TIME: | MONDAY, 17TH OCTOBER, 2022 AT 6.30 PM |
| VENUE: | COUNCIL CHAMBER - OBSERVATORY HOUSE, 25 WINDSOR ROAD, SL1 2EL |
| DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER: | NICHOLAS PONTONE |
| (for all enquiries) | 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.



GAVIN JONES
Chief Executive

Agenda

| <u>AGENDA ITEM</u> | <u>REPORT TITLE</u> | <u>PAGE</u> | <u>WARD</u> |
|------------------------|---|-------------|-------------|
| 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. | Minutes of the Meeting held on 21st September 2022 | 1 – 12 | - |
| 3. | Corporate Debt Management Policy | 13 – 34 | All |
| 4. | Update on Procurement & Contract Management | 35 – 40 | All |
| 5. | Slough Children First Limited (SCF) Annual Report and Governance Review | 41 – 200 | All |
| 6. | Adult Social Care Transformation Programme Update | To Follow | All |
| 7. | Health Visiting and School Nursing (0-19 service) | 201 – 240 | All |
| 8. | Home to School Travel Assistance and Post 16 Travel Assistance Policies - Consultation Feedback | 241 – 328 | All |
| 9. | Intelligent Traffic Systems Maintenance Contract | 329 – 356 | All |
| 10. | Mitigation Strategy regarding Burnham Beeches and Upton Court Park masterplan | To Follow | All |
| 11. | Recommendations from Cabinet Committee on Asset Disposals: Asset Disposal Strategy | To Follow | All |

(Papers for the Cabinet Committee for Asset Disposals are published on the meeting page for 13th October 2022.)

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|-----|--|-----------|-----|
| 12. | Recommendations from the Cabinet Committee for Asset Disposals: Montem Site | To Follow | All |
|-----|--|-----------|-----|

(Papers for the Cabinet Committee for Asset Disposals are published on the meeting page for 13th October 2022.)

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| 13. | References from Overview & Scrutiny | To Follow | All |
|-----|-------------------------------------|-----------|-----|

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| 14. | Exclusion of Press and Public | - | - |
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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

| | | | |
|-----|---|-----------|-----|
| 15. | Asset Disposal Strategy Appendices | To Follow | All |
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|-----|--|-----------|-----|
| 16. | Disposal of Council Asset at Montem Lane Appendices | To Follow | All |
|-----|--|-----------|-----|

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.

Note:-

Bold = Key decision

Non-Bold = Non-key decision

**AGENDA
ITEM**

REPORT TITLE

PAGE

WARD

Cabinet – Meeting held on Wednesday, 21st September, 2022.

Present:- Councillors Swindlehurst (Chair), Mann (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Akram, Anderson, Bains, Hulme, Nazir and Pantelic

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Muvvala, Smith and Strutton

PART 1

30. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

31. Minutes of the Meeting held on 18th July 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 18th July 2022 be approved as a correct record.

32. Finance Action Plan Update

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced the latest Finance Action Plan report which updated Cabinet on the key areas of work undertaken in response to the serious financial challenges and recommendations made by a range of external agencies. The Cabinet was asked to recommend the report to Council on 22nd September 2022.

It was reported that the Council's strategy which included the sale of assets to reduce borrowings and MRP/interest costs, and reducing net expenditure was starting to come to fruition, although the Lead Member emphasised that there was a significant amount of work to do before the Council's financial position was stabilised.

It was estimated that the overall capitalisation direction could be reduced from a potential total of £782m to £369m. The improvement was due to several factors including improved and accelerated asset sales leading to earlier financing and hence reductions in MRP profiling, together with improvements to the collection fund, council tax and funding settlement figures. The assumptions that underpinned the figures was summarised and the key risks and pressures were discussed including pay inflation, contract inflation and social care reform. The Cabinet recognised that the figures in the report would undoubtedly change and it remained essential that the modelled asset sales and savings plans, or alternate savings, were delivered. Whilst many challenging decisions would still need to be taken in the coming months and years, Lead Members cautiously welcomed the improvement in the position. The Leader of the Council reiterated the importance of adhering to the agreed financial strategy, particularly continuing to identify and deliver departmental savings, but that the report set out a path to the financial sustainability of the authority.

Cabinet - 21.09.22

Lead Members asked about the progress on the accounts and the Executive Director responded that the accounts were on track, noting that 2018/19 was a challenging audit and there may be some delay.

Councillor Strutton addressed the Cabinet and commented on the late publication of the report.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet welcomed the report and agreed the importance of continuing to deliver the agreed financial strategy. The report was recommended to Council.

Resolved –

(a) That the update on the key areas of the work undertaken to respond to the many and very serious financial challenges and the recommendations made by external agencies be received. Specifically, on the following issues:

- capitalisation direction and changes to the estimated value of this
- progress being made on generating capital receipts
- MRP
- the Council's borrowing levels
- accounts
- budgets
- the dedicated schools grant
- the finance structure
- revenues and benefits

(b) That the progress and issues arising from the continued work on the above be noted.

Recommended –

(c) That the report be recommended to Council.

33. Financial Update Report - 2022/23

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that set out the forecast monitoring position as at Month 4 of the 2022/23 financial year covering revenue, including Dedicated School Grant and schools, treasury management and capital for both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

It was noted that the forecast year end General Fund position for 2022/23 was a fully balanced, taking into account the provisions of the capitalisation direction, however there was an overspend across service areas of £7.6m including a shortfall on in-year savings of £4.4m against the £20m target. This had been offset by factors including the improvement in the collection fund position and impact of capital receipts on MRP. There were significant

budget pressures and an additional provision of £4.4m had been made for cost of living and inflation impacts than had originally allowed for in the 2022/23 budget. Lead Members discussed a number of matters in the report including borrowing and it was noted that whilst temporary borrowing was forecast to reduce by £115m interest payable on temporary borrowing was forecast to increase by £4.7m. The importance of asset sales was recognised both to reduce borrowing and “de-risk” the Council. There had been some slippage in the much reduced capital programme which had also reduced the need to borrow.

The Leader highlighted the Commissioners comments which raised concern about the shortfall of 22% in the delivery of savings proposals which was forecast to be largely offset by increased corporate savings and adjustments. The Cabinet agreed the importance of achieving planned savings, or finding alternative savings, in departments as this was core part of the Council’s financial strategy. Lead Members would need to work closely with their respective Directors to identify and address non-delivery of savings both in the current and future years.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet agreed the recommendations relating to virements and capital adjustments and noted the report.

Resolved –

(a) That the following be approved:

- The virements between directorates and from budgeted Capitalisation Direction as set out in Appendix I and which have been applied in the presentation of 2022/23 budgets throughout the report.
- That approval to virements within a given directorate that do not affect the overall net budget for the directorate (“net-nil”) is delegated to the Executive Director and the S151 Officer.
- The capital slippage from 2021/22 into 2022/23 for the General Fund (£1.959m) and the HRA (£3.983m).
- The removal of the £2.085m IT infrastructure refresh capital budget on the basis that it is already correctly included in the revenue budget.
- The capital slippage from 2022/23 into 2023/24 for the General Fund (£16.497m) and the HRA (£15.374m).

(b) That the following be noted:

- that there are a number of continuing pressures arising in the 2021/22 outturn which continue into 2022/23 but have been addressed as planned through the 2022/23 Capitalisation Direction.

- that the 2022/23 forecast year-end position for the General Fund, taking account of use of all capitalisation direction amendments, is a fully balanced position. However, within this, there is an overspend of £7.616m across service areas, including a shortfall on in-year savings of £4.439m against the total target of £19.958m, and including the loss set out in the latest SCF business plan. This is then balanced through an improvement in the collection fund position, the application of settlement monies received, the impact of capital receipts on MRP and a reduction in the use of capitalisation.
- that additional provision of £4.4m has been made for cost of living/inflation impacts above what was originally allowed for in the 2022/23 budget.
- that the DSG balance is forecast to be a cumulative deficit of £28.863m by the end of this financial year with plans to reduce this to a balanced in-year position by 2025/26.
- that maintained schools are projecting a reduction in balances by 31 March 2023 from £9.555m to £5.465m, with 4 out of 16 schools expecting to be in deficit with an aggregate deficit of £0.647m.
- that the HRA is forecasting an improved position against 2022/23 revenue budget of £8.811m, with a contribution to the HRA reserve projected of £0.577m.
- that the revenue budgets as presented in this report assume that the virements as set out in Appendix I have been approved.
- that the capital budgets as presented in this report assume that the slippage put forward for both the General Fund and the HRA has been approved.
- that the capital programme budget for the General Fund for 2022/23 is proposed to reduce from £45.259m to £28.655m through slippage of underspends from 2021/22 and reprofiling of project budgets into future years, and that an overspend of £0.069m is currently forecast.
- that the capital programme budget for the HRA for 2022/23 is proposed to reduce from £22.111m to £13.185m through slippage of underspends from 2021/22 and reprofiling of project budgets into future years, and that the forecast as at P4 is balanced.

34. Update on the procurement forward plan for services in excess of £180,000 and works in excess of £1 million in 2022/23

The Lead Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance introduced a report that updated on the procurement forward plan for services in excess of £180,000 and works in excess of £1m in 2022/23. The report included an update to contracts reported to Cabinet in May 2022 where there had been significant changes and sought approval to commence tendering for seven further contracts to those approved in May:

- NNDR administration;
- Haybrook College extension;
- Planning, building control and land charges systems;
- EV Taxi rapid charging infrastructure;
- Bulk liquid fuels;
- DSO road vehicles leased fleet;
- Transport modelling to support submission of the new Slough Local Plan.

The Lead Member stated that the contracts register was now complete and would put the Council in a much stronger position to better manage contracts in the future. A process document manual had been produced and officer trained was taking place. The Cabinet discussed how the contracts register could be used to identify opportunities and make savings. It was noted that the register would be regularly updated and would enable the Council to track contracts and improve forward planning so future contracts were let in a timely and efficient manner.

The Cabinet approved the recommendations.

Resolved –

- (a) That commencement of procurement for the list of goods, works or services set out in Appendix A to the report be authorised;
- (b) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director for Place and Communities following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance to award contracts, to the best value bidder, for the Bulk Liquid Fuels contract over £500k indicated in Appendix A, as requiring delegated authority to award contracts due to tight timescales involved.
- (c) That Delegated authority be given to the Chief Operating Officer following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance to award contracts, to the best value bidder, for the Enterprise Resource Planning, corporate telephony, Wide Area Network, data centre hosting, cloud hosting of IT systems and disaster recovery of IT systems contracts over £500k indicated in Appendix A, as requiring delegated authority to award contracts due to tight timescales involved.

35. Waste Collection and Disposal Savings

The Lead Members for Transport & The Local Environment and for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that proposed making a number of changes to the Council's waste collection arrangements and disposal charges.

The provisions of the Environment Act 2021 were noted as was the commitment in the Council's Improvement & Recovery Plan to bring forward a recycling plan and make financial savings. The recommendations included moving to fortnightly waste collections for street level properties and some flats from June 2023 to be supported by communications activity; charges for new and replacement wheeled bins; and the introduction of charges for disposal of certain items at Chalvey Household Waste & Recycling Centre.

The rationale for the proposals was summarised with the Council required to deliver waste services in both an environmentally and financially sustainable way. The vast majority of other local authorities had already moved to fortnightly collections and evidence showed there to be an increase in recycling rates following such a move. It was anticipated that the proposals would deliver savings of £705,000 a year, noting there would be some startup costs in the first year. Food waste would remain within the grey wheeled bin pending a review of options to separately collect food waste in the future.

The Place Scrutiny Panel had considered the proposals at its meeting held on 20th September and the comments of the panel were tabled and noted. In summary, the Panel had supported the move to fortnightly collections in principle but did not support the proposed introduction of charges for new and replacement bins. The Cabinet noted the comments and it was stated that where the Council was responsible for a damaged or lost bin it would replace it without charge. The Lead Member was asked to give further consideration to the arrangements for waiving charges to pensioners and people on low incomes with a view to refining these policies before the final decisions on the financial savings were taken when setting the Budget in March 2023. The Panel had also requested that the proposed charges for the disposal of items at the Chalvey HWRC be reviewed to ensure they were sufficiently clear to residents about the charges for items. It was responded that the charges mirrored those of Buckinghamshire County Council to ensure a consistent approach.

Councillors Muvvala, Strutton and Smith addressed the Cabinet and raised a number of concerns and comments about the proposal including the potential increase in fly-tipping; lack of consultation; reduction in service; the qualifying criteria for the retention of weekly collections; and several other operational matters regarding the implementation of the proposals. Lead Members and Officers responded to each of the comments in detail and amongst other matters noted that there had been consultation in the booklet sent to every household in Slough last year and that there was no evidence of an increase in fly-tipping from authorities that had moved to fortnightly collections.

After a lengthy discussion, the Cabinet approved the recommendations, noted the comments of scrutiny and agreed the detail of the benefit criteria for those who would qualify for a free new or replacement bin would be reviewed prior to final implementation of the policy.

Resolved –

- (a) That charges for provision of new and replacement wheeled bins and other containers set out in paragraph 2.3 of the report be agreed to come into effect on 1 November 2022.
- (b) That the charges for acceptance of certain items of waste for disposal at our Chalvey Household Waste & Recycling Centre set out in paragraph 2.6 of the report be agreed to come into effect on 1 November 2022.
- (c) That it be agreed to reduce the frequency of general waste collection (grey wheeled bin) for the majority of residents from weekly to fortnightly from Monday 26 June 2023 with food waste to remain within the grey wheeled bin as part of general waste, rather than being collected separately, pending a review of options to separately collect food waste.
- (d) That it be agreed to reduce the frequency of recycling collection (red wheeled bin) for the majority of residents from weekly to fortnightly from Monday 26 June 2023.
- (e) That the waste collection & disposal policies be agreed as set out in Appendix 4 – Frequently Asked Questions which would become the published response on the SBC website.
- (f) That the comments of the Place Scrutiny Panel be noted.

36. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Service Recovery Plan

The Lead Member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills introduced a report that updated on the progress being made in the SEND & Inclusion service following the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) in February 2022 produced in response to the local area inspection by Ofsted and CQC which concluded that there were significant weaknesses in services in Slough.

Delivery of the WSOA was being overseen by the SEND & Inclusion Strategic Board and each of the seven areas of improvement identified had a responsible officer and agreed actions. Lead Members noted positive progress in a number of areas although it was recognised the improvement journey was at an early stage. The SEND service had started to improve its timescales for the 20-week period for completing EHCPs from 0% in April 2022 to 23% in August.

A number of strategies on school effectiveness; SEND & Inclusion; and school place planning would be coming to Cabinet in the next six months.

The Council had also commissioned the LGA to conduct a review of SEND services in September 2022 and a report would be provided that would assist in identifying further improvements.

The Cabinet welcomed the update and requested a further report on progress in January 2023 within 12 months of the WSOA being agreed.

Resolved – That the timetable for consultation and approval of strategies linked to SEND services be approved.

37. Update on Annual Business Plan for Slough Children First Limited (SCF)

The Cabinet considered a report that provided an update on the development of the Slough Children First (SCF) annual business plan and requested approval for a request made by the company for an increase up to a maximum of £0.343m to the 2022/23 contract sum agreed by Cabinet in February 2022. This would increase the size of the contract to £31.779m.

The appendices to the report were in Part II of the agenda. The Cabinet considered all matters relating to the report in the public part of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information.

The Cabinet noted the update on the development of the company's business plan since it had approved an interim plan in February 2022. No recommendations were yet being made on the business plan pending the review being carried out by Mutual Ventures. A governance review was also taking place.

Work was ongoing on the final business plan and pending its submission a type one in year charge had been submitted by the company requesting funding of £0.343m in 2022/23 to provide for the urgent recruitment of additional resources to mitigate against the rising risk of hard to children in Slough through demand pressures. The Cabinet considered and approved the request.

Resolved –

- (a) That the update concerning the development of a business plan by Slough Children First be noted.
- (b) That a maximum of £0.343m in-year increase in the contract sum to Slough Children First to £31.779m for 2022/23 be agreed. The actual sum would be dependent on the appointment of the additional resource being sought and would be paid to the company as these new staff started with the company.

- (c) That following the finalisation of the Mutual Ventures report, delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning and Skills, to engage with the Department for Education on commissioning an options appraisal on alternative models for delivering children's social care.

38. Disposal of Council Assets in Wolverhampton, Bradford, Gosport and Basingstoke

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that sought approval for the disposal of four property land assets. This was the first in a series of reports to future meetings as part of the asset disposal programme.

The first recommended disposals were four out-of-borough assets as follows:

- Wickes, Wolverhampton.
- Euroway, Bradford.
- Odeon, Basingstoke.
- Waitrose, Gosport.

The proposed asset sales had been subject to due diligence and reflected the best consideration reasonably obtainable for the disposal of the assets. The disposals would generate net savings to the revenue budget and a capital receipt which would be used to reduce borrowing and the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP).

The appendices to the report were in Part II of the agenda. The Cabinet considered all matters relating to the report in the public part of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information.

The Lead Member stated that these four assets had been bought purely to generate investment income. The four assets were acquired for a total of £31.8m between 2017 and 2019. The assets had been most recently valued in September to reflect current market conditions which showed a combined value of £26.6m which was £5.2m below the acquisition price due to a fall in value for the Gosport and Basingstoke assets. The assets had delivered rental income since they had been purchased. It was recognised that asset values changed over time and there would be variation in the performance of assets in an investment portfolio.

There was a risk to the Council in retaining assets which may further diminish in value in the future. Disposal would reduce any financial risks to the Council from future volatility in property markets and rising borrowing costs. The Council's advisors, Avison Young had recommended disposal of the four assets. The Cabinet welcomed the fact the asset disposal programme was now bringing forward sites for decision as this was a key part of the Council's recovery plans.

Cabinet - 21.09.22

Councillors Smith and Strutton addressed the Cabinet. Councillor Smith asked about the justification of disposing of two assets for less than the purchase price. The Lead Member reiterated the reasons given in the meeting and in the report as to why disposal was recommended and reminded Members that these were part of a portfolio of investment assets that would come forward for disposal some of which had increased in value and others which had decreased. Councillor Strutton raised concern about the initial decision making process to acquire such assets as highlighted in the Commissioners comments. The Leader stated that if the external auditors did investigate and make any recommendations on the purchases they would be properly considered at that time.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet agreed the recommendations to dispose of the four out-of-borough assets.

Resolved –

- (a) Agreed to the disposal of the Wickes, Wolverhampton asset and to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Property and Housing, in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight and Council Assets and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to enter into the contract and other legal documentation in connection with the disposal in accordance with the Heads of Terms appended at Appendix 3.
- (b) Agreed to the disposal of the Euroway Bradford asset and to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Property and Housing, in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight and Council Assets and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to enter into the contract and other legal documentation in connection with the disposal in accordance with the Heads of Terms appended at Appendix 4.
- (c) Agreed to the disposal of the Odeon, Basingstoke asset and to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Property and Housing, in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight and Council Assets and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to enter into the contract and other legal associated documentation in connection with the disposal in accordance with the Heads of Terms appended at Appendix 5.
- (d) Agreed to the disposal of the Waitrose, Gosport asset and to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Property and Housing, in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight and Council Assets and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to enter into the contract and any associated documentation in connection with the disposal in accordance with the Heads of Terms appended at Appendix 6.

39. References from Overview and Scrutiny

The comments of the Place Scrutiny Panel were considered and noted during the waste collection and disposal savings item.

There were no other references from overview and scrutiny.

40. Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved – That the matters in Part II of the agenda be considered and resolved during Part I, without disclosing any of the exempt information, but that the Part II reports remain restricted as they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 the Schedule 12A the Local Government Act 1972.

The following is a summary of the matters considered during Part II of the agenda:

41. Part II Minutes - 18th July 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the Part II meeting of the Cabinet held on 18th July 2022 be approved as a correct record.

42. Update on Annual Business Plan for Slough Children First Limited (SCF) - Appendices 1 and 2

Resolved – That the Part II appendices be noted.

43. Disposal of Council Assets in Wolverhampton, Bradford, Gosport and Basingstoke - Appendices

Resolved – That the Part II appendices be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.59 pm)

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Slough Borough Council

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| Report to: | Cabinet |
| Date: | 17 October 2022 |
| Subject: | Corporate Debt Management Policy |
| Lead Member | Cllr Anderson. Lead Member for Financial Oversight and Council Assets |
| Chief Officer: | Steven Mair, Executive Director Finance and Commercial (Section 151 Officer) |
| Wards (s): | All |
| Key Decision: | No |
| Exempt: | No |
| Decision Subject To Call In | No |
| Appendices: | A – Corporate Debt Management Policy |

1 Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 The Council does not have a published debt management policy and needs to have one to ensure all Directorates have consistent debt management processes and fully understand their role and responsibilities in the process.
- 1.2 This also ensures that the Council is meeting its fiduciary duties in terms of protecting the public purse. It will also provide individual and businesses who deal with the Council a clear understanding of how the Council's policies could impact on them.
- 1.3 The Policy has now been produced to ensure that it fits in with best practice and is attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.4 The approach outlined will benefit the authority by:
 - Achieving the best possible cash flow for the Council whilst ensuring that the liability to pay is calculated correctly
 - Providing good financial management and control across the Council
 - Enforcement action is reasonable, and;
 - Those who are vulnerable are assisted in meeting their financial obligations to the Council
- 1.5 This Policy is an overarching framework which sets out the principles the Council's debt management activities will be managed. More detailed procedures and processes are in place or are in the process of being produced for specific types of debt such as those for Adult Care debt, Parking enforcement and commercial leases. This Policy does not override or replace these procedures and processes or legal provisions.

Recommendations:

- 1.6 Cabinet is recommended to:
- i) Approve the Corporate Debt Recovery Policy set out in appendix A
 - ii) Delegate authority to the Executive Director Finance and Commercial (Section 151 Officer) to make minor amendments in consultation with the Lead Member, to allow for the Policy to be updated and to take account of any future service improvements or legislative changes.

Reason

- 1.7 The Council needs an effective debt management policy to support the maximisation of debt collection in an efficient and effective manner. Debt is a topical and high-profile area in the current economic climate and the policy needs to ensure the Council takes account of the circumstances of the debtor as well as its own fiduciary duty in terms of management public funds.
- 1.8 Its implementation aims to deliver measurable service improvement and adherence to recognised good practice.

Commissioner review

- 1.9 *“The paper proposes an overarching policy on Debt Management which will be supported by a range of procedures and processes relating to specific types of debts – the Commissioners support this approach.*
- 1.10 *It is important that the Council balances its fiduciary duty to protect the public purse, and thereby protect public services through efficient and effective debt management, with the need to support individual residents and businesses who may at times experience difficulty in paying for their services. It is also important that the appropriate procedures and processes for specific types of debt are published in an open and transparent way to assist residents and businesses in managing their debts with the Council.”*

2 Report

- 2.1 Slough Borough Council believes its collection and debt management policy should be fair to everyone, especially those on low incomes. It is recognised that people and businesses do not pay their debts for a variety of reasons. Some people may deliberately set out to delay or not make payments and all methods of enforcement will be used to secure payment in these cases. Some people, because of living in or on the margins of poverty, may have difficulty in paying. The Council will use its best endeavours to help such people and to minimise the impact of debt on them whilst recognising that unpaid debt has a wider implication on the authority's ability to deliver services to the most vulnerable people in its communities.
- 2.2 Some people may be able to pay but do not pay because of an oversight or personal difficulties and not because of a deliberate decision to avoid or delay payment. The Council will seek to help such people develop a culture of payment

by encouraging them to get in contact and discuss any difficulties. The need to get in touch is central to the policy.

- 2.3 Where a person or company makes contact their circumstances will be considered with a view to agreeing a reasonable payment arrangement, minimising recovery action and helping to alleviate hardship.
- 2.4 Where people fail to make contact or maintain arrangements, recovery action will continue.
- 2.5 There are already sound debt recovery procedures in place within Revenues and Benefits, Housing, Parking and Financial Services. This Policy provides an overarching framework and covers the collection of Rents, Council Tax, Business Rates, Business Improvement Districts, Housing Benefit Overpayments, Sundry Debts and Parking.
- 2.6 The key aims of the Policy are as follows:
 - 2.6.1 To maximise the collection of income due by:
 - implementing a transparent charging policy
 - accurate, clear and timely billing and;
 - deploying effective, appropriate and timely support and recovery processes
 - 2.6.2 To deploy recovery methods appropriate to debt type and debtor's ability to pay. Debtors identified as unable to pay will receive appropriate debt management and benefit advice, be helped to make and adhere to payment arrangements and understand options to minimise costs in the future.
 - 2.6.3 To facilitate a coordinated approach to managing multiple debts owed to the Council.
 - 2.6.4 To ensure that debts are managed in accordance with legislative provisions and best practice.
 - 2.6.5 To foster good financial management and control across the Council
 - 2.6.6 To ensure income relating to all types of debt is managed in accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Financial Rules and this Policy.
 - 2.6.7 To ensure performance in relation to debt recovery is regularly reported through the relevant management structures of the Council.
 - 2.6.8 The Council is committed to continuous improvement and it is critical that new approaches and ways of working will be introduced. The Policy will be reviewed biennially as a minimum to allow it to be updated and to take any service improvements or changes into account.
- 2.7 The Council will follow the principles outlined below in all its recovery action.
 - Our action will be proportionate
 - Our approach will be consistent

- Our actions will be transparent
- 2.8 Additionally, our intention will be to be firm, fair and effective whilst adhering to our customer service standards.
- 2.9 Early intervention to support people struggling with payments helps prevent further charges and reduces both collection costs and demand on local public services.
- 2.10 Proportionality – Proportionality allows for a balance to be struck between the potential loss of income to the Council and the costs of collection.
- 2.11 Consistency – Consistency means taking a similar approach in similar circumstances regardless of debt and debtor to ensure equity for all. The Council aims to achieve consistency in:
- The advice it provides,
 - The use of its powers, and
 - The recovery procedures used.
- 2.12 However, the Council recognises that consistency may not mean uniformity and variables including the following will be taken into account:
- The social/personal circumstances of the debtor
 - The debtor’s payment history
 - The debtor’s ability to pay
- 2.13 Transparency – Transparency is important in maintaining public confidence and enabling people to understand what is expected of them and what they should expect from the Council. It includes explaining clearly the reasons for taking recovery action and the associated timescales.
- 2.14 A distinction must be made between advice and legal requirement.
- 2.15 Communications should be in Plain English, and large print with Braille or translated versions will be made available to customers upon request or where identified that this is required.
- 2.16 With the exception of Council Tax and NNDR and any charge that is made by way of a “fine” for non-compliance with the law, an opportunity will be provided for the debtor to discuss what is required to comply with the law before formal recovery action is taken. In the case of Council Tax, NNDR, and other statutory charges where the customer seeks clarification of their legal obligations, the Council will provide this. A written explanation will be provided of any rights of appeal against formal recovery action either before, or at the time the action is taken.
- 2.17 Where written procedures are not in place in departments these will be produced before the end of the current financial year and where appropriate published on the Council website.

3 Options Considered

- 3.1 Not have a published overarching corporate debt policy and let Directorates pursue debt using their interpretation of best practice.
- 3.2 Produce and approve a corporate debt management policy that ensures all Directorates have consistent debt recovery processes and fully understand their role and responsibilities in the process – **recommended**.

4 Background

- 4.1 There is currently no over-arching corporate debt policy in Slough Borough Council which leads to a risk of staff working on recovering debt not fully considering statutory requirements on debt recovery and the other debts being collected by the council and the impact of this on the individual debtor.
- 4.2 An internal audit report in February 2022 recommended that a debt management policy be produced.
- 4.3 The majority of debt collected by the Council is the responsibility of the Executive Director Finance and Commercial (Section 151 Officer), including Council Tax, Business Rates, Housing Rents, Housing Benefits Overpayments, Adult Care Debt and Sundry Debt. The Accounts payable team work with directorates in collecting sundry debt, such as commercial properties and Adult Care debt.
- 4.4 Adult Social Care Debt that may have accrued as a result of the Council meeting a person's eligible care and support needs is subject to a separate policy, approved by Cabinet in July 2022. However, it still fits within the overarching principles set out in the Corporate Debt Policy.
- 4.5 Parking debt is collected by the Executive Director of Place and is subject to statutory collection processes but does fall within the overarching principles set out in the Corporate Debt Policy.
- 4.6 The approval of a Corporate Debt Policy enables consistency and clarity to the Councils procedures for debt collection.
- 4.7 There will be a formal review of the effectiveness policy every two years which will be reported to Members.

5 Implications of the Recommendations

5.1 Financial implications

- 5.1.1 The failure to adopt an effective approach to debt recovery could result in an inability to plan finances effectively in a difficult economic climate over the period covered by the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 5.1.2 The failure to adopt an effective approach could also impact on the authority's financial position; namely the bad debt provision of the authority and the level of income generated from fees and charges.

5.1.3 The adoption of the Policy, does not in itself have any resource implications, but aids transparency and understanding about the procedures and processes relating to debt recovery and write off protocols within the Council. This is because, as part of the Council's budget process the bad debt provision is reviewed for all its aged debt and the provision is adjusted as necessary. Provisions are also reviewed during the production of its statutory final accounts, to consider the debts written off during the year and whether the bad debts provisions remain sufficient or not.

5.2 **Legal implications**

5.2.1 The Policy will promote good practice and a consistent approach in the recovery of debt and, where service areas consider it is appropriate to recommend the write off any debts that are irrecoverable, after ensuring any necessary consultation with Legal Services. Having such a policy should also assist the council with its fiduciary responsibilities.

5.3 **Risk management implications**

5.3.1 There a risk that directorates and staff do not adhere to the corporate debt policy. This will be mitigated by regular staff training, collaborative work between the accounts payable team and directorate staff raising debtors invoices and the production and review of procedure manuals for each area that comply with the corporate debt policy.

5.4 **Environmental implications**

5.4.1 None

5.5 **Equality implications**

5.5.1 There are no identified equality implications from this report although the policy itself recognises that there may be Equality Act considerations to be taken into account.

5.6 **Background Papers**

[Adult Social Care Debt Recovery Policy Cover Report](#) approved by Cabinet 18th July 2022

[Adult Social Care Debt Recovery Policy](#) approved by Cabinet 18th July 2022



Appendix A

CORPORATE DEBT MANAGEMENT POLICY

Slough Borough Council

July 2022

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction | 2 |
| 2. Aims..... | 2 |
| 3. Scope of the Policy..... | 4 |
| 4. Policies common to all types of debt | 4 |
| 5. Principles of Recovery..... | 5 |
| 6. Hierarchy of Debt..... | 8 |
| 7. Payment | 8 |
| 8. Debt Write-Off | 9 |
| 9. Helping Customers | 9 |
| 10. Maintaining Good Practice | 14 |

1. Introduction

1.1 This document details the Council's policy on the billing, collection and recovery of monies due to the Council.

1.2 The Council's aim in its collection and recovery activity is to prevent arrears arising in the first place. A wide range of practices are in place to ensure residents and businesses understand their obligations to pay and are provided with appropriate support to help them meet this obligation where necessary.

1.3 The Council is committed to ensuring its approach to debt collection and arrears management is carried out legally, fairly and ethically, considering the circumstances of each case and will keep its processes under review to ensure they are effective, proactive and fit for purpose.

1.4 Sums due to the Council can be a mixture of statutory and non-statutory charges, though the majority of income is associated with charges (and sometimes penalty charges) arising from statutory regimes. The methods for billing and recovery of statutory debts are usually tightly prescribed and recovery practices must comply with these requirements. Service's collecting individual debts have their own processes and procedures which comply with the principles of this overarching policy and legislation specific to their debt.

1.5 This Policy sets out the general principles to be applied in relation to debt management and income collection by all areas of the Council.

1.6 The Council has a legal duty and responsibility to its residents to ensure that income due is paid promptly. The collection of income is key to ensuring that there is sufficient money available to fund Council service delivery. It is therefore essential that all sums due are collected efficiently and effectively, and that debt owed to the Council beyond its payment terms is kept to a minimum. Late payments may result in the Council charging late-payment interest on sums outstanding or seeking interest during recovery processes where it is lawful and appropriate to do so.

2. Aims

2.1 The Council seeks to achieve best practice in its revenue collection processes, ensuring that billing is timely, accurate and clearly communicated, that appropriate enforcement action is taken when necessary and, that those who are vulnerable or experiencing financial difficulty are assisted in meeting their financial obligations to the Council.

2.2 The Council aims:

- To maximise the collection of income due by:
 - Ensuring accurate, clear and timely billing;
 - deploying effective, appropriate and timely recovery processes

- utilising recovery methods appropriate to debt type and the debtor's ability to pay. Debtors identified as unable to pay will receive appropriate debt

management and benefit advice, be helped to make and adhere to payment arrangements and understand options to minimise costs in the future.

- To ensure that debts are managed in accordance with legislative provisions and best practice.
- To foster good financial management and control across the Council
- To ensure income relating to all types of debt is managed in accordance with the Council's Financial Rules and policies.
- To ensure performance in relation to debt recovery is regularly reported through the relevant management and governance structures of the Council. Ultimately to facilitate a coordinated approach to managing multiple debts owed to the Council.

2.4 The Council wants to help people and businesses experiencing financial difficulties. At the same time, the Council has a duty to ensure that people and businesses pay their bills as quickly as possible.

2.5 The Council will balance these aims by:

- Acting as early as possible to help those who are struggling to pay.
- Attempting to assist the customer in sorting out debt problems before they escalate out of control. Identifying potential problems when possible and providing a timely offer of financial advice either internally or through signposting to a suitable organisation where financial difficulty has been identified.
- Facilitating a co-ordinated approach to enable customers to manage multiple debts across services. Priority will be given to helping residents to remain in their accommodation where multiple debts are identified.
- Agreeing affordable and sustainable arrangements for those who genuinely need time to pay their debts.
- Asking customers to provide reasonable information regarding their finances, if required, to facilitate agreement of an affordable payment arrangement.
- Periodically reviewing instalment arrangements to ensure that debts are being cleared as quickly as possible whilst remaining affordable.
- Informing customers that once an agreement has been made no further action will be taken unless the arrangement is broken.
- Recognising and protecting the customer's rights at every stage of the process.
- Adhering and supporting residents who utilise the Breathing Space legislation
- Complying with the relevant customer care standards.
- Using plain English in letters and all other correspondence.
- Providing translation services where required.
- Treating individuals fairly and consistently, having due regard to factors such as age, gender, disability, and sexual orientation and ensure that individual's rights under Data Protection and Human Rights legislation are protected.

3. Scope of the Policy

3.1 This policy applies to the collection of the following debt:

- Council Tax
- Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR/Business Rates) & Business Improvement District (BID) Levies
- Housing Rents, Leaseholder Charges and rechargeable repairs
- Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit/Support Overpayments
- All other Sundry Debt (Council Services which include non-residential /residential financial care contributions, contractual debts including commercial debts, valuation, trade waste, licensing, overpaid salaries and wages etc).
- Commercial leases
- Penalty Charge Notices for Parking and Bus Lane Contraventions

3.2 There are specific rules and regulations which govern the recovery and collection of some of these debts which are set out in respective departmental procedures.

4. Policies common to all types of debt

4.1 All bills and invoices in respect of services delivered by the Council should be correctly addressed to the person who is liable for the payment.

4.2 Where appropriate all services should be paid for up front, and ideally prior to services being delivered, with bills being issued as soon as practicable.

4.3 The Council will always attempt to use the most efficient method of debt recovery in order to maximise income whilst minimising costs to the debtor.

4.4 The Council will encourage the most cost-effective payment methods with the emphasis on electronic payment methods that require no human intervention by officers of the Council to achieve its crediting to the account in question.

4.5 Staff seeking to recover debts will ensure information is accessible through translations, larger print versions or sign language, as appropriate to the needs of the debtor.

4.6 Where the potential for a statutory benefit or discount exists in relation to a debt, efforts will be made to make the debtor aware of such opportunities and they will be encouraged to apply for these. Where debtors are vulnerable and may need support in making these claims they will be referred to appropriate welfare advice services.

4.7 All notices issued by the Council will be identifiable as being from the Council by use of the corporate logo and providing full contact details.

4.8 Where either national or local performance indicators exist for debt recovery, the Council will strive for top quartile performance (in comparison to similar councils). Progress reports will be provided at regular intervals during the year to management.

4.9 The Council supports the provision of advice from the internal welfare and debt team, external agencies and will work in partnership with welfare advice agencies where authorised by the debtor in connection with debts due to the Council. The Council recognises the benefits that these organisations can offer both the debtor and the Council in prioritising repayments to creditors and in maximising income available to the debtor.

4.10 In cases of multiple debts (situations where monies are owed to more than one service area, e.g. NNDR, Council Tax and Housing Benefit overpayment) there can be problems in determining the relative priority of the individual debts for both the individual concerned and officers pursuing settlement. In such cases officers are expected to liaise and agree a co-ordinated recovery approach, which reflects these policy aspirations together with the need to balance repayment profiles across all debts due to the Council.

4.11 Section 6 below details the Hierarchy of Debt; however, it should be noted that lower priority debts will also require payment and will not automatically be written off.

4.12 The Council recognises prompt recovery action is key in managing debt and maximising income. The Council will therefore:

- Regularly monitor the level and age of debt through reports to Cabinet.
- Set clear targets for the recovery of debt as part of the finance action plan and MTFS.
- Publish and communicate clear written recovery procedures.
- Apply its recovery processes on a timely basis
- Agree and utilise a hierarchy approach to the collection of multiple debts
- Regularly review each year its recovery methods to ensure compliance with best practice and maximum recovery.
- Review all debts deemed irrecoverable prior to agreeing any write-off each month.

4.13 The Council make a bad and doubtful debt provision for all income streams. These are reviewed at each financial year-end.

4.14 Where an external agency is procured to assist with the collection of debt, the flow of information between the Council and the agency must be in a secure electronic format and in accordance with the Council's policies for data security.

4.15 Where legislation permits, the Council will seek to levy and recover from the debtor any and all costs/fees that are legitimately due from the debtor to the Council or its agents as a result of late payment. Only in exceptional cases, where it would not be in the public interest to pursue costs/fees, will they be waived.

5. Principles of Recovery

5.1 The Council will follow the principles outlined below in all its recovery action.

- Our action will be proportionate
- Our approach will be consistent

- Our actions will be transparent

5.2 Additionally, our intention will be to be firm, fair and effective whilst adhering to our customer service standards.

5.3 Early intervention to support people struggling with payments helps prevent further charges and reduces both collection costs and demand on local public services.

5.4 Proportionality – Proportionality allows for a balance to be struck between the potential loss of income to the Council and the costs of collection.

5.5 Consistency – Consistency means taking a similar approach in similar circumstances regardless of debt and debtor to ensure equity for all. The Council aims to achieve consistency in:

- The advice it provides,
- The use of its powers, and
- The recovery procedures used.

5.6 However, the Council recognises that consistency may not mean uniformity and variables including the following will be taken into account:

- The social/personal circumstances of the debtor
- The debtor's payment history
- The debtor's ability to pay

5.7 Transparency – Transparency is important in maintaining public confidence and enabling people to understand what is expected of them and what they should expect from the Council. It includes explaining clearly the reasons for taking recovery action and the associated timescales.

5.8 A distinction must be made between advice and legal requirement.

5.9 Communications should be in Plain English, and large print with Braille or translated versions will be made available to customers upon request or where identified that this is required.

5.10 With the exception of Council Tax and NNDR and any charge that is made by way of a "fine" for non-compliance with the law, an opportunity will be provided for the debtor to discuss what is required to comply with the law before formal recovery action is taken. In the case of Council Tax, NNDR, and other statutory charges where the customer seeks clarification of their legal obligations, the Council will provide this. A written explanation will be provided of any rights of appeal against formal recovery action either before, or at the time the action is taken.

Recovery Methods

5.11 The Council will differentiate wherever possible between those who can't pay, those who won't pay and those who have gone away. The purpose of this differentiation is to target the most effective recovery method to recover the debt.

5.12 A range of recovery options are available for use where arrangements to pay have broken down, options include:

- Seeking a County Court judgement
- Attachment of Earnings Order
- Deductions from benefit
- Enforcement Agent action
- Charging Order
- Insolvency (bankruptcy) action
-
- Securing the debt by obtaining a charging order against assets
- Enforced sale of assets
- Suspension of non-essential services and legal rights within the tenancy agreements
- Eviction
- Committal to prison

5.13 The Council will always take recovery action where a customer does not pay and does not say they are having difficulty paying. The choice of recovery method will depend on several factors including the methods available for a particular type of debt. If the customer tells the Council soon enough that they are having problems paying and agrees a special payment arrangement (if feasible), the Council will not take further recovery action, provided the agreement is complied with. However, if recovery action has started (e.g. we have sent a court summons) and a special payment arrangement is made subsequently, the Council may continue with recovery action and, where possible, ask the court to make an order in similar terms (to the agreement) depending on the circumstances and nature of the debt.

5.14 Where the debt is for an ongoing service provided by the Council which the Council does not have to provide (for example Trade Refuse) the service will be suspended until the debt is paid or an acceptable special payment arrangement is made.

5.15 The collection process for Adult Social Care charges will be similar to other types of sundry debt but is subject to its own policy. This takes into account the vulnerable nature of customers and additional steps will be followed to try and understand the customers' personal and financial circumstances so that we can act in the best interests of the customer, other service users and the Council.

5.16 Use of eviction from Council properties for rent arrears will be a last resort and is governed by legislation.

Evasion and Fraud

5.17 The unlawful evasion of payments due to the Council reduces the financial resources available to the Council and has a direct impact on all residents, businesses and other organisations that rely on Council services. Unlawful evasion or fraud to avoid payment will not be tolerated and where this is identified then in

addition to taking action to enforce payment the Council will seek to impose such further penalties or sanctions as the law allows, which may include prosecution.

5.18 Where debts arise through evasion or fraud the Council will seek to recover payment in full as quickly as possible and whilst each case will be considered on its own merits, payment arrangements will only be agreed in very exceptional circumstances.

6. Hierarchy of Debt

6.1 Some customers will owe money to multiple service areas. If they are on a low income or experiencing financial hardship it needs to be as clear as possible, which debts the Council considers a priority.

6.2 Priority will normally be given to debts where non-payment could lead to loss of the customer's home or imprisonment. These relate to Rent/Service charges and Council Tax, which are most commonly enforced through the courts as per statutory requirements. Account will also be taken of the stage reached in the recovery process. In principle the priority will be:

- Housing rent / Leaseholder charges
- Council Tax debts
- Housing Benefit Overpayments
- Other charges

6.3 Other debts owed to the Council may, depending on the circumstances, be of a lower priority. However, this should not provide a debtor with a reason to believe that they are not liable to pay these debts. The Council must follow statutory and/or internal procedures for these debts as well.

6.4 When agreement on appropriate action and priority cannot be reached between service managers, the individual case will be referred to the Council's Head of Transactional Services who will decide.

6.5 Where a credit is identified on a customer account, wherever possible; checks will be made for other outstanding debts due by the customer, prior to a refund being made.

6.6 Where other debts are identified, it may be necessary to obtain the customer's permission to transfer the credit to another outstanding debt, though normally every reasonable effort must be made to apply this to the other outstanding debt.

7. Payment

7.1 The Council will wherever possible require payment in line with the legislative requirements, or at the request of the service. The Council's preferred method of payment is Direct Debit or online electronic bank payment. We will continue to improve systems, so this is available for an increasing range of debts. However, this does not prohibit payment by other methods if available, including credit and debit cards, paypoint payment cards and barcoded bills, post office payments, standing

orders and other electronic banking methods, such as internet banking and touch tone telephone payments.

8. Debt Write-Off

8.1 The Council will seek to minimise the cost of write-offs to local Council Tax payers by taking all necessary action to recover what is due. All debts will be subject to the full collection, recovery and legal procedures where proportionate.

8.2 However, the Council recognises that each year a small number of debts become irrecoverable, and in such circumstances prompt and regular write-off of such debts is good practice.

8.3 However, the write-off of debts is only appropriate where: -

- The demand or invoice has been raised correctly and is due and owing; and
- There is a justified reason why the debt should not be pursued further.

8.4 Write offs must also be authorised in accordance with the Council's Finance Procedure rules.

9. Helping Customers

Customer Care

9.1 The Council will ensure all demands for payment provide the following information clearly:

- The amount owing and service it relates to
- The date by which payment is due
- How payment can be made
- Where payment can be made
- The account reference so the account can be credited quickly and correctly.
- Contact details if the customer has a problem paying

9.2 The Council will be particularly mindful when dealing with customers that may fall into the following categories and could be considered vulnerable:

- The Elderly
- People with a disability
- The seriously ill (including mental health issues)
- The recently bereaved
- Single parent families
- Pregnant women
- Unemployed people
- Those who have obvious difficulty in understanding/speaking/ reading English
- Those experiencing Domestic Abuse
- Those with other vulnerabilities that may impact their ability to deal with debts

9.3 The Council will guard against misuse of vulnerable status, but also be aware that individuals may not admit to being vulnerable.

9.4 Where appropriate the Council will make suitable referrals to its own Debt and Welfare team or if more appropriate the advice sector and allow a period for them to take advice.

9.5 The Council will make an informed decision as to whether the customer has capacity to deal with the issue, which is assumed in the first instance.

Financial Difficulty

9.6 Invoices will advise customers that if they believe they cannot afford to pay as billed they should contact the Council as soon as possible; recovery action will be taken if a bill is not paid and no contact has been made.

9.7 Officers may, where appropriate, and depending on individual circumstances enter into a payment agreement or carry out a financial assessment of a customer's incomings and outgoings. This may mean at times advising customers that they will need to rethink their spending habits and prioritise what they pay to whom differently.

9.8 The Council will always require debt to be cleared as quickly as the customer's finances will allow and each case will be considered on its own merits. Debt recovery staff are available to discuss Customers' requirements and provide instalment applications and advice.

How to get help and advice

9.9 The Council will offer professional advice to all its customers and signpost customers facing financial difficulty to its own Debt and Welfare team or external partners, including Citizens Advice and Welfare rights.

9.10 Residents experiencing difficulties paying their rent and or service charges will be referred to the Council's in-house Debt advice Team to prevent homelessness.

9.11 Where appropriate customers will be made aware of the Council's discretionary housing/council tax support schemes to encourage maximisation of take up.

9.12 The Council will make debtors aware of the Breathing Space legislation and signpost appropriate cases to relevant debt advisors. It will adhere to all of its obligations once a debtor enters into a period of breathing space.

9.13 The Council where aware of a business struggling to meet their debt liability to the local authority will where appropriate signpost to them to available help.

9.14 The Council will where appropriate make businesses aware of the small business rates relief or other reliefs as appropriate to encourage maximisation of take up to reduce their business rates.

9.15 For other types of debt, we will work closely with the business to ascertain the reason for non or late payment and make appropriate arrangements to collect the debt. This may mean extending the time to pay or offering a further arrangement.

9.16 However, where a person/business does not pay, and there is not a valid reason for non-payment, we will continue to enforce the recovery tools available, such as use of court action, enforcement agents and insolvency.

9.17 In some instances, this may include the withdrawal of service, for example trade waste collection, where we would withdraw the service if invoices remained outstanding.

9.18 However, before any action is taken, there would be contact with the person/business to understand why they have not been able to pay and an appropriate assessment of their circumstances taken in to account before any further action is taken.

Visiting Customers

9.20 The Council or contracted External Debt Recovery and Enforcement Agents may undertake visits to persons/businesses in arrears in order to resolve accounts outstanding.

9.21 The Council will make every effort where possible to co-ordinate visits to debtors so that where appropriate and practical, different debts owed by the same person/business can be addressed at the same time. If someone needs further assistance

9.22 Some people may still need further help and may require the assistance of one of the following:

- Citizens Advice Bureau
Confidential debt counselling is available from the [Citizens Advice Bureau](#)

Tel: 03444 111 444

Slough freephone number: 0808 169 7766

Slough local number: 01753 981 040

- Age UK
[Age UK](#) provides a support service for vulnerable older people.

Tel: 0800 169 2081

- Money Advice Service
[The Money Advice Service](#) offers free, impartial advice and tools which can help you get your money into shape.

Tel: 030 0500 5000

- StepChange

The [Step Change Debt Charity](#) offers free debt advice and tailored solutions to help you better manage your debts and finances.

- Free, confidential help and advice for Businesses can be found from the [Business Debt Line](#)

Tel: 0800 197 6026

9.23 There are many other advice call centres and websites available on-line, though many sites are profit-making and will charge for their services – customers are advised to use care and check for fees and charges when selecting any of these services.

Paying by instalments

9.24 When a Customer finds themselves in difficulty with debt, it may be possible that all of their debts, including all Council debts, will be taken into account when assessing ability to pay. All cases will be dealt with individually according to the circumstances surrounding their debt. For non-priority debts an assessment of the ability to pay will be based on the proportion of disposable income that the customer states that he/she has and realistic regular payment amounts will be agreed in preference to taking legal action.

9.25 The intention is that debts should be cleared as soon as possible. It may not always be appropriate to offer payment by instalments. For instance, some accounts may not be paid by instalments e.g. where a customer has requested goods or services from the Council – they would be expected to be able to pay if they've made the order, or if they have incurred parking or bus lane penalties. The Council will consider what course of action is appropriate as follows:

- Payment at once, in full as per the invoice, agreement etc.
- Payments within 3 months – agreed without completing pro-forma of details of income and expenditure, but written agreement from the customer is required.
- Payment within the financial year for which the debt is due (Council Tax or Business Rates) – agreed without completing pro-forma.
- Payment within 12 months – would require income and expenditure details to be supplied.
- Payment over a longer period if the customer does not have the funds to clear the debt as above – would require income and expenditure details to be supplied and would be subject to periodic/annual review.

9.26 To determine the level of instalments, departments will use standardised Income and Expenditure pro-forma which take account of the standards and guidelines available nationally and documents supporting the financial statement may be required for an arrangement to be made.

9.27 Once an arrangement is made customers are expected to comply with that arrangement. Where a customer's circumstances change and the arrangement becomes difficult to sustain, contact should be made to discuss further options.

Failure to make contact and comply with the arrangement will result in further recovery action.

9.28 Where instalment orders have been set following a judgment or order through the County Court/Magistrates based on the debtor's means at the time the order is made, these can only be amended by a further order pursuant to an application from one of the parties. This may impact on instalment agreements for multiple debts.

What Service Will Customers with Multiple Debts Receive?

9.29 Customers presenting with multiple debts need to believe that there is a solution to their debt problems and should be actively encouraged to share with staff, information on all monies owed in order for the most appropriate referral to be made.

9.30 The Policy does not promote a "one size fits all" approach, but rather looks to work with the customer to take agreed steps to help address multiple debts.

9.31 To this end, the response to debt management will vary as different solutions will be needed to address the far-ranging complexity of cases.

9.32 In the majority of cases it will be appropriate to refer the debtor to our Debt and Welfare team to allow an assessment of the most beneficial approach to meeting liabilities can be made. Where it believed a conflict of interests might occur a referral to an external provider will be made.

9.33 Alongside the debt owed to the Council, the Policy will enable customers to receive help, advice and support in agreeing realistic payments to other creditors including HM Courts & Tribunal Service (in respect of fines), utilities, credit companies and mobile phone suppliers.

9.34 Taking a case by case approach will also enable diversity and exclusion issues to be addressed.

9.35 Support will be offered including access to interpreters for customers whose first language is not English or for those who are deaf, ensuring staff attending appointments are able to address the individual customer's needs. Where requested the provision of supporting information for customers will be made available in an appropriate format, e.g. large print, Braille or audio.

Complaints

9.36 Most complaints can be addressed by discussing the issues. If we agree a solution, we will keep a record to make sure nothing was missed.

9.37 If we cannot solve the problem immediately it will be passed on for further investigation and action. We use a three stage complaints process to do this, full details of the Corporate Complaints Procedure can be found at:

[Complaints procedure – Slough Borough Council](#)

Rights of Appeal

9.38 There are statutory ways in which people can appeal about decisions the Council may have taken for certain matters and can seek independent legal advice:

- Valuation Tribunal: For people who believe the Council has acted incorrectly on a Council Tax billing matter.
- Magistrates Court: For people who are aggrieved by the recovery process for Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates and for Non-Domestic Rates payers who believe the Council acted incorrectly on a billing matter.
- Appeal Tribunal: For decisions made on Housing Benefit claims
- County Court: For those defending possession actions of Council property, action taken to recover Housing Benefit overpayments and for Sundry Debt Invoices.
- Traffic Penalty Tribunal: for appeals against Parking and Bus Lane Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs)

10. Maintaining Good Practice

10.1 The Council will seek to comply with best practice guidance in respect of local authority revenue collection published by recognised bodies including guidance provided by professional institutes such as the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation and CIVEA. The Council will also seek to comply with the following guidance;

- Collection of Council Tax arrears good practice protocol (Published by Citizens Advice July 2009)
- Council Tax collection: best practice for local authorities (Published August 2021)
- National Standards for Enforcement Agents January 2012 (Published by Ministry of Justice)
- CIVEA Code of Conduct and Good Practice Guide (2012)

10.2 Staff employed in the collection of revenue will receive appropriate training commensurate with their duties. Professional development and membership of professional institutes such as the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation (IRRV) will be encouraged, as well as ongoing professional development.

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Slough Borough Council

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| Report To: | Cabinet |
| Date: | 17 th October 2022 |
| Subject: | Update on Procurement and Contract Management |
| Lead Member: | Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance – Councillor Ajaib |
| Chief Officer: | Director of Finance and Commercial (s151) – Steven Mair |
| Contact Officer: | Head of Commercial Services – Clare Priest |
| Ward(s): | All |
| Key Decision: | NO |
| Exempt: | NO |
| Decision Subject To Call In: | YES |
| Appendices: | None |

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1. This report sets out the improvements to procurement and contract management at Slough Borough Council, since the establishment of the Commercial team in 2021, and to update cabinet on the implementation of the Directions issued by the Secretary of State on 1st December 2021 in relation to the procurement and contract management function. The report also sets out the savings and best value being driven through a detailed review of the council's contracts register and further planned improvements to the commercial function

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- Note the key development activities undertaken by the Commercial team since its establishment to improve procurement and contract management at the council
- Note savings and best value being driven through detailed review of the council's contracts register.
- Note the further key development activities that will be undertaken by the establishment of an embedded commercial function, to improve the function and deliver the procurement and contract management strategy.

Reason:

The Council has never had a suitably led or developed central contracts and procurement function, this has been addressed since April 2021 under the interim Director of Finance and the Group Manager Commercial and looking forward will be sustainably secured as part of the Finance and Commercial team restructure.

The lack of such a suitable function has meant that there has been no strategic leadership of this work other than on an interim basis.

Commissioner Review

“Effective procurement and contract management is an essential activity for a well run authority. The Council has set out an improvement programme for this area of work to meet the requirements of the Directions regarding procurement. This update report indicates good progress. Over the past 9 months, significant procurement activity has been undertaken to build a contract register, and to ensure contracts are renewed or retendered in a timely manner, although there are still instances where this is not the case. Going forward the Commissioners would like to see regular management information on procurement and contract management activities, including waivers, to ensure procurement and contract management activity meets the highest standards.”

2. Report

2.1. The actions contained within this report ensures the Council obtains value for money in its procurement and contract management arrangements and has transparent processes in place. This is to ensure that the council undertakes appropriate procurement activity in a timely way, as procurement activity is planned and decisions are taken at the proper time.

Background

- 2.2. From May 2019 the procurement function at Slough Borough Council was undertaken by RSM, an external consultancy company. This was intended to be a temporary arrangement (6 months) to plug a gap in internal procurement resources due to turnover of the internal team. However, the arrangement has continued due to plans to recruit a permanent team being put on hold pending the Our Futures Transformation Programme. The team provide procurement advice and support to the organisation, and since April 2021 their workload has been managed and directed by the Group Manager Commercial who was appointed as part of the organisational restructure and also manages the small in-house team.
- 2.3. The procurement function did not include oversight of contracts, and no centralised contracts register was in place.
- 2.4. The approach prior to April 2021 had meant a lack of strategic oversight of procurement and a weak function.
- 2.5. The Council is currently facing extreme financial pressures and has received the reports from the CIPFA review and the DLUHC which has recommended that the Council should introduce contract management to ensure services are delivered as planned and any mitigating actions can be taken in a timely manner.

Key developments

- 2.6. Since establishing the commercial team in April 2021, the Group Manager-Commercial has led improvements to the Procurement and Contract Management function by:
- reviewing and improving the council’s contract procedure rules. The revised rules improve decision making at the appropriate levels. Thresholds allow greater accountability by budget holders and senior leadership, to attempt to achieve greater compliance with the rules by simplifying low value

procurement requirements, and to free up the procurement service to concentrate on high value/high risk procurement and procurement that must be in line with government guidance.

- improving procurement and contract management governance by ensuring that authorisation for procurement activities is authorised at the correct level and to ensure that any new contract that is entered to is scrutinised, to confirm that it is appropriate, best value for the council, and there is sufficient budget. This also allows for a robust pipeline of procurement activity.
- implementing a training programme for staff to inform them of the contract procedure rules and governance processes.
- implemented a centralised contracts register which has not been in place for 10 years. This has improved the management and oversight of contracts and allows the council to plan procurement activity more effectively.
- improving procurement pipeline planning to ensure that procurement activity is undertaken in a timely way
- using the procurement pipeline information to define the size of the service in the Financial and Commercial restructure which was approved by Cabinet in June and is now its in implementation phase.
- moving away from relying on expensive consultancy support from RSM, by initiating recruitment to a permanent in-house team and procuring cheaper consultancy support whilst the team is recruited to. This support will also be used to bring in procurement specialists where no there are no in house resources.

2.7 The above improvements will in turn lead to:

- better evaluation of supplier's performance through higher quality contracts allowing for action to be taken to increase the performance and effectiveness of the contract
- decisions being taken at the proper time, which mitigates potential risks appearing in the future
- reducing contract disputes or surprises
- ensuring the Council has full oversight of all of its contracts;
- benchmarking of contracts to ensure the Council is getting the best value for money
- enables the identification of opportunities for efficiencies through joined up procurement activity with other parts of the Council, and/or with partners

Savings through detailed review of the council's contracts register

2.7. The Group Manager- Commercial has worked on a review of all council contracts to identify opportunities to drive savings and value for money through stopping unnecessary contracts, re-scoping existing contracts and identifying opportunities of combining contracts of a similar nature. Note savings in ICT are predicated on a reduction in staff and/or our asset base. As a result the reviews, savings of £1.8m have been identified, broken down as follows:

| Directorate | No of contracts reviewed | Contract culled | Contract combined | Contract changed | Contract created | Savings Identified* £'000 |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Chief Operating Officer | 88 | 7 | 3 | 30 | 0 | 128 |
| Chief Operating Officer – IT | 63 | 18 | 5 | 30 | 0 | 1,100 |
| Finance and Commercial | 25 | 2 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 62 |
| Place and Community/Housing and Property | 103 | 15 | 9 | 23 | 3 | 490 |
| People (Children) | 37 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 0 | N/A |
| Slough Children First | 20 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | N/A |
| People (Adults) | 94 | 4 | 3 | 53 | 0 | N/A |
| | 430 | 47 | 21 | 155 | 3 | 1,800 |

*The savings cover this current financial year (£486,000), 23/24 (£1m) and 24/25 (£288,000)
Note the majority of these savings have been put into the Council's MTFS except: this financial year (£166,000), 23/24 (£76,000) and 24/25 (117,000)

2.8. The opportunities identified have come under the following categories

- cull: 47 contracts have been culled, where contracts have been stopped as they are no longer needed, or improvements to IT infrastructure have removed the need for certain software solutions
- combine: 21 opportunities have been identified to combine contracts where similar services are being supplied e.g. web hosting, case management systems, or look for opportunities to procure jointly with other local authorities
- change: 155 contracts can potentially be changed through contract re-procurement. Value for money can be achieved through reviewing the scope of these contracts to ensure that appropriate solutions are tendered for and solutions are not “gold plated”
- create: Only three new contracts were identified through this process where opportunities have been identified to take into account the impact of new legislation

2.9. Each Directorate has a contracts register project plan in place to ensure that the actions agreed to achieve savings are tracked, monitored and implemented.

2.10. Savings are being tracked and monitored to ensure that they are taken out of directorate's base budgets.

Further key development activities

2.11. There is more work to do, to fully embed the commercial function in the council, and to ensure that the council drives savings through contract management and procurement. The following actions will be undertaken:

- implement the contracts register on the council's finance system so contracts can be easily linked to budgets and spend.
- recruit contract management support lead to lead on development of a framework to ensure there is a co-ordinated and consistent approach to contract management- by January 2023.

- risk assess contracts and develop plans for the highest risk contracts – January to March 2023, and this will be an ongoing task within the contract management function.
- provide advice and support to contract managers to ensure contracts are being managed effectively – from January 2023.
- ensure KPI's are meaningful and monitored effectively – from January 2023
- Programme of continuous contracts register reviews to ensure the council is getting the best value for money – from September 2022 and six monthly thereafter.
- monitoring of contracts register project plans for each directorate to ensure actions relating to making savings from contracts are implemented – from September 2022.
- implement the actions in the procurement and contract management strategy that have not yet been undertaken. This is predicated on a full in house team being in place and therefore these actions will be actioned throughout the 2023/24 financial year:
 - identification and management of strategic suppliers
 - further develop cross regional and cross national approaches to procurement
 - managing contracts and relationships through development of contract management plans for business critical contracts
 - continue to maximise best value through reviews of spend, council contracts and pipeline planning
 - proactively manage strategic risks associated with contracts
 - develop a policy and framework for social value that lists key areas employed by local authorities based upon service areas to consider during procurement exercises, including impacts on carbon and relates to the motion on climate change;

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1. Financial implications

3.1.1. The plans are supported by the key elements of the Council's Constitution most notably Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedural Rules.

3.2. Legal implications

3.2.1. The Council is under a general Duty of Best Value¹ to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness." The development of commercial function, will enable the Council to fulfil its best value duties. These arrangements will secure continuous improvement regarding economy, efficiency and effectiveness and overall value, including social value and will be considered in the procurement and contract management process.

3.3. Risk management implications

3.3.1. The Council will take a risk-based approach to the management of contracts. Contracts will be risk assessed to ensure that contracts have a robust contract plan in place, which is managed by the contract owner, and supported by the contract management support lead in the commercial team

¹ Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 (as amended by s137 of the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007)

3.3.2. The commercial team will use the council's risk management framework to ensure that any risks of strategic importance are escalated to the directorate or corporate risk register and mitigating actions are managed accordingly.

3.4. Environmental implications

3.4.1. There are no specific environmental implications arising directly from this report.

3.5. Equality implications

3.5.1. The Best Value Statutory Guidance states that authorities should avoid "gold plating" the Equality Act 2010 and should not impose contractual requirements on private and voluntary sector contractors over and above the obligations in the Act. This includes seeking to remove unnecessary paperwork and obstacles to contract compliance thereby making it easier for small and medium firms and the voluntary sector to apply and bid for contracts, and lowering costs to taxpayers.

3.6 Procurement implications

3.6.1 All procurement projects will consider the best procurement option and procurement route. This will ensure that best value is demonstrated in each procurement undertaken.

3.7 Workforce implications

3.7.1 Staffing of the Commercial services team have been identified via the Functional Capability Assessment Process as part of the council's Recovery Plan. This includes consideration of organisational capability, capacity and resilience. The restructure of the Finance and Commercial Team takes this into account and sufficient capacity is being built into the structure to ensure there is a team to lead and manage procurement and contract management.

3.8 Property implications

3.8.1 There are no specific property implications in relation to this report.

4. **Background Papers**

None

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

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|-------------------------------------|--|
| REPORT TO: | Cabinet |
| DATE: | 17th October 2022 |
| SUBJECT: | Slough Children First Limited (SCF) Annual Report and Governance Review |
| CHIEF OFFICER: | Gavin Jones – Chief Executive Steven Mair – Executive Director of Finance and Commercial |
| CONTACT OFFICER: | Jane Senior, Associate Director People Strategy and Commissioning Peter Robinson – Nominated Council Finance Representative Sarah Wilson – Principal Lawyer |
| WARD(S): | All |
| PORTFOLIO: | Cllr Swindlehurst – Leader of the Council Cllr Christine Hulme, Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills |
| KEY DECISION: | NO |
| EXEMPT: | Public |
| DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN: | YES |
| <u>APPENDICES:</u> | Appendix 1 – SCF Annual Report Appendix 2 – Governance Review |

1 Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report provides Slough Children First's (SCF) annual report, together with an update on a detailed governance review. SCF became wholly owned by the Council in April 2021. Prior to that it was a standalone trust. SCF delivers statutory children's services on behalf of the Council in accordance with a direction of the Secretary of State for Education. This is the first annual report since the change in governance arrangements.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- Note SCF's Annual Report

- Note the governance review of SCF and in particular the recommended actions and recommend to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee that it receives six monthly reports on progress against the governance review recommendations.
- Note that People Scrutiny Panel is receiving a report recommending that it set up a task and finish group to review the Mutual Ventures report, Annual Review process and draft business plan to make recommendations to cabinet on approval of the business plan as part of the budget setting process.

Reason:

To ensure that Cabinet is provided with an update on progress in SCF in the previous financial year to form part of the annual review of the arrangement and to demonstrate that the Council is properly fulfilling its ownership role of SCF by reviewing the governance arrangements in place in SCF.

DLUHC Commissioner’s Comments

The Commissioners note and support the recommendations in this report

DfE Commissioner’s Comments

Slough Children’s First was set up in April 2021 following Ministerial direction but with the agreement and support of the Council. With one exception nationally, Council owned companies for children’s services have been created through intervention from the DfE following sustained and systemic failure of the local authority in running those services. The most successful of the companies, Achieving for Children (Richmond, Kingston, Windsor and Maidenhead), Worcestershire Children First and Together for Children (Sunderland) deliver children’s services more broadly than just social care and have the full support of their Councils with a financially sustainable approach. Slough Children’s First has had a series of encouraging Ofsted reports but progress remains fragile particularly around workforce at all levels. There remain significant issues around total funding for the company and financial processes and management.

Appropriate governance arrangements between the Council and the Company are crucial if the aim of a “good” or better overall Ofsted rating is to be achieved. I finish as DfE Commissioner on 30th September 2022 and will be succeeded by Paul Moffat. It is for him, working with DfE colleagues, to make recommendations on the suitability of the company model to the Secretary of State for Education who remains the decision maker whilst the Council is in formal intervention.

SCF Chairman’s Comments

Slough Children First (SCF) continues to be fully committed to ever-improving quality of life and outcomes for the borough’s children, driven by our vision of every child in Slough being “safe, secure and successful”, a vision for achievement alongside the council and other key partners.

In Slough as elsewhere demand pressures on children’s services are increasing, with impact on budget projections and spend levels. Here these pressures are accentuated by SBC’s extreme financial pressures and make collaboration and mutual confidence between SBC and SCF all the more important.

We have welcomed the council's engagement, support and challenge in the areas covered in this report. We look forward to debates on the conclusions and recommendations arising from the Mutual Ventures (MV) review and its implications for the Business Plan's progress and consideration by the council. We commit too to providing information and advice to support discussions on future delivery options and associated opportunities and risks.

The development of the SCF 2022/29 Business Plan remains a protracted process but one which has generated good debates around what we are seeking to achieve for the borough's children, what strategies will get us there, and within what financial envelope. Children's spend is notoriously volatile and our challenge - especially as a low spending service – is to ensure maximum efficiency along with investment in prevention and early intervention strategies which are far better for children as well as offsetting cost pressures in the medium term,.

The review of SBC/SCF governance arrangements as we embarked upon year two of the new arrangements has been timely, and again an opportunity for collaboration on improvement. Rather than spending time contesting conclusions within the detail of the review, as I write we are putting together a prioritised governance improvement plan to complement initiatives already underway. We will share this plan with the council and are ready to provide six monthly progress reports to Audit and Corporate Governance Committee should Cabinet determine this way forward as recommended in the report.

Finally, we are ready to support the work of the People Scrutiny Panel should it agree to the establishment of a task and finish group reviewing the Mutual Ventures report, Annual Review process and draft business plan, again in the spirit of collaboration and shared ambitions for Slough's children.

2 Report

Introductory Paragraph

- 2.1 SCF became wholly owned by the Council on 1 April 2021, with new Articles of Association setting out its governance arrangements. The Articles of Association set out a list of reserved matters, which must be approved by the Council, as the sole owner of the Company. The Company was previously Slough Children's Services Trust, incorporated on 12 March 2015 and was responsible for the Council's statutory children's social care functions from 1 October 2015.
- 2.1 SCF delivers statutory children's social care functions under a direction of the Secretary of State for Education and in accordance with a service delivery contract (SDC) between SCF and the Council. Improvement activity to support this across children's services are a critical part of the Council's improvement journey and the Council and SCF need to work together to ensure that the services can be delivered in a cost-effective way, contributing to the delivery of required financial savings to enable the Council to become financially sustainable within the medium term.
- 2.2 As well as being the responsible local authority for children's services within Slough, the Council is the commissioner of services under the SDC, the sole owner of SCF and the primary funder. The risks that sit with SCF will inevitably impact on the Council and the Council is expected to demonstrate that it is properly monitoring and governing its wholly owned companies. Whilst not specifically in relation to SCF, the Council's external auditors raised concerns and a statutory recommendation in 2021

about the governance of the Council's companies and this has also been a focus in the governance review commissioned by DLUHC. The Council's Principal Lawyer has undertaken a governance review with the support of SCF and the findings are reported below.

- 2.3 Schedule 3 of the SDC sets out the annual review process that should be undertaken, of which the submission of an Annual Report is the first stage. The Council should note the progress made and consider this when agreeing the forthcoming business plan and negotiating a new contractual payment for the next financial year. It is proposed that a report on the business plan will be considered later in the year following a review by the People Scrutiny Panel and discussions between the Council and the Department for Education (DfE).
- 2.4 Due to concerns about the ongoing financial sustainability of SCF, it submitted a high level investment business plan for 2022-2029. This requires significant investment in SCF in the short term to implement a range of preventative initiatives which would deliver savings on statutory services in future years. Due to the level of investment required and the length of time it would take to deliver any savings, as well as concerns about previous initiatives not delivering the anticipated savings, the DfE commissioned Mutual Ventures to undertake a review of the investment plan and to assess its viability.

Slough Corporate Plan

- A borough for children and young people to thrive

The Council's corporate plan emphasises the need for children and young people to be able to access services that keep them safe and secure. This includes a focus on delivering preventative help to children and families and ensuring that children with special educational need and disabilities (SEND) should have the same opportunities as non-disabled children and young people. It also includes a focus on raising aspirations and delivering opportunities for young people to prosper. Whilst children's social care services are delivered by SCF, other children's services including education, early years and services for children with SEND are delivered by the Council and many other council departments deliver services that contribute to this priority.

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

Whilst the services are delivered by SCF in accordance with a statutory direction from the DfE, the Council is legally the commissioner of services and the sole owner of SCF. The funding for children's social care services delivered via SCF form a significant part of the Council's general fund. The Council has a duty to secure best value and to ensure that its companies remain fit for purpose in terms of delivering against the original strategic aims and that they are demonstrating delivery of value for money.

Options considered:

The SDC requires SCF to submit an annual report to the Council as part of a contractual annual review process. Whilst this is not a reserved matter that requires Cabinet approval, this is a first step in agreeing the annual business plan. As such this report has been presented to Cabinet for formal noting.

There is no legal requirement to undertake a formal governance review, however based on the concerns raised by the Council's external auditors and in the DLUHC commissioned governance review, officers have undertaken this review and have presented it to Cabinet for formal noting. The Mutual Ventures independent review should be considered as part of this wider governance review, as it will consider the viability of SCF's business plan for delivery of services in the future.

Any change to the current delivery model would need prior discussion and detailed development with the DfE Commissioner and DLUHC Commissioners, and the explicit agreement of the Secretary of State for Education.

For the above reasons, no other options were considered appropriate at this time.

Annual Review

- 2.5 The SDC sets out the contractual arrangements between the Council and SCF and includes the process for annual review at Schedule 3.
- 2.6 Schedule 3 sets out a key component of the Council's strategic oversight and review of the SDC. The aims and objectives of the annual review are to:
- Consider the quality of practice and the outcomes for children, young people and families in the borough of Slough;
 - Facilitate the Council's quality assurance of the operation of the contractual arrangement;
 - Enable the Council to review the discharge of its statutory functions as delivered by SCF;
 - Consider whether changes are required;
 - Consider relevant factors in relation to the setting of future years' contract sums.
- 2.7 The annual review process requires SCF to prepare an annual report prior to 30 June in every contract year. This should be formally considered by the Strategic Commissioning Group. The draft of the annual report should include, as a minimum, the following:
- A summary of SCF's performance in the previous financial year.
 - A summary of the Council's performance under the SDC and any support services agreement.
 - The cost of performing the services in the preceding contract year in comparison with its budget.
 - A summary of any agreed changes.
 - A summary of the demand analysis in the preceding financial year, including any increases in demand against assumptions.
 - The expected demand for services in the two contract years immediately following the annual review.
 - The effects of any changes in children's social care legislation or guidance on the delivery of services and any actual or anticipated changes in law.
 - The strategic priorities and outcomes likely to be relevant to the commissioning in the following contract year.
 - A summary of any social, demographic or other relevant factors.
 - The results of any audits or surveys including a summary of the outcomes of any surveys of service users and relevant stakeholders and third parties in relation to the services carried out during the previous contract year.
 - The outcomes of any rectification plans

- A high-level review of central Government funding, including details of any anticipated funding directed to the services in the previous financial year and future years;
- Matters relating to the risk register.
- The outcome of any regulatory inspections.
- The proposed changes to the agreement to be considered as part of the annual review, including changes to the service specification, KPIs and financial mechanism for the following contract year.

2.8 The draft annual report was received by the Council in the form of a powerpoint presentation and a number of appendices. It contained most of the information referred to above, although not in the order set out in the SDC. The report was considered at the contractual Strategic Commissioning Group on 21 September 2022.

2.9 At the meeting, the SCG discussed the performance against KPIs, noting some deterioration, but that SCF is still compliant with the contractual obligations. Further work is to be done to review the KPIs to ensure they are correctly capturing risk. On finances, it was noted that one in-year change had been agreed and that there was a risk arising from a lack of certainty around public health grant funding and health funding.

2.10 The annual review process requires the following matters to be agreed:

- the content of the Annual Report;
- the contribution rates determined by the LGPS Fund Actuary;
- any matters arising in relation to the financial mechanism, including whether the contract sum for the forthcoming contract year remains appropriate;
- the proportionate share of any Surplus that will be allocated to each Party pursuant to the financial mechanism;
- the results of any audits carried out by the Council during the preceding contract year;
- any significant complaints made against SCF in respect of the preceding contract year;
- any serious incidents (including serious case reviews) involving SCF in the preceding contract year;
- a review of the Key Performance Indicators and the Services Specification;
- a review of the Dependencies and the Support Services;
- a review of the governance arrangements under the SDC to assess whether they continue to be appropriate and fit for purpose; and
- such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time

2.11 The strategic commissioning group agreed the following:

- The Annual Report be noted and referred to Cabinet for formal noting.
- The Annual Report would benefit from re-ordering to follow the list set out above and should be presented in a narrative report.
- The contract sum for the next year to be considered as part of approving the business plan.
- There is no surplus and SCF is currently projecting a deficit over and above the in-year amendment to the contract sum. Details of the deficit for 2021/22 and the projected deficit for 2022/23 are contained in the financial implications section.

- Audits – SCF had presented information on its auditing of social care cases, but no information on its internal and external audits. It had been subject to two internal audits on value for money and governance. Neither report had been presented or referred to in the annual report and it was agreed that a further discussion take place to ensure the internal audit plan was appropriately focused and the findings were provided to the Council following appropriate consideration at board level. Both audit reports were presented after the meeting and were finalised in the 2022/23 period. The internal audit undertaken on governance was limited in nature and has largely been superseded by the wider governance review. The value for money audit was also limited and has largely been superseded by the more detailed analysis being undertaken by Mutual Ventures.
- Complaints – SCF was subject to 3 complaints which were upheld by the LGSCO in 2021/22, which all related to one family. The details of these have been included in a report to Audit and Corporate Governance Committee. A report on complaints data was also presented.
- Serious incidents – the Council has been notified of one serious incident. The SCG discussed any lessons learned and changes to practice. In future years the Annual Report should include details of any lessons learned and recommended changes to practice and risk procedures because of serious incidents.
- Key performance indicators and service specification – at the SCG meeting in August 2022, SCF agreed to review the KPIs to ensure they were appropriately capturing risk. There was discussion about including a KPI on caseloads. This will be discussed further and agreed at part of the contract monitoring process. There are no proposals to amend the service specification.
- Dependencies and support services – a number of concerns have been raised about support services, including ICT and accommodation arrangements. There are separate meetings and processes in place for these issues to be discussed and reported up to the SCG if a resolution cannot be reached. There are pressures being put on SCF due to delays and issues in Council services, including delays in the customer contact centre and the SEND service.
- Governance arrangements – this is subject to a separate review and was not discussed in detail. However, the SDC provides terms of reference for the strategic commissioning group setting out the membership of the group as including the lead member for children’s services. As the lead member for children’s services does not have a decision-making role in this meeting, it would be preferable for this member to be removed from the standing membership and be separately briefed by officers where necessary. It is not usual for elected members to attend contractual meetings in relation to the Council’s other contractual arrangements. This will be considered as part of the contract management processes.

Governance review

2.12 Following concerns being raised about the Council’s governance of its companies and issues with the business planning process earlier this year, the Principal Lawyer commenced a desktop governance review in May 2022. This was formally reported to the Council’s corporate leadership team (CLT) on 18 May 2022 with a recommendation that CLT officers note and agree to the contract management arrangements being simplified as set out above, note and comment on the governance review and consider next steps, request SCF to provide evidence and information to support the governance review, including flagging any information that should be kept confidential and consider the nomination of further council nominated non-executive directors.

- 2.13 A meeting took place with SCF officers on 9 June 2022 where it was agreed that SCF would support with the review and a request for information was sent on 16 June 2022 to SCF's chief executive and chairman. Documentation and information in support of the review was sent by SCF on 6 September 2022.
- 2.14 It should be noted that there has been a lot of work undertaken by SCF officers and directors, as well as by Council officers to improve both the relationship and the processes in place. In addition, SCF is continuing to improve its delivery of social care services, as evidenced by its regulatory inspections and this is testament to the hard work and commitment of SCF staff and leaders. The governance review is not intended to detract from this work. However, it is accepted by SCF and the Council that good governance is critical to delivering high quality services and more work is required to demonstrate effective governance.
- 2.15 The review is appended at Appendix 2. The findings have been shared with SCF officers and the board and the Principal Lawyer attended a board meeting to discuss these on 22 September 2022. The findings have also been shared with the DLUHC commissioners and the DfE commissioner. There are several areas of concern, which can be summarised as follows:
- Induction processes for new directors and development programme - this is not as comprehensive as it should be and could limit the effectiveness of the board to hold executive officers to account. All directors should be able to and demonstrate that they are scrutinising and monitoring financial and performance management. The submission of the first business plan for 22/23 indicated that the scrutiny of financial projections and deliverability of savings proposals was not as robust as it could be;
 - Clarity on role of Lead Member for Children's Services - the lead member for children's services is continuing to attend board meetings, but there doesn't appear to be any clarity or documentation on her role and on one document she was named as the lead on behalf of the board. As the lead member for children's services is no longer a director of SCF, her attendance at the board is as a participating observer and there should be a protocol setting out her role, including procedures in relation to confidential information and the need to withdraw from meetings when there is a conflict of interest;
 - Effectiveness of board - very little assurance data was supplied for this, including in relation to appraisal of the Chair, which is the responsibility of DfE. A formal request has been sent to the DfE for information on this process. No documentary evidence was supplied to demonstrate effective performance management information or processes for any of the executive directors, including the SCF chief executive;
 - Assessing and monitoring value for money – there was a lack of clarity on where the responsibility sits for this and how independent reviews are informing this. There is an option to set up another board committee focused on finance and business operations, which would separate out quality assurance from financial management. Whilst this model may work and it is a matter for the SCF board to determine its committee structure, there is a potential that financial management will not be considered in terms of service performance. There is a recommendation that financial implications are included on all board reports;
 - Risk management procedures – a formal review of KPIs is recommended and risks should be formally reported via the contract meetings, as at present the performance data doesn't flag the concerns, but information is presented in other forums that indicated that there are significant risks. Whilst there is a risk management policy and procedures, a review of the board papers indicates that

mitigations that are being reported to and by the board are not always accurate or mitigating the risk. This is particularly relevant in relation to financial risks;

- Delivery model - the Council should have evidence that it has reviewed the suitability of the model on a periodic basis. This is addressed by the recommendation from Cabinet in September 2022 for officers to liaise with DfE on an options appraisal.
- Business plan approval and compliance with contractual mechanisms - the latter has been improved recently and there has been training from the external lawyers who represented SCF in the contract negotiations. However, this is still an area of concern. The contract sets out a very clear annual timetable of submitting an annual report, having an annual review, submission of an annual business plan to inform setting of Contract Sum and processes for in-year changes to Contract Sum, both for invest to save and demand pressures. This is not working as anticipated and SCF need to establish a governance timescale that ensures that documents are presented, reviewed and submitted to the Council in accordance with the annual process and containing the information set out in the SDC.
- Culture and values - there is a need for more focus on governance processes and an acceptance that good governance is intrinsically linked to high quality performance. The independent non-executive directors were appointed in 2021 and have made significant progress in setting up a board structure and new committees which has improved the processes. SCF need to consider whether the right information is being supplied at the right time to the board and its committees to ensure good governance.
- Internal schemes of delegation - the financial procedure rules appear not to have been reviewed since the company's articles changed and apart from decision-making on social care matters, no internal scheme of delegation has been supplied.

2.16 The Principal Lawyer attended the board meeting on 22 September 2022. The board were thankful for the detailed review and accepted that more work is required to ensure effective governance processes are in place. Board members had had limited time to review the detail of the review, but were keen to support the high level outcomes. It was agreed that the review contained recommendations to the Board and the Council and it was a matter for the Board to determine whether recommendations to SCF were appropriate.

2.17 It is proposed that the recommendations form an action plan that is reported to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee on a 6 monthly basis as a minimum to monitor progress.

Mutual Ventures review

2.18 SCF has developed a further high level 7 year business plan 2022-29, along with a prevention and early help (continuum of care) business case, targeted early help (abridged) business case, an edge of care (investing for outcomes) business case, a workforce (enhanced retention offer) and a draft programme plan. The business plan has been discussed at a number of meetings commencing in Spring 2022. Due to concerns about the level of investment requested and the length of time required to deliver savings, the DfE commissioned Mutual Ventures to undertake a review of the plan.

2.19 Mutual Ventures have spoken to various stakeholders to inform its review, including the current and new DfE commissioners, the DLUHC commissioners, council officers responsible for finance, commissioning and governance, SCF board members

(executive and non-executive directors). Mutual Ventures is in the process of finalising its report and it is recommended that the final report is considered by the People Scrutiny Panel as part of its review of the longer term business plan in order to make recommendations to Cabinet.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

- 3.1.1 The contract sum for services provided by SCF in 2022/23 agreed by Cabinet in February 2022 and approved by Council in March 2022 was £31.436m. Cabinet also approved a working capital loan of £5m in March 2021 that is due to be repaid at the end of the contract.
- 3.1.2 In September 2022 Cabinet agreed an increase in this contract sum of £0.343 to £31.779m,
- 3.1.3 SCF incurred a deficit of £1.332m in 2021/22 and are forecasting a deficit for 2022/23 of £3.890m, an accumulated deficit of £5.222m at 31 March 2023. Assuming savings planned are delivered and the current forecasts are realistic. The current projections would mean SCF would be insolvent by the year end if no additional funding is agreed with the Council or DfE.
- 3.1.4 The current draft SCF business plan is predicting a deficit of £3.4m for 2023/24, with no contribution to Council savings targets. £1.2m of this relates to an assumed reduction in DfE grant to £0.9m support for the company.
- 3.1.5 As it stands the Council cannot provide the level of support set out by SCF in future years and significant work will need to be undertaken in order to agree a contract sum for 2023/24.

3.2 Legal implications

- 3.2.1 The Secretary of State for Education has powers to issue a direction in relation to specified social services functions relating to children under s.497A of the Education Act 1996. Various directions have been issued in relation to statutory functions in Slough since 2014. The sixth statutory direction was issued in April 2021. This requires that the Council secures that prescribed children's services functions are performed by SCF and the Council jointly and other prescribed children's services functions are performed by SCF on behalf of the Council. The Council was also directed to enter into a new service agreement to implement the discharge of these functions and continue to comply with any instructions of the Secretary of State, his representatives and the Children's Services Commissioner in relation to
 - i. ensuring that the Council's children's social care functions are performed to the required standard;
 - ii. the terms of the Service Agreement that require the Secretary of State's consent or approval;
 - iii. the operation of the Direction.
- 3.2.2 The intention behind amending the Articles of Association and a new Governance Side Agreement was to change the ownership of the Company and clarify the roles

and responsibilities of the Council and the DfE, on the basis this will give the Council greater control over the strategic direction of the Company, whilst ensuring operational independence for day to day functions. The reserved matters set out in the Articles allow the Council to make certain high level decisions as opposed to leaving these matters to the Company's board of directors, however these matters are also subject to consultation and consent rights of the DfE.

3.3 Risk management implication

3.3.1 Risks

| Risk | Assessment of Risk | Mitigation | Residual Risk |
|---|---|---|----------------------|
| Children and Families at risk. | <p>Very High</p> <p>The Company has raised a serious issue that children and families will be at significant risk due to a rise in demand pressures, should solutions and mitigations not be found.</p> | <p>A Type-one in year change request has been agreed to address some of the risks raised.</p> <p>Recruit to the existing vacancies to deal with the demand and effectively assess and intervene to mitigate risk of harm to children. There has been success in terms of recruitment of foreign qualified social workers. Concerns have been raised with the DfE about the system in place in relation to agency teams of social workers, which is impacting on the ability to recruit to permanent roles.</p> <p>The DfE has commissioned a review by Mutual Ventures to consider the deliverability of the longer term business plan.</p> | High |
| Insolvency risk is hard to properly assess without a finalised business plan. | <p>Very High</p> <p>The Company has raised an issue in respect of its solvency.</p> | <p>The draft business plan 2022-29 is currently being reviewed by Mutual Ventures who have been appointed for this purpose. Future necessary action will be determined following the conclusion of this review.</p> | High |

3.4 Environmental implications

None

3.5 Equality implications

SCF provides social care services to protect some of the most vulnerable children and supports families from a diverse background. If SCF fails to adequately deliver its services this will impact on children and working age adults with children to a greater extent than the wider population. In addition, it will negatively impact on children and parents with disabilities who are more likely to need the support of SCF. Certain ethnic groups and gender are disproportionately represented within the community supported by SCF and will therefore be disproportionately impacted by any change in the delivery of services.

3.6 Procurement implications

The services have been commissioned from SCF in accordance with a direction of the Secretary of State for Education. SCF is solely involved in delivery of children's social care services for SBC and is wholly owned by SBC, which means there is no need to competitively tender for services.

3.7 Workforce implications

None

4. Background Papers

None.



Slough Children First 2021/22 Annual Report

March 2022



A hands-on approach to help children in Slough be
..... Safe, Secure and Successful

Contents



| Item | Slide |
|--|---------|
| Aims and Objectives | 3 |
| Slough Context | 4 – 12 |
| Leadership and Partnerships | 13 – 19 |
| Regulatory Inspections and Legislative Changes | 20 – 27 |
| Demand and Other Relevant Factors | 28 – 39 |
| Performance and progress in 2021/22 | 40 – 70 |
| Quality Assurance | 71 – 76 |
| Financial Outturn and Risks | 77 -79 |
| What's Next: 2022/23 Focus | 80 – 81 |

Aims and Objectives of the Annual Review



Slough Children First (SCF) and Slough Borough Council (SBC) have a contractual agreement between both parties. As part of this agreement SBC are required to complete an Annual Review of the services they commission from SCF. SCF are required to produce an Annual Report summarising the services delivered for the year.

The key aims and objectives of the annual report are to:

- Understand the context of Slough for the year
- Review SCFs discharge of statutory functions
- Reflect on the quality of practice and outcomes achieved for children, young people and families
- Reflect on and plan future budget and financials including any factors that may affect this
- Identify areas of focus for the following year
- Quality assurance against the agreement between the Company and SBC
- Identify any changes required to the performance of the agreement



Slough Context

Slough Population



Slough is a complex and diverse town with a population of approximately 149,557. Slough's population is significantly younger than England's profile with almost a third of people aged under 18 (21% nationally) and we have the largest number of children and young people aged 0 to 19 in Berkshire East (31% of the total population). Our population is expected to grow to 151,674 by 2029.

Page 57



- Slough's male life expectancy and healthy life expectancy continue to be significantly worse than national and regional rates. Boys born in Slough today can expect to live to 78 with the last 20 years of life not being in good health.
- There is also a 5.3 year difference in life expectancy between boys born in the least deprived areas and most deprived areas of Slough.

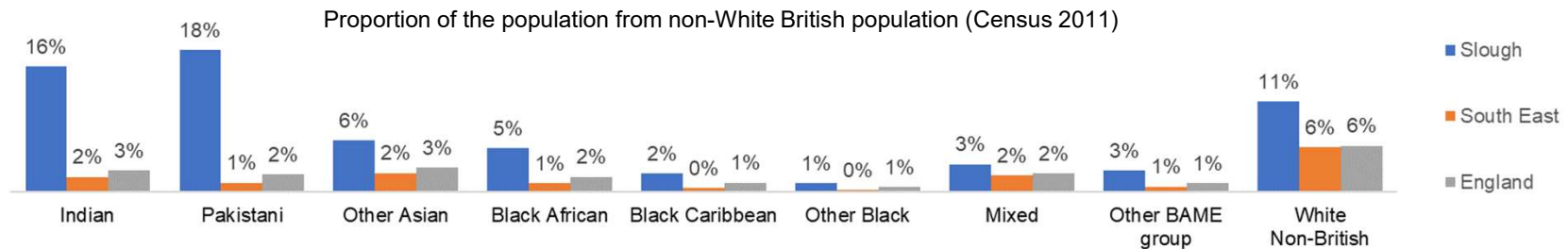


- Slough's female life expectancy is similar to national rates and also higher than males. However, healthy life expectancy is significantly worse than national and regional rates. Girls born in Slough today can expect to live to 82 with the last 23 years of life not being in good health
- There is also a 5.8 year difference in life expectancy between girls born in the least deprived areas of Slough and most deprived areas.

Diverse Community



Slough is one of the most ethnically diverse Boroughs in England with 54% of the population coming from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background (15% in England). A further 11% of the population are from a White non-British background (5% in England). People from an Asian background make up 40% of Slough's total population and are the largest ethnic group. 39% of Slough residents born outside the UK and the EU, and 13% having been resident in the UK for less than 10 years (Slough Local Insight).



150 languages are spoken in Slough schools posing challenges for engagement with all of these differing communities. 67.4% of households in Slough had English as a main language, with 15.5% of households having no one who speaks English as their main language

Employment



From Jul-20 to Jun-21, **68%** of Slough's working age population were in employment. The proportion of people in employment decreased during the pandemic and this drop has been more pronounced in Slough.

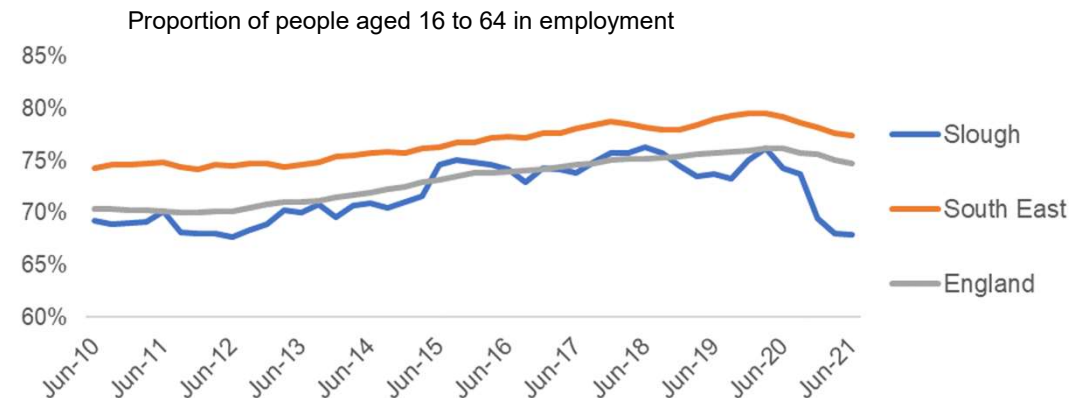
6.4% of Slough's working age population were estimated to be unemployed (4,600 people). 27% (26,100) of Slough's working age population were also economically inactive (not in employment or seeking work). The main reasons for being economically inactive in Slough were being a student and looking after family and/or home.

Page 59



Pre-Covid, Slough had traditionally high employment and a fast growing economy but its unemployed claimant rate is higher now than it was pre-Covid.

Slough remains in the **top 10** highest unemployment rates out of 63 largest cities and towns in England.



Slough Deprivation and Housing

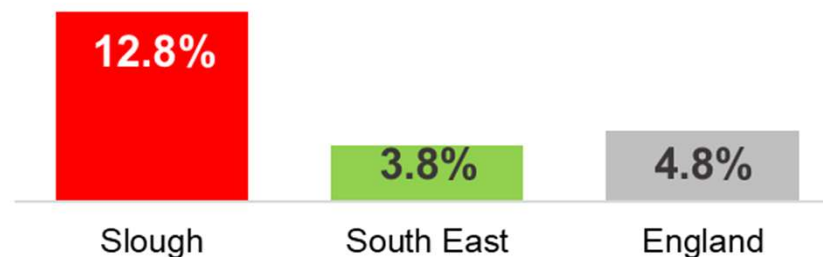


- Slough's overall deprivation ranking sits within the 5th more deprived decile in England.
- 7 out of Slough's 80 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) fall within the 10%-20% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally. These are in areas of Britwell and Northborough, Central, Chalvey, Colnbrook with Poyle and Elliman wards.
- Evidence shows that living in cold homes is associated with poor health outcomes and an increased risk of morbidity and mortality for all age groups (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities 2022). In 2019, 5,105 households in Slough were considered to be fuel poor.
- The average household size in Slough is 2.8 people, compared to 2.4 in England.
- Over 6,500 households in Slough were estimated to be overcrowded in 2011. This means that there are fewer bedrooms than would standardly be required for the number of people in the house.
- 1,038 households in Slough were identified as eligible for support (termed prevention or relief duty) under the Homeless Reduction Act in 2019/20. This is a rate of 19.1 per 1,000 households.

Proportion of households in fuel poverty (2019)



Proportion of households that are overcrowded (2011)



Children & Young People (under 18): Health



Approximately 43,650 children and young people (aged under 18) live in Slough ([Office for National Statistics 2022](#)). This is 29% of Slough's total population, which is the 2nd highest proportion in England. Although fertility rates are decreasing both nationally and locally, Slough currently has the highest total fertility rate in England ([Office for National Statistics 2021](#)).



6.5% of Slough mothers were smokers at the time of delivery in 2020/21.



Childhood obesity is increasing nationally. Slough's prevalence of obesity continues to be worse than national figures and is the highest rate in the South East for both age groups measured through the National Childhood Measurement Programme



3.9% of term babies born in Slough were a low birth weight (under 2,500g) in 2019.

Infant mortality is a key indicator of the general health of the entire population. In 2018-20, 29 babies under 1 died in Slough at a rate of 4 per 1,000 population.



65% of Slough babies were breastfed 6-8 weeks after birth in 2020/21.

In 2017-19, 16 children aged 1 to 17 died in Slough at a rate of 13 per 100,000 population.

Children & Young People (under 18): Income and Education



19.5% of Slough's under 16s lived in relative low income families in 2019/20. This is over 7,700 children and continues to increase.



13.2% of pupils in Slough had special educational needs (SEN) in 2018, which is 3,995 pupils.

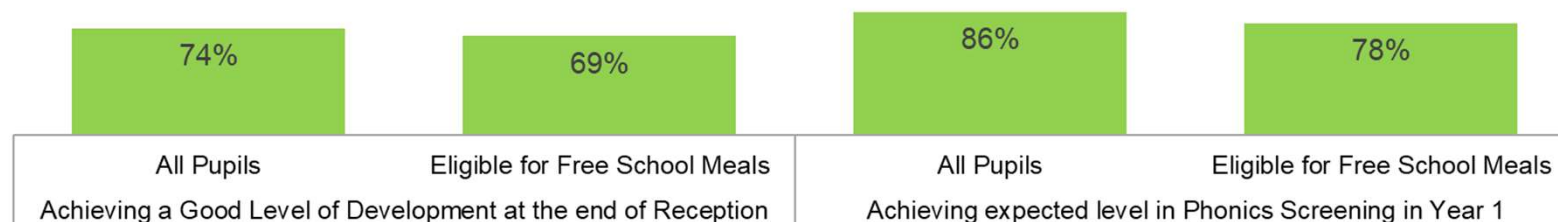
Page 62



195 children in Slough were in care on 31-Mar-20. This is a rate of **45** per 10,000 population.

- Slough's school readiness and attainment levels are significantly better than England's and continue to increase. This is also true for children eligible for free school meals.
- KS 4 attainment in Slough's state-funded schools continue to be significantly better than England's.

School readiness in Slough (2018/19)



Mental Health

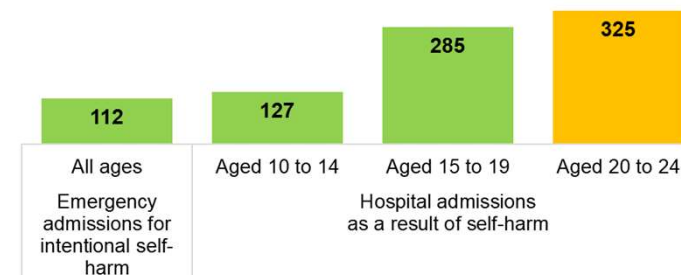


- Mental health problems affect around one in four people in any given year. 19% of Slough's population aged 16 and over are estimated to have a common mental disorder, which is significantly higher than the national (17%) and regional (15%) prevalence rates.
- Nationally, 16% of children aged 5 to 16 are estimated to have a probable mental health disorder

Page 63

- Hospital admissions for self-harm in children have increased in recent years with admissions for young women being much higher than admissions for young men.
- Suicide is a significant cause of death in young adults and can be an indicator of underlying rates of mental ill-health. From 2018 to 2020 there were 32 suicides recorded for Slough residents at a rate of 9 per 100,000 population.
- The suicide rate in males is higher, both nationally and locally. In 2018-20 81% of suicides in Slough were male.
- In 2018-20, Slough's premature mortality rate for people with severe mental illness (SMI) was significantly worse than England's at 123.1 per 100,000 population. The under-75 mortality rate was 376% higher than the general population in Slough for this time period, which was similar to England.

Slough Admission rates per 100,000 population (2019/20)



Environment and Crime



Slough is classified as an urban city or town with no rural areas ([Office for National Statistics 2021](#)). Air quality indicators in Slough indicate higher levels of fine particulate matter and mortality attributable to air pollution, compared to England

Page 64

Children and young people at risk of offending or within the youth justice system often have more unmet health needs than other children and **public health services have an important role to play in tackling violence** to help focus on interventions that are effective and target prevention and treatment.

Domestic Abuse Increase: There is a 9.7% increase in Domestic Abuse valid crimes for Slough when comparing 20/21 against 21/22.

Modelled estimates indicate that the rate of **children and young people** from Slough who living in households where **domestic violence and abuse**, parental substance misuse or parental mental health issues are affecting an adult in the household are higher than the rest of Berkshire East.



176 children and young people were in the youth justice system in Slough (2020/21). Of these 78 were statutory and 98 were voluntary



18 children and young people were were first time offenders in Slough (March 2021).



There were 295 admissions from violent crime in Slough during the latest 3 year period (2017/18 to 2019/20). This was a rate of **64** per 100,000 population.

| Out of court disposals | |
|--|------------|
| Community Resolution Police Facilitated | 82 |
| Community Resolution with YOT Intervention | 36 |
| Community Resolution (Non Substantive/Voluntary) | 23 |
| Youth Conditional Caution | 11 |
| Youth Caution | 5 |
| Community Resolution - other agency facilitated | 3 |
| Youth Restorative Disposal | 1 |
| Youth Caution + Conditions | 1 |
| Grand Total | 162 |



Leadership and Partnerships

Leadership in Slough



- The Company changed its operating model in April 2021 to become a Wholly Owned Company but retained its operational independence. The Council as the sole owner has oversight and influence through the Company's governance arrangements
- New arrangements have resulted in a New Board – new chair and new Non Executive Directors with a wealth of Public sector experience.
- Slough has experienced changes in strategic leadership, with 4 short-term interim DCS/Chief Executives in post during 2021 and the extended leave of the Council Chief Executive
- Both of these roles now have stable, albeit, interim arrangements in place alongside 3 DLUHC appointed Commissioners for the Council working with the Company's DfE Commissioner.
- The departure of the Assistant Director for Quality Improvement, Performance and Practice (QIPP) and the Associate Director, Children and Families (both for career development reasons) in November 2021 gave the opportunity to further align services and functions together.
- The Performance Team joined the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Service to bring our extensive suite of data and performance management information, and better use of quality assurance information closer together to provide a more focused lens on our practice
- The role of 'Head of Regulated Services' was developed and the post holder is now the Responsible Individual for the Independent Fostering Agency (IFA), the adoption service and Breakaway, Slough's Children's Home.
- Our Heads of Service leadership team, all of whom are permanent, have developed and pulled together over the last year, keeping a relentless focus on doing what is right for our children. This group brings great stability to Slough Children First,.
- Their efforts shows themselves in the progress made on our improvement journey and has been noted from the Company Board, DFE and the DfE Commissioner despite all of the issues faced.

Strategic Aims and Priorities



Overarching Strategic Aim is continuous improvement of services to get to Good

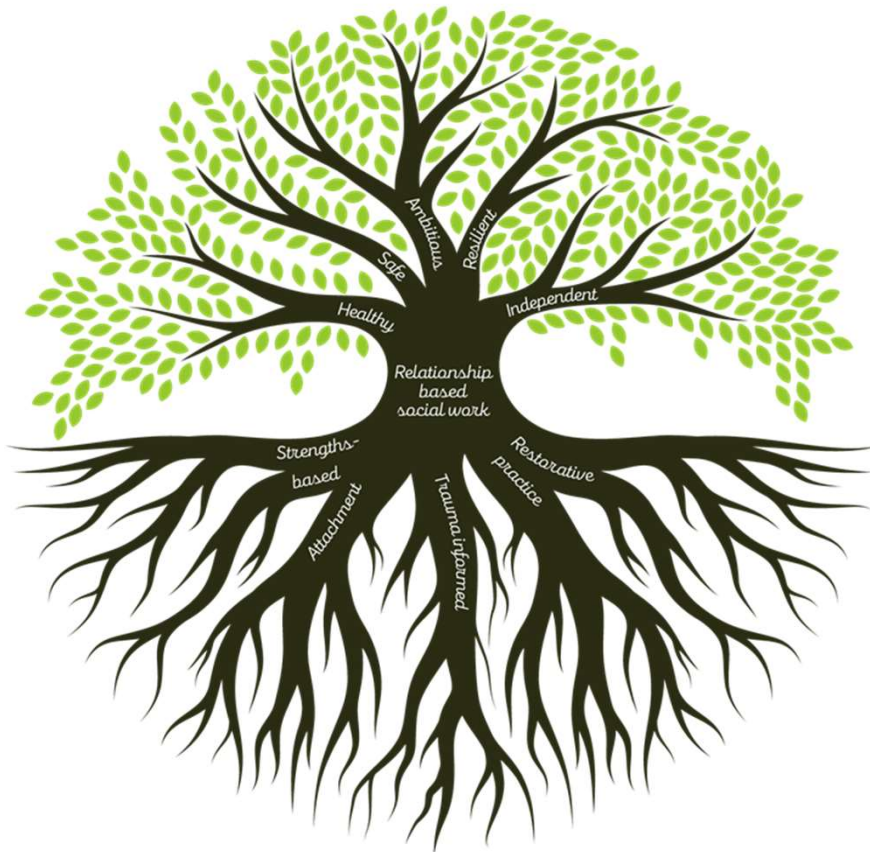
The company has four strategic aims, each with its own set of priorities to support the delivery of services:

| Quality improvement throughout a child's journey | Stability of workforce | Being sustainable | Development of child focused partnerships |
|---|---|--|---|
| Consistently good practice throughout a child's journey ensures better outcomes for children and families | A stable and effective workforce which enables better outcomes for children and families | A secure and sustainable organisation which provides high quality and cost-effective outcomes | Key strategic partners working together to ensure the best outcomes for our most vulnerable children. |
| a) Promote the voice of the child and hold the child in mind in all our work b) Safeguard and promote needs c) Quality partnership working improves outcomes for all children d) Improved and evidenced outcomes | a) Attract, support, develop and retain quality staff and effective leaders b) A positive culture which provides professionally fulfilling employment c) Effective communication mechanisms | a) Strong and transparent governance b) Evidenced use of resources efficiently to meet children's needs c) Value for Money d) Maximising partnerships to deliver better aligned services which achieve better outcomes for children | a) Work with key partners to develop the continuum of services b) Development of community offerings through the voluntary sector to support children and families c) A review of tri partite panels with Health and Education to ensure the child is at the centre of the outcome with all parties working in collaboration d) Build strong relations with local providers to help develop sufficiency of placements for our young people. e) Work in strategic partnership with the council on accommodation options for our young people. f) Developing close links with adults to ensure robust transition planning for our children with disability to ensure a seamless and transparent transition of support offering |

Our New Practice Framework – The Slough Approach



Page 68

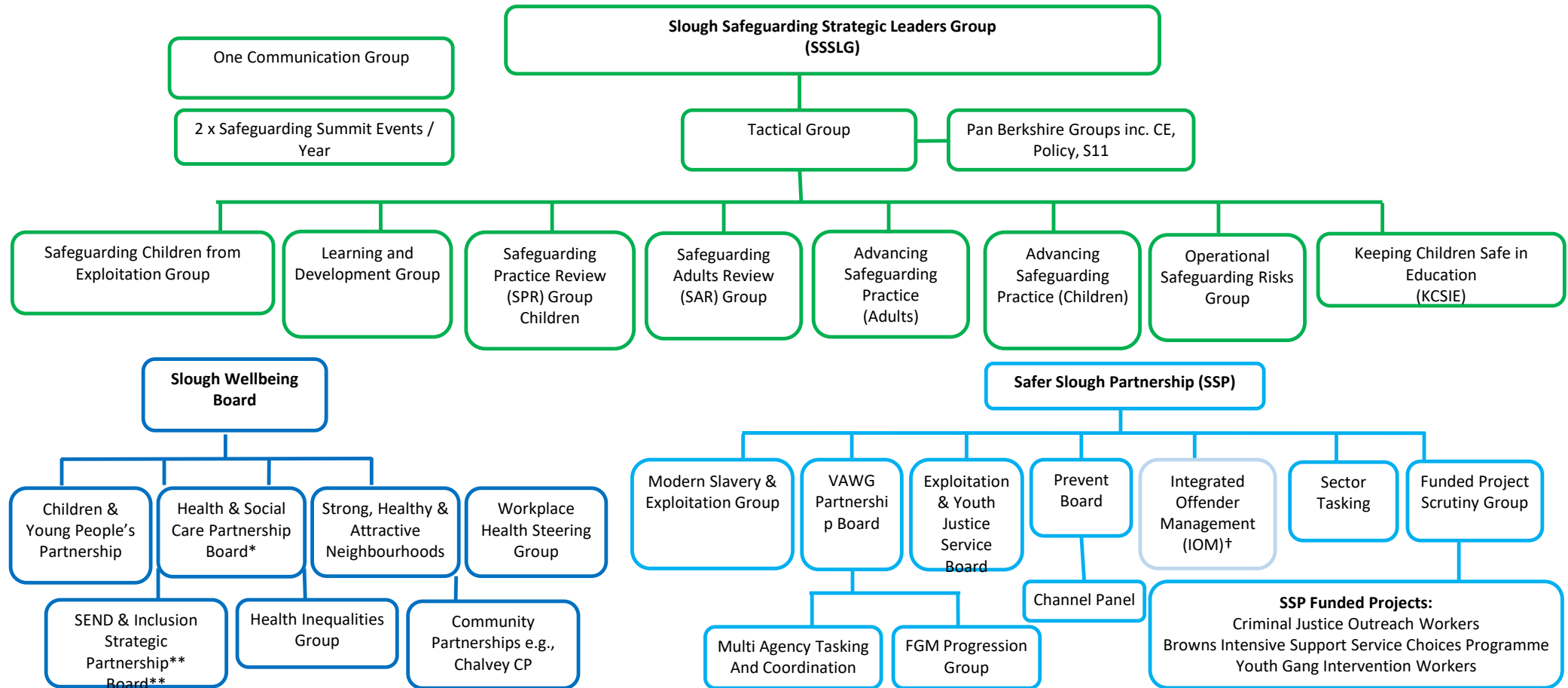


- The Slough Approach has been developed to provide us with a clear focus on the way in which we aim to work with children, families and partners in Slough.
- This will ensure everyone who works in Slough understands the way in which we expect them to work with children, families and partners as this will be a more familiar model of practice.
- We changed our framework as systemic practice wasn't the right anymore for Slough and the associated costs. But we have kept our clinicians as they add considerable value to our work
- We have based our framework on a Relationship Based approach. Underpinning our Relationship Base approach are four key strands:
 - Attachment Theory
 - Restorative Practice
 - Strengths Based
 - Trauma Informed
- We recognise there are a range of tools and approaches that support social workers to work with children and families in a relationship based approach and have developed an action plan to ensure social workers learn about these.
- We are working closely with Research in Practice to access their resources and held a day in late January 2022 where staff were able to access a number of seminars on relationship based social work as part of an ongoing programme of learning and development with RiP
- We launched our new Practice Framework during Practice Learning Week w/c 14th March 2022
- We are continuing with further bite sized sessions on the four key strands and tools and we are planning to include the framework in the induction programme.

Slough Partnership Structure



Page 69



Safeguarding Partnership Working in Slough



What is working well

- Partners are willing to engage and partnerships are friendly.
- Multi-agency audits have commenced.
- Partners acknowledge the issues and difficulties facing both communities and other partners in Slough and want to make a difference.
- Good on the ground and operational arrangements exist with partners which benefits individual children and young people.
- Independent Equalities audit commissioned.

What needs to improve

- Too many meetings with the same people in them sharing similar information. Meetings and Partnership Boards to be more constructive, focused on delivery and partners held to account for developments and improvements.
- Positive discussions with partners are not consistently followed enough with joint funding to improve outcomes for children and families.
- There are gaps in the current and proposed continuum of care which could be effectively filled by partners.
- Each partner has their own workforce challenges which should not be barriers to activity.
- A more expansive knowledge of communities and their assets in Slough, and the role they can play in supporting families.

Future Developments

- Challenge the continued prioritisation of Children's Services in Slough across all partnerships.
- Use the change of chair of the strategic safeguarding arrangement to the Chief Exec/DCS to further strengthen these arrangements and hold partners to account.
- Develop the confidence and ability of partners to act as lead professionals.
- Develop stronger strategic arrangements with partners to create a greater impact for more children and young people.
- Ensure partners understand the company's transformation and the role they need to play to ensure it's sustained success.
- Map all of the different communities in Slough including the assets and services they are able to provide.

Safeguarding Partnership Arrangement: Impact 2021/22



- SPR completed on twins
- Multi-agency file audits
- Retrospective audit of 2019-2021 reviews linked to knife crime
 - Focused sub group on Sexual and Criminal Exploitation
 - Review of MACE/weekly meetings
 - Development of exploitation team
- Learning from Data
 - Conversion rates from contact to Referral- threshold document
 - Increase volume and complexity- Review of EH
 - Recruitment and retention problems all professionals- Place
- An independent review of the demographics of the victim and perpetrators
- Focus on the MASH and strategy meetings- improved attendance of partners and partnership working
- Reviewed the Multi-Agency Referral Form
- Implemented the Neglect Tool Kit

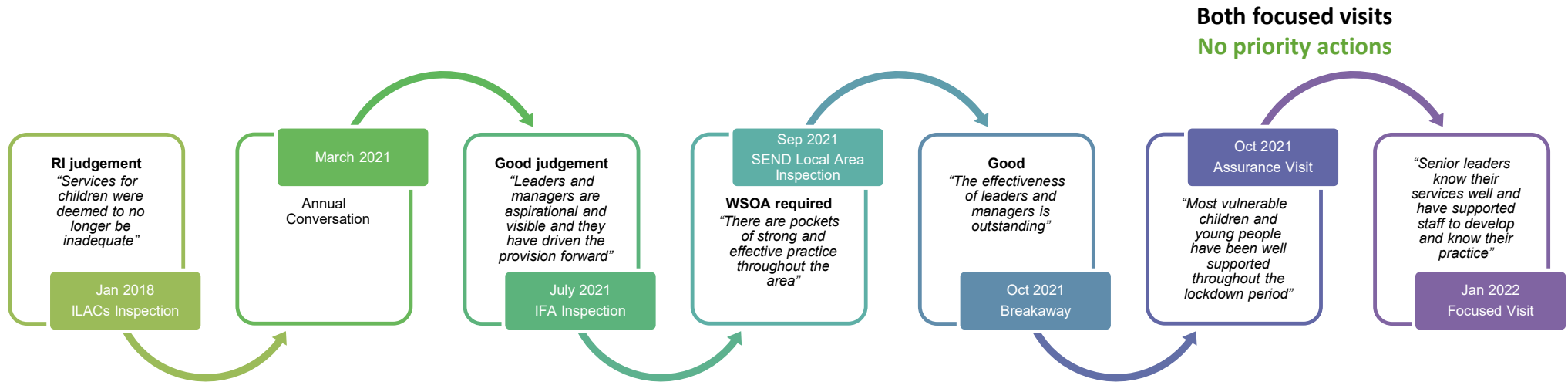


Regulatory Inspections and Legislation Changes

Regulatory Inspections



Page 73



IFA Inspection July 2021



No longer inadequate and judged to be “Good”

- Ofsted deemed the IFA to be good in all areas – Overall experience for children, Help and Protection and Leadership and Management
- Children thrive due to careful matching to foster carers skills sets which is supporting placement stability
- Ofsted saw examples of tenacity and the IFA having difficult conversations with Foster Carers in the best interests of children
- Positive feedback about the training offer to foster carers and praise for the training co-ordinator who goes above seen in other IFAs
- Leadership team is aspirational and visible with a good grasp of strengths and areas for improvement
- Some learning which the IFA will take through into a refreshed service plan – quality of foster carer daily logs (recommendation) and further strengthening of the Fostering Panel (Ofsted requirement)
- Some learning for SCF – quality of placements plans
- Ofsted noted the turnover of staff and the changes in social workers in SCF

Outcome of SEND Local Areas Inspection September 2021



- SEND services were deemed to require a Written Statement of Action.
- This was not unexpected and was highlighted to Ofsted and CQC in a SEF which was recognised to be honest and accurate
- The Written Statement of Action (WSOA) is the first part in a series of steps required to address the significant areas of weakness identified in the inspection report and will require changes at a strategic, partnership, commissioning, and operational level.

Page 75

Local area inspection findings – Concerns Raised

- Leaders have not effectively implemented Children and Families Act 2014 reforms, and the Council (BSC), Slough Children First (SCF) and the CCG failed to work together to develop and effective strategy for doing so.
- Despite a desire to improve, improvement work is in its infancy.
- Too little focus on the reality faced by children and young people with SEND and their families
- Information about support is not readily available or understood, although when parents receive support, it has been praised and welcomed.
- Co-production has been weak.
- Joint commissioning is not well developed
- Social care needs of children and young people with SEND are rarely considered unless known to children's social care
- Waiting times for assessment of occupational therapy and neurodevelopmental needs are unacceptably long.
- There is no dysphagia (people who experience difficulties swallowing, eating and/or drinking) service for children over five, meaning treatment is only accessed via emergency departments.
- The area fails to deliver services in accordance with many EHC plans, including a significant number of children not receiving speech and language therapy.
- Staff turnover is high, with no coherent workforce strategy
- Completion of EHC plans within the statutory timeframe has fallen.
- Not all schools are welcoming of children and young people with SEND and arrangements for partnership working between schools have been informal and ad hoc.

Breakaway Inspection October 2021



- Overall experience and progress of children and young people : **Good**
- Children enjoy staying at Breakaway and feel welcomed.
- Their successes are celebrated, and their individual needs are met with a range of activities
- Parents are complimentary about the care their children receive and are able to transfer some of the learning at home to improve their lives
- How well children and young people are helped and protected: **Good**
- Children are encouraged to take age-appropriate risks, dependent on their needs and understanding
- Swift and appropriate actions by staff help safeguard children when there are concerns
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers: **Outstanding**
- Children are listened to, heard, and what they have to say is acted upon.
- There is a thread of accountability and responsibility throughout the management team, with effective quality assurance processes

Ofsted Focused Visit January 2022



Summary of overall areas of strength identified:

- No Area Priority Actions
- Staff were positive throughout the visit about working for SCF and demonstrated enthusiasm and commitment to children.
- Leaders know the service well and have supported staff to develop and improve their services
- Relationship with the Council and Strategic partnerships have improved
- Noted the early impact of Targeted Early Help moving into the company
- Successfully navigated delivery of services through pandemic
- MASH helping to keep children safe
- Range of recruitment strategies are in place

Summary of challenges:

- Significant challenges in recruitment and retention, which hampers stability and therefore practice
- Bottlenecks in in early help and safeguarding and family support children do not receive service quickly enough
- Caseloads are too high and situation is fragile

What Needs to Improve in this area of Social Work Practice

- Management oversight within the assessment teams to ensure that risk to all children is assessed when their circumstances change.
- Capacity in early help and safeguarding and family support to reduce the delay in children receiving help.
- The impact of quality assurance processes to improve social work practice

Ofsted Focused Visit January 2022



Targeted Early Help

- Decision making is appropriate with good understanding of thresholds and steps up work well
- Noted improved impact of NEET team
- Some families wait too long for allocation

MASH

- Thresholds well understood and timely proportionate decision making with parental consent
- Evidence of strong management oversight giving clear direction for staff
- Partners evident in the front door but have resilience issues
- S47 enquiries commence promptly but still variable in quality

Assessment Service

- Quality is improving and a strong focus on impact on children
- Most assessments include family history and presenting issues and the analysis supports appropriate decision-making, which clearly identifies what needs to change
- Knowledgeable about children and this awareness is gained through their regular visits, strong relationships and some engaging direct work

Safeguarding and Family Support

- Capacity issues in S&FS create bottleneck in the Assessments teams
- Changing risks for a small number of children while they wait to transfer to the next team, which should have prompted an update to the assessment
- Less effective management oversight of CIN

Domestic Abuse

- Children at risk from domestic abuse are identified and range of services
- Support families affected by domestic abuse effectively

Contextual Safeguarding Team

- Risks to children are managed well -Holistic assessment and informed by multi-agency mapping and safety planning
- When children go missing, early screening at the front door appropriately informs decision-making

Quality Assurance

- Performance management reporting is well established and support focus of areas to develop
- Quality assurance processes are developing, audits continue to show variability in the quality of social work practice
- More consistency and effectiveness of auditors

Changes in Children's Social Care Legislation or Guidance



Important national developments that impacted the planning arrangements for children's services in England and Wales:

1. The National Child Safeguarding Review Panel report (**Dec 2020**) into recent child deaths has identified national improvements required regarding information sharing, partnership working and the organisational context for the leadership and management of high-quality child protection practice. The SCF Business Plan identifies priorities in these areas, including the need for investment.
2. Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (**Apr 2020**), temporary changes to the protections given in law to vulnerable children living in care

2021/22 Known and Expected Changes

1. The recent national review of children's social care by Josh MacAlister (**May 2022**) sets out the way forward for the children's social care system over the next decade.
2. The final Parliamentary approvals for ICBs (**Jun 2022**) which include children as a priority group and raise the bar for the role that the health system plays in keeping children safe. Ensuring that health commissioners and providers work closely with the council and SCF is a crucial enabler to the delivery of the SCF Business Plan.
3. Known policy changes on the horizon include the White Paper on education and Green Paper on SEND, Changes in Staying Close and Put for Care Leavers, and Revision of Working Together due in 2023



Demand and other Relevant Factors

Social, Demographic and Other Relevant Factors



Increasing Costs:

- Increase in inflation rates e.g., fuel and food poverty. The war in the Ukraine in Feb 22 has significantly contributed to inflationary increases. For children, young people, and families in Slough this has resulted in an increase in the cost of living and with an expected increase in families needing our support as they struggle to make ends meet.
- We are already seeing the impact from the cost-of-living rises, with inflationary requests from providers averaging 12% from those that have made requests.

Capacity and Demand:

- Recruitment and retention of social work staff is both a local and national challenge.
- Too many vacant business support roles, and some staff in these roles neither resilient or skilled enough.
- There is increased demands coming into the system due to the impact of Covid-19, the current economic climate, and a lack of a coordinated and coherent Targeted Early Help system.
- Growth agenda for the population in Slough as a result of new builds and families placed by other local authorities requiring our services. The number of properties in Slough is projected to increase to 57,504 by 2030.
- Increased numbers in UASC and changes in the regulations and assessment requirements will place further challenges on our services.

Covid-19

- Significant impact of Covid during this period
- Known and future impacts of Covid e.g., deterioration of mental health in children and young people and readiness for learning; shortage of professionals across the public sector with significant gaps in other agencies placing additional pressure of children's social care.

Staff Skills, Knowledge, and Capability:

- More complex work coming through and a workforce, which is inexperienced with several critical posts vacant.
- Complexity of the problems being experienced by children, young people and families is increasing due to changes in societal factors such as poverty, domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse

Sufficiency:

- Not enough placements and services to meet complex increasing needs of children not available.
- On-going concerns about our transient population with vulnerable families migrating into Slough from elsewhere in the country, some placed by OLA

Systems and Processes:

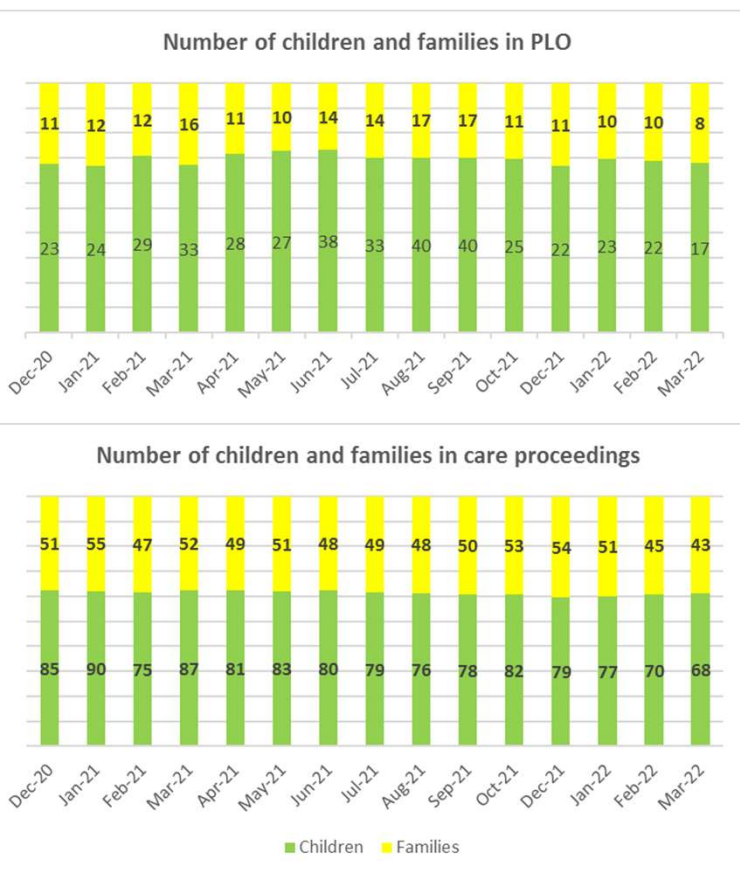
- Too much duplication in the ICS system and processes either not being followed or well understood without the appropriate floor walkers.

Impact of Covid-19 in Slough



- Strategically we have taken the decision throughout the pandemic to keep services open. Ofsted noted in the January 2022 focused visit '*Leaders have successfully navigated the impact of the pandemic*'.
- Throughout 2021, the practice standard of seeing children face to face during visits has been maintained unless either the family or the social worker have Covid.
- The volume of open referrals rose as schools opened up to all students in early 2021, but Covid within school bubbles forced large numbers of children back at home to self-isolate leaving Slough Children First as the only organisation with sight of these children to manage risk appropriately.
- MASH have remained in the office throughout the year, and other teams have worked in the office on a rota basis with strict measures in place to keep staff safe. But adhering to Covid rules has not been without consequences, causing some anxiety for staff. It affected back office staff the most who had to remain at home throughout the whole pandemic, increasing their isolation away from colleagues and their team.
- In February 2022, Covid restrictions were slightly relaxed in Observatory House and then further relaxed in April 2022 to eliminate the need for social distancing. As a result more staff have been allowed into the office and all services have moved onto the same floor. This has had a positive impact on staff morale.
- Slough has responded to its nationally comparable high rates of Covid infection, with a comprehensive vaccine programme made available to all Slough Children First staff, including foster carers from January 2021. 268 staff (out of 333 employees) had received two doses of the vaccine. 56 staff have declined the vaccination and 9 staff are not known but thankfully in the last year there have been no further staff deaths from Covid.

Operational pressures from PLO and Care Proceedings



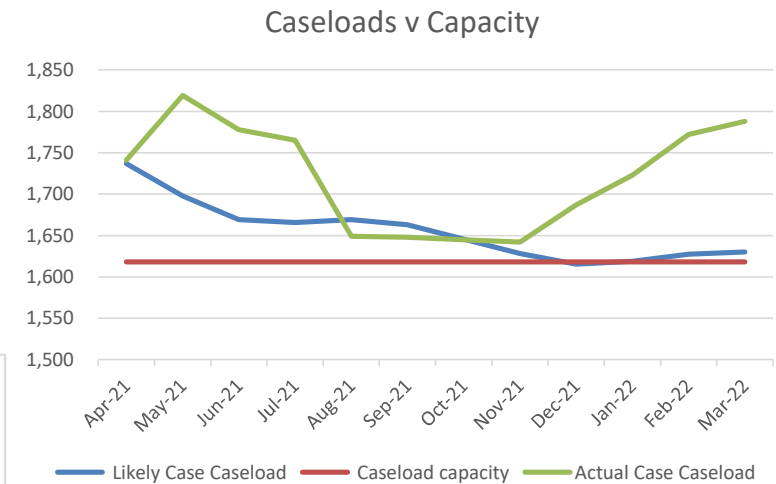
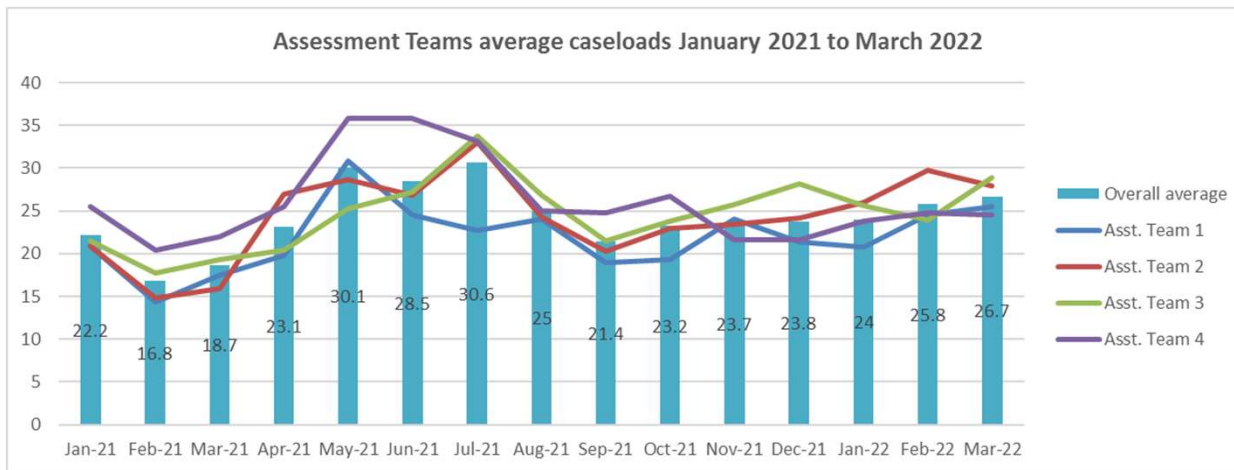
- Complexity of matters in court requiring expert opinions which takes times and adds to delays
- Delays in Reading Courts due to Covid were similar to the national picture. Though as courts return to face to face from April 2022, this is enabling some of the backlog to be cleared and Final Hearings are able to be held
- 24 children and families are exceeding the 26 week care proceeding timescale which is a consistent number across the last 12 months
- 4 children and families are currently exceeding the 16 week PLO timescale
- Care proceedings rose in January 2021 to the highest levels seen and have only recently reduced with an average of 79.3 children and 49.8 families per month in care proceedings since December 2020. The reduction is due to courts catching up.
- An average of 28.3 children and 12.3 families in PLO since December 2020 with a recent reduction as a result of de-escalating families
- New Permanency Planning Meeting (PPM) process developed in collaboration with staff underpinned by coaching and revised practice standards to strengthen the use of the permanency process in Slough which results in swifter permanence for children
- Some early impact has been seen through increased ownership of permanence for children by staff and managers.



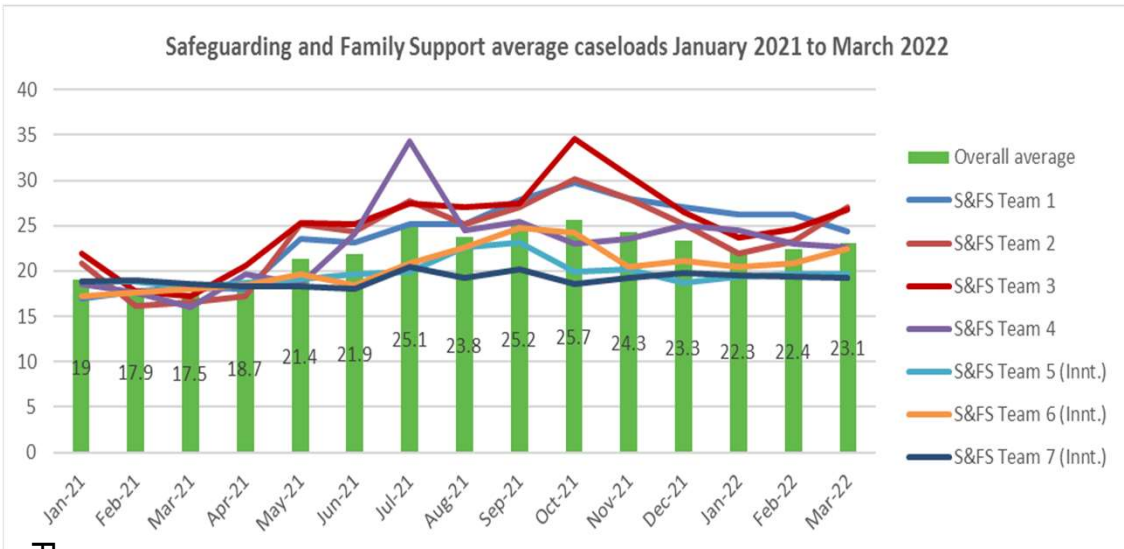
Demand Analysis: Caseloads

- Caseloads have continued to be a pressure and exceeded capacity in 2020/21.
- As seen in the chart on the right caseloads exceed our predictions at the start of the year (May-Jun) and we saw another significant spike (outside of predictions) at the end of Nov/ beginning of Dec 2021.

Page 84



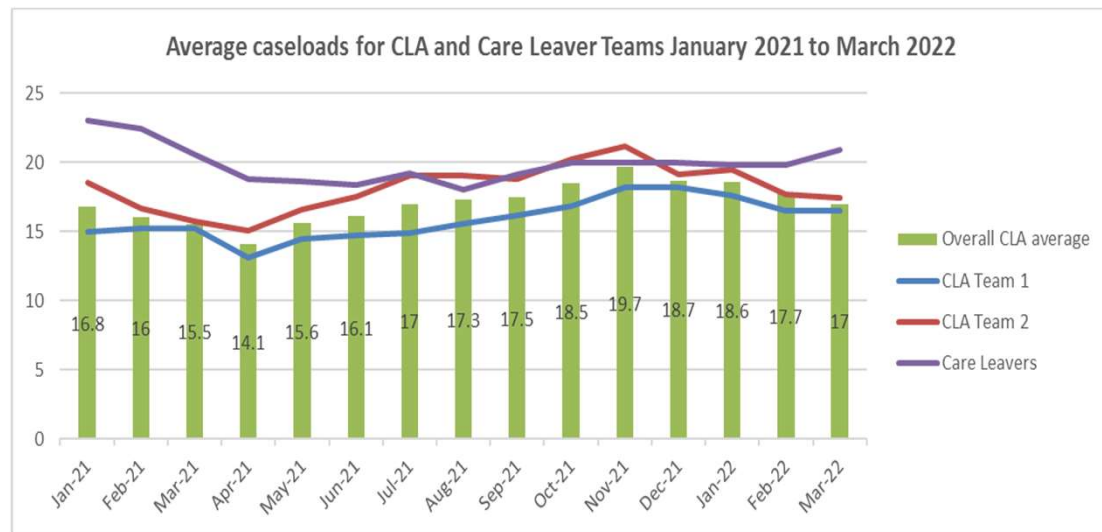
- Average caseloads in Assessment should be between 20-22 children per worker.
- Throughout 2021/22 the Assessment teams exceeded the average caseloads and were predominately in the top 10 highest caseloads each week.



- Average caseloads in SG&FS should be between 18-20 children per worker.
- The Safeguarding and Family Support teams held higher than average caseloads throughout the year, adding to pressures in the system.

Page 85

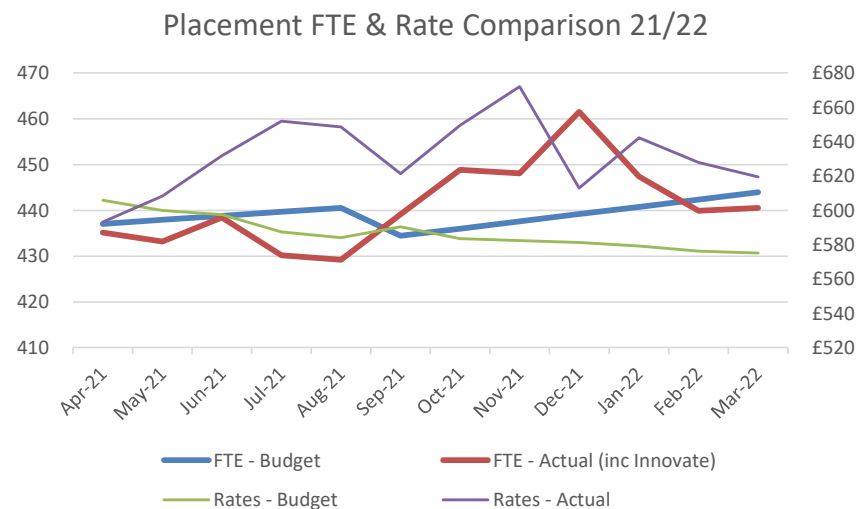
- Average caseloads in CLA should be between 16-18 children per worker.
- Average caseloads for care leavers should be between 20-25 children per worker. This does not include where they are a secondary worker for children looked after aged 16-18
- The service managed to maintain the overall average caseloads at this level through out the year but we saw a peak November, similar to caseload pressures in other areas of the service.



Demand Analysis: Placements



- Throughout this period demand for placements significantly outstrips supply.
- Recruitment of foster carers proved challenging in this period due to Covid-19
- There was an increase in demand for mother and baby placements directed by the Courts.
- There was a very high cost placement out of Slough to protect a young person whilst a criminal trial was progressing. This was a significant cost for the period.
- Ofsted began reinspecting providers and there was an increase in the number of disrupted placements as a result.
- Delays in court processes delayed permanent placements for some children.
- The MacAlister review highlighted the costs of placement and the profits some providers were making. CMA review commenced on a national level.



Sufficiency: Unregistered Placements



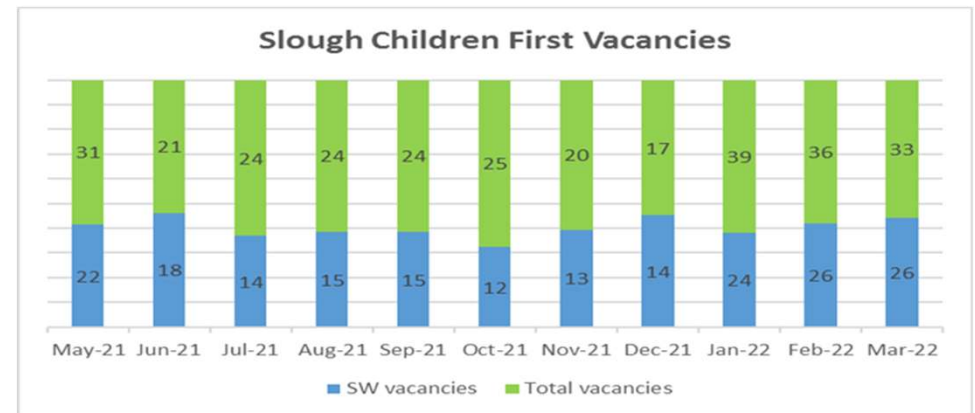
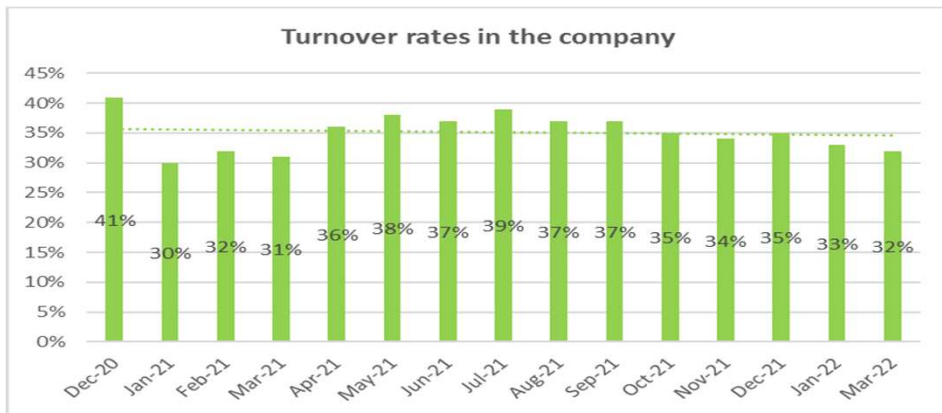
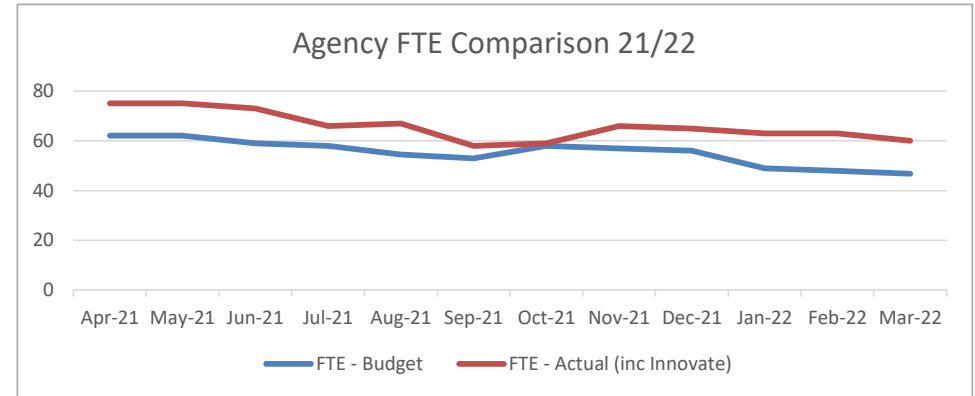
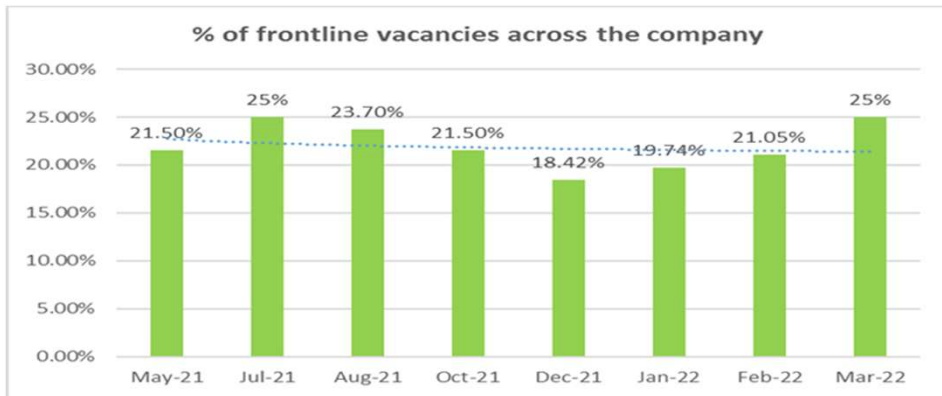
- Lack of provision for children with autism, learning disability and possibly mental health is a national challenge:
 - 14 year old with ASD/ LD/ MH: Bespoke placement setup with 3:1 staff (6 days) now in Council property with £50K plus damage. Residential school placement identified for Sept 2022
- Court directed Reg 24 placements which don't meet the minimum fostering standards support the child payments but not the fostering allowance and additional support:
 - 2 currently
- 16 year old with ASD several placement break down in local hotel with support staff for 11 days. Moved into residential placement but subsequently broke down and now moved into semi- independent.
- 14 year old concern about exploitation currently in 2:1 placement under DoLS
- 17 year old NCA involved - placed in a safe house at significant cost

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)



- New Lead Member for children agreed in May 2021 we would become part of the NTS
- Since April 2021 we've had 35 young people present as UASC
 - NTS – 7
 - Care 4 Calais- 10
 - Hotel- 15
 - Police-2
- 33 UASC currently being supported over 0.07%
- Majority from local asylum dispersal hotel
- Age assessments have been challenging- appointed additional member of staff
- Home Office specialist team have assisted - one of their assessments being challenged
- Currently have 3- JRs disputed age assessments
- Process for unaccompanied Ukraine asylum seekers in place-as yet none identified

Demand Analysis: Workforce



Demand Analysis: Workforce



| Area | No of Posts | | Impact on Services |
|-------------------------|-------------|---------|---|
| | Perm | Interim | |
| HOS | 7 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All permanent - creates stability for staff |
| IRO's and CP chairs | 6 | 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondment of staff to two PIM roles 1 vacant CP chair |
| Team Managers | 13 | 9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 of the interim are Innovate (reducing to 2) 6 Permanent managers in EH All Interim TMs in post more than 6 months |
| Assistant Team Managers | 7 | 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An interim is covering a Maternity Leave due to return in early May |
| Service Co-ordinators | 4 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Backbone of the service 2 on long term sick leave |

Key Areas of Focus

- **Organisational Development:** A culture of learning from scrutiny, audits, service user and staff feedback
- **Training:** A stable and skilled workforce lead by managers who can meet the demands of services and achieve positive outcomes for children
- **Cultural Competence:** A shift in culture with a fully engaged staff group that understands the operating model they are working in and committed management team that are skilled to lead staff and establish an environment of positive behaviours
- **Recruitment and Retention:** A clear and sufficient recruitment processes which secures new staff in a timely way ensuring the right support is in place at the right time
- 79% of frontline / case holding staff are permanent
- Voluntary turnover of 20% of permanent staff in a rolling 12 month period indicating staff are feeling more valued by the Company

ASYE's - Good pipeline of newly qualified staff with 2 cohorts a year. There are currently 11 ASYE's with 179 children and caseloads between 13 – 20 children (average of 16.3)

- This gives ASYE's the space to develop their experiences, however this is a 19% reduction in capacity to allocate a further 41 children (assuming 20 children per SW)
- This is most acute in the Safeguarding and Family Support service who have the most ASYE's (8)
- The one downside of growing our own is our experienced social workers are bearing the impact of less experienced staff with higher caseloads than we would like
- Historical ASYE retention rates are good, although attrition levels in the last couple of years has been high, so a post ASYE group has been put in place for support for social workers in their 2nd year of employment.

Demand Analysis: Workforce

ASYE's

- Whilst posts may be filled with 'permanent' members of staff, ASYE's have capped case loads and therefore are not truly comparable to experienced SWs.
- There were 12 ASYE's with approx. 124 children and with caseloads between 8 – 19 children
- With fully qualified workers this would be 240 children (assuming all are holding 20 children). This is a reduction of 48% in capacity.
 - R&A have 2 ASYEs (holding 24 children rather than 40).
 - S&FS have 8 ASYEs (holding 100 children rather than 180)
 - CLA has 1 ASYE (holding 15 children rather than 20)

Full capacity figures

| Team | Full capacity | Vacancies | Vacancy impact | ASYE total | ASYE impact | Total Impact reduction | % reduction impact |
|------|---------------|-----------|----------------|------------|-------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| R&A | 516 | 7 | 140 | 24 | 16 | 156 | 30 |
| S&FS | 472 | 6 | 120 | 100 | 80 | 200 | 42 |
| CLA | 272 | 5 | 100 | 15 | 5 | 105 | 39 |

In totality

- There are 22 interim case holding workers and 18 vacancies within the operational services, therefore 40 'vacancies' to fill to create a truly permanent workforce
- There are currently 9 perm social workers being progressed (including the international candidates)



Performance and Progress in 2021/22

People, Place and Our Children



Neglect and emotional abuse remain the highest categories of abuse, at 59% and 34% respectively as of March 2022, for children on a child protection plan.

Statistically high numbers of **Child Protection**: 66.2 per 10,000 compared to 40.8 (SN 2020/21). August 2021 was significant with the highest number of children going onto a CP plan (44) and the lowest coming off (7). This showed a new pattern where demand didn't drop over school holidays.

An increasing number of **CLA** supported by us (240 in March 2022 up from 223 in March 2021) has contributed to Slough now being comparable with Statistical Neighbours: 55 per 10,000 compared to 56.1 (SN 2020/21). August and December 2021 saw the highest number of children become looked after in the month (19 and 20)

There are periods of sustained demand during the year when the number of children open to us reaches over 1,800 (highest 1,849 in May 2021). The number of children open to us hasn't dropped below 1,600 in either 2021 or 2022 and was 1,769 at the end of March 2022.



High levels of **Child In Need** numbers due to the complex situations our children live in. Numbers were high at the start of 2021 (553 in February 2021) and reduced to 502 children in November 2021 but have since significantly risen to 621 in March 2022.

Pressures on **sufficiency** of placements for children and young people with very complex needs, vulnerabilities and/ or challenging behaviours.

Covid coupled with **cost of living rises** has caused a significant impact on Slough households. The rise in food and fuel poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, the effect on the mental health of adults and increased domestic abuse has led to families having more complex needs and increasing homelessness.

Dependencies of Performance Measures



The SCF will work within a set of interrelated dependencies with services within SBC and the wider partnership, for example:

- **IT** – The delivery of services is crucially dependent on:
 - Sufficient devices rolled out to all relevant staff
 - Devices being properly configured for maximum efficiency
 - Robust and consistent connectivity
 - Suitable software acquisition and update
- **Housing** – If there is a lack of responsiveness from housing, Children's Services may have to fund:
 - families in emergency accommodation
 - homeless 16/17 year olds
 - care leavers
 - asylum seekers
- **Adult Services** – Adult services are responsible for the management and oversight of transition services for children with disabilities. Tardy planning can lead to Children's Services retaining responsibility for too long.
- **Broader work across the partnership** on domestic abuse, substance misuse, alcohol misuse, mental health issues, crime especially violent crime, gangs and county lines all significantly impact on the demand for

Children's Services, and people's ability to parent well. The functioning of the Children and Young People's Partnership will therefore be a key dependency.

- **Information** – need a suitable JSNA which picks up children's issues hinders good quality strategic planning and commissioning
- **Universal services** – the move to the locality model, digital services and increasing self-service need to evidence a reduction in demand at higher levels, or at least appropriate triaging and signposting of services.
- **Partnerships** – Partnerships need to be strengthened to ensure good quality integrated delivery for maximum efficiency, and that suitable arrangements are in place for the tri-partite funding of placements and for continuing health care funding to be accessed for relevant children.
- We will want to track **IHAs completed within 20 working days**, but these need to be delivered by health services in other areas and are not within our control.
- Currently there is a **national shortage of placements for children**, particularly adolescents with additional needs. We want to track the percentage of placements made more than 20 miles from Slough. We will take account of this in our consideration of sufficiency and commissioning, but this is not susceptible to quick fixes, so this measure may become part of the performance framework after year one.

Hearing the Voice of the Child



I already have 2 mummies

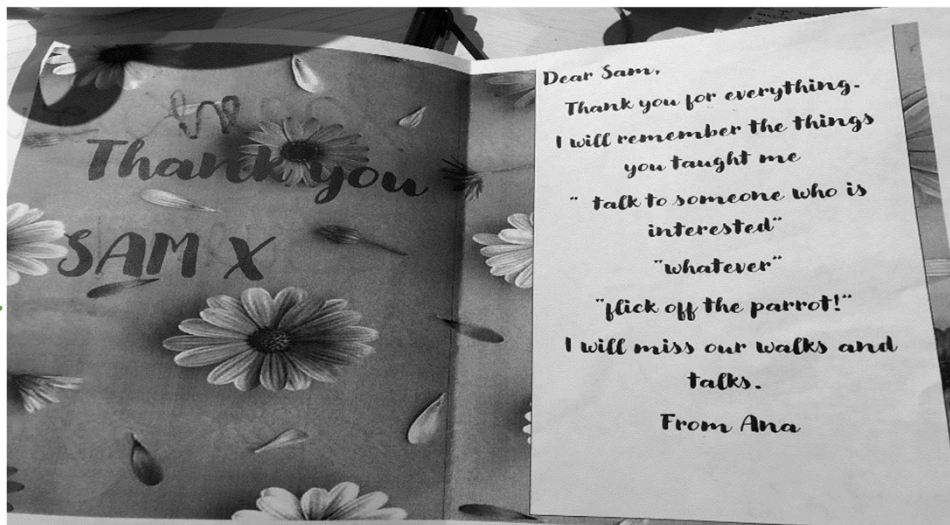
I am happier with this foster carer because they listen to me and we do fun things

I have SEND needs. I am finding the jump from Year 11 to Year 12 difficult

Now I am with my family I feel safe from x

I am struggling emotionally but I want to keep my college place going

I want to live with my brother and not separately from him

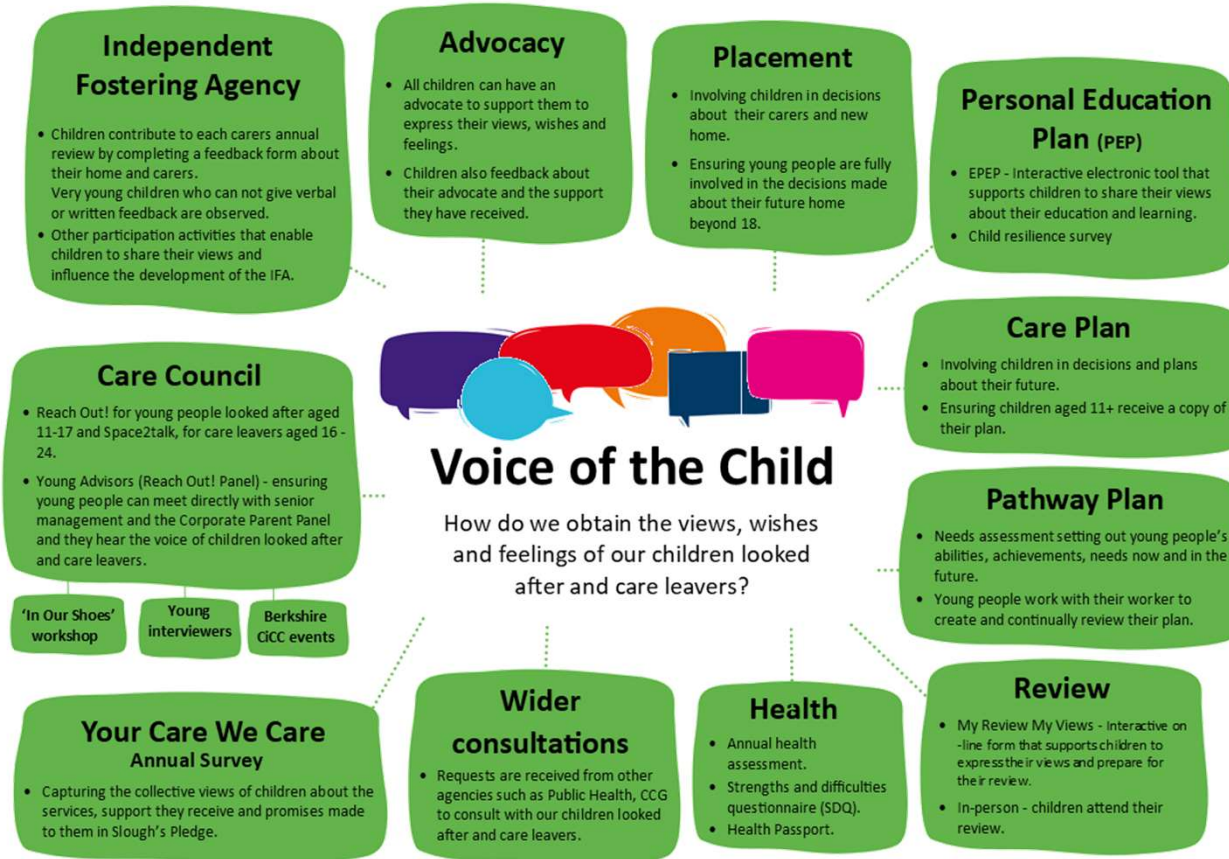


I'm worried about what will happen if my Dad comes home.

Areas of focus

- Consistently ensure that the recording reflects the workers knowledge of the lived experience of our children
- Implementation of the revised Participation strategy
- Ensure that the voice of the child and family is used to inform commissioning

Childs Voice



- Work undertaken to return to face to face meetings for **Reach Out**- limited uptake so return to virtual
- **Space2talk** continued support on line
- **Hot Topics** shared with Corporate Parenting Panel
- Consultation Tool used by 57 children- themes feel happy, want to be involved in their review and don't understand care plan
- **Health and Well being research**- views on the health support they receive
- **Recruitment** of senior staff
- Development of **training** for foster carers
- Your experience **service feedback** cards

Contractual KPIs- Company Performance Framework



| Performance/Efficiency Indicators | Good to be | Baseline Data | | | | 2021/22 | | | | | | | | | | | | 2020-21 | | 2020-21 Benchmarking | | | |
|--|------------|---------------|--------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|-------|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | | Aug-20 | Sep-20 | Oct-20 | Nov-20 | Apr-21 | May-21 | Jun-21 | Jul-21 | Aug-21 | Sep-21 | Oct-21 | Nov-21 | Dec-21 | Jan-22 | Feb-22 | Mar-22 | High | Low | Slough | SN | SE | ENG |
| % of Re-Referrals | ↓ Low | 17.0% | 25.0% | 14.6% | 19.7% | 19.9% | 25.0% | 24.0% | 17.5% | 19.4% | 25.4% | 27.2% | 23.2% | 23.5% | 13.5% | 18.2% | 19.2% | 25.4% | 12.9% | 17.3% | 20.6% | 27.7% | 22.7% |
| Assessments completed on time | ↑ High | 91.9% | 85.7% | 87.7% | 79.2% | 94.6% | 90.2% | 89.7% | 72.3% | 71.1% | 67.9% | 86.9% | 89.3% | 91.3% | 84.8% | 87.7% | 99.6% | 96.7% | 67.2% | 74.9% | 88.9% | 88.7% | 87.6% |
| ICPC timeliness (statutory measure by child) | ↑ High | 81.0% | 41.2% | 53.3% | 70.5% | 27.6% | 59.3% | 71.4% | 90.5% | 77.8% | 94.1% | 66.7% | 89.7% | 75.0% | 68.4% | 83.3% | 75.0% | 100.0% | 41.2% | 65.3% | 84.3% | 82.0% | 83.0% |
| % of children subject to CPP with all reviews within timescale | ↑ High | 75.2% | 74.6% | 69.8% | 68.7% | 82.5% | 84.5% | 88.2% | 90.5% | 91.1% | 92.2% | 92.1% | 91.6% | 92.3% | 89.3% | 92.4% | 91.5% | 80.0% | 64.7% | 83.9% | 94.0% | 92.7% | 93.2% |
| CP Visits undertaken on time | ↑ High | 80.0% | 80.1% | 86.8% | 86.4% | 83.5% | 93.8% | 87.4% | 82.0% | 80.9% | 81.1% | 88.4% | 89.3% | 87.7% | 97.7% | 91.7% | 93.9% | 97.6% | 65.7% | 87.3% | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| % CLA visits undertaken on time | ↑ High | 91.5% | 94.6% | 97.5% | 91.4% | 95.9% | 92.3% | 90.5% | 93.2% | 86.5% | 83.1% | 88.8% | 87.9% | 82.9% | 89.5% | 89.0% | 82.9% | 97.5% | 90.0% | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| % of CLA with their latest review within timescales | ↑ High | 100.0% | 97.1% | 95.6% | 93.0% | 96.4% | 95.5% | 96.4% | 95.5% | 92.0% | 89.3% | 96.8% | 97.2% | 96.9% | 96.8% | 96.8% | 93.9% | 97.9% | 90.5% | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Participation in CLA reviews | ↑ High | 92.9% | 98.0% | 87.2% | 85.7% | 89.7% | 90.6% | 89.7% | 95.2% | 90.0% | 100.0% | 88.9% | 87.2% | 91.2% | 84.6% | 88.5% | 95.0% | 100.0% | 85.0% | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| CLA placed over 20 miles away | ↓ Low | 33.0% | 31.6% | 32.5% | 30.0% | 30.1% | 30.9% | 33.7% | 33.8% | 31.9% | 32.4% | 35.3% | 34.1% | 32.9% | 33.0% | 33.7% | 34.8% | 35.5% | 28.6% | 31.0% | 21.7% | 28.0% | 21.0% |
| Placement Stability - short term | ↓ Low | 12.3% | 11.7% | 11.3% | 8.5% | 7.7% | 7.7% | 7.3% | 6.5% | 5.6% | 4.2% | 6.1% | 5.3% | 6.7% | 7.0% | 6.7% | 5.4% | 15.7% | 6.4% | 10.0% | 8.3% | 11.0% | 9.0% |
| Placement Stability - long term | ↑ High | 80.8% | 83.0% | 82.4% | 86.0% | 83.1% | 83.6% | 83.6% | 81.5% | 74.2% | 76.1% | 74.2% | 74.2% | 72.1% | 71.2% | 69.2% | 66.7% | 88.5% | 70.9% | 85.0% | 69.7% | 68.0% | 70.0% |
| Care Leavers EET | ↑ High | 48.2% | 46.8% | 50.0% | 47.5% | 50.0% | 55.1% | 58.1% | 60.0% | 58.4% | 58.2% | 56.2% | 52.9% | 53.5% | 50.7% | 51.4% | 53.5% | 59.5% | 44.4% | 49.0% | 51.7% | 51.0% | 52.0% |
| Care Leavers with a pathway plan (18+) | ↑ High | 93.7% | 92.5% | 95.0% | 91.7% | 96.5% | 95.7% | 93.2% | 84.4% | 89.7% | 89.7% | 89.4% | 87.1% | 88.5% | 82.3% | 81.6% | 83.3% | 95.5% | 80.8% | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Supervision | ↑ High | 47.5% | 74.3% | 78.9% | 78.9% | 90.8% | 77.3% | 82.4% | 77.6% | 80.3% | 73.6% | 71.3% | 86.8% | 78.6% | 79.2% | 83.4% | 76.9% | 95.7% | 32.7% | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |

What's Worked Well



The following areas highlight where Slough Children First has improved over the last 12 months

- Targeted Early Help decisions are appropriate and well considered
- MASH operating in real time with effective application of thresholds for interventions
- Improved quality of assessments with strong focus on the impact on children
- Exploitation Team completing holistic assessments informed by increasing multi-agency mapping, supporting children to remain in the family home and keeping them safer
- Range of services for domestic abuse and an internally developed programme starting RESPECT accreditation
- Improved management oversight and more regular supervision providing a better grip, and supporting leaders to have a good understanding of service
- Performance management reporting is well-established and driving improvements
- All children Looked After 16+ have an allocated Personal Advisor
- Virtual School has extended its remit to include all children with an allocated social worker with positive impact on children re-engaging in education
- Staff morale is high, there has been increase in permanent staff and good pipeline of AYSE and overseas trained social workers
- Practice improvement mentors have supported staff to develop more consistent practice, and offered opportunities for peer support and learning
- Focus on sufficiency of emergency placements, short breaks and local provision
- The impact of clinicians work on individual children
- Good Ofsted outcomes for IFA and Children's respite unit

Our Improvement and Transformation Programme



- Revised improvement plan in April 2021 focused on quality and aligned to the company's business plan to deliver its strategic aims through 5 priority areas. (see [Appendix 1](#) for copy of plan)
- Successes seen in the improvement plan have been enabled by extra capacity provided through DfE funding to deliver our transformation programme.
- DfE transformation programme has enabled 4 key workstreams to be set up in 2021. Each are showing impact and in turn positively impacting on changes to performance and the culture in the company.
 - **Stability of workforce** – turnover is reducing from previous highs and an increased number of permanent frontline staff (55.6% March 2022)
 - **Quality of practice** – More consistency in quality of practice – 6% increase in the number of children's files graded as good and 15.5% less files graded as inadequate compared to 2020/2021
 - **Contextual Safeguarding** – improved response recognised by Ofsted
 - **Sufficiency** – stronger and increased local offer, especially for 16+ young people
- This is providing the scaffolding in Slough upon which to create and maintain good services in a small unitary organisation, without large resources and with similar inner London challenges.
- The improvement plan is being delivered against a backdrop of sustained increases in demand, staff turnover, impacts of Covid and s114 which brings a variety of pressures. These collectively have at times tested Slough Children First's resilience to maintain good compliance in services.
- But we are focused on a continued cultural shift which builds on the successes we have seen already and is underpinned by consistency of leadership.

Improvements made via our Improvement Programme



Maintained statutory face to face visiting frequency with staff protected by PPE



Workforce

- The percentage of permanent frontline staff has increased from 38.2% in April 2021 to 54% in December 2021
- All company permanent staff stable at 78%
- Achieved through an increase in the number of permanent applications resulting in appointments - 22 permanent and fixed term contract new starters between Nov 2021 and Jan 2022, and 8 offers for Feb – March 2022

Participation and Engagement

- Return to face to face participation and engagement activity where it has been safe to do so
- Research underway to understand which social media platforms young people prefer to use to improve participation and communication activity
- Introduction of 'Your Experience Cards' to gather feedback from all service users

Permanency and sufficiency in placements

- Permanency planning is now embedded and owned by managers
- Improved pathways for 16-25 accommodation and support is enabling more young people to be supported within Slough.
- 79% of Care Leavers aged 16+ are in suitable accommodation (December 2021) with 90% of Care Leavers aged 18 – 21 years old in suitable accommodation (87.3% SN & 88% Eng.)

Culture and change

- Staff well-being supported via clinical support as well as sleep and anxiety workshops
- Staff generous in their fundraising for children's Christmas presents and CLA celebration event scheduled for May 2022

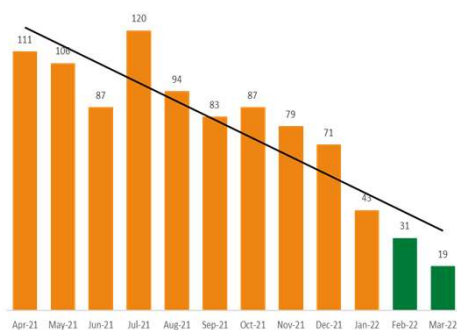
Service Improvement: Early Help



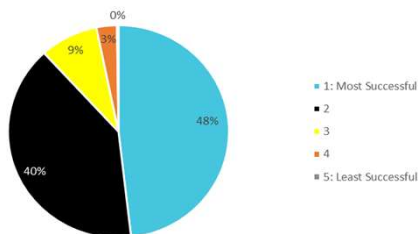
Ofsted focused visit January 2022 – “Early help decisions are appropriate and well considered. There is a good understanding of thresholds for this service”

Page 102

EH Assessment timeliness



Outcomes for families following a period of Early Help Intervention



Better

- Targeted Early Help, NEET and Targeted Youth Services have landed well in the company strengthening services for children and young people. (see next slide for further details)
- Duty manager co-located in the MASH to provide a single point of contact for targeted early help which is working well
- Early Help staff closely plan with the assessment team on step downs and this has added value to making step downs more effective.
- More robust process in place for step ups and step downs as noted by Ofsted in Jan 22 “*Effective systems are used to ensure children access the appropriate social work support when their needs increase or change is not achieved*”.
- The average length of time from allocation to completed assessments has consistently reduced in the past 9 months. The 30 day timescale has been met in the last two months (see graph)
- Management oversight and supervision standards are now aligned with SCF timescales and monitored more frequently, assisting with improved performance **to 75%**
- Pie chart shows 88% of families (689 families and 1368 children) were recorded as having the highest levels of success at point of Early Help case closure, with only 3% having a low rating.
- Audit processes are now aligned with those of the Company with an Early Help audit tool developed

Areas of focus for further improvement

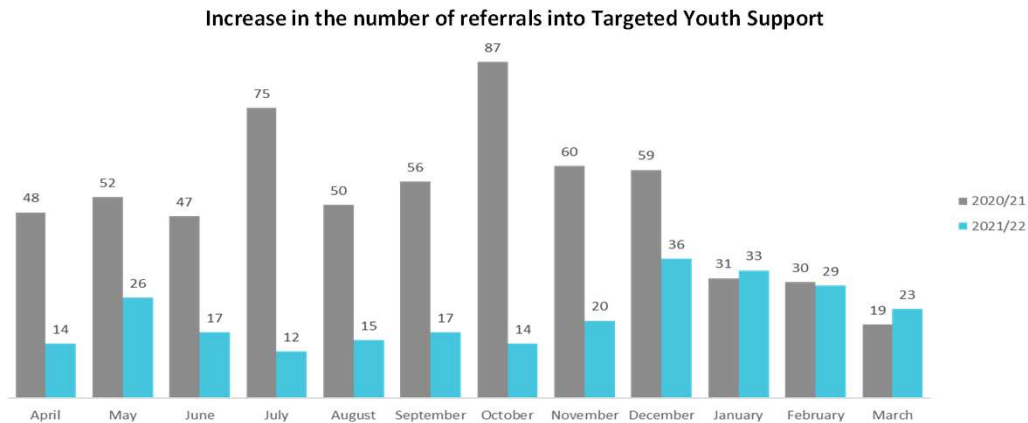
- Reconfigure the team to ensure adequate capacity in the Early Help team as noted in the Jan focused visit (*what needs to improve*) to support the timely transfer of families and increase the number of Early Help staff physically located within the Front Door
- As part of the company’s work to transform its operating model, develop a targeted Early Help service and an Edge of Care service with partners
- To support the development of the revised operating model, review and amend thresholds between levels 2 and 3 to maximise the effectiveness of the targeted Early Help
- Improve the impact of management oversight on practice and the progress of children’s plans
- Influence the development of Family Hubs to support the development of a continuum of targeted services in Slough
- Develop a set of specific KPIs and align data reporting as per other services within the company
- Further develop quality assurance activity and close the loop on learning
- Develop EH workers through a professional qualification to enable a consistent standard of evidence based professional practice for those otherwise qualified staff
- Development of an Early Help Toolkit for practitioners

Impact seen already from Targeted Early Help after aligning with the company



- **Changes in Targeted Youth Services and Engage in 2021 have impacted on service delivery**
- Services transferred to the company in April 2021 as part of changes to a Wholly Owned Company. They were led by an SBC Associate Director who left in July 2021.
- In November 2021 they transferred to the Director of Operations alongside Early Help which gave them a renewed focus
- This concentrated thresholds and gave an outwards focus on wherever the child and young person was living.
- These changes have resulted in an increase in activity from November 2021 onwards and better outcomes for children and young people

Page 103



Referrals dropped significantly through 2021 (50% reduction in referrals since December 2020), though this has started to increase back to a rate comparable with the start of 2021.

Improving outcomes for young people Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET)

- NEET workers became part of our successful Virtual School in December 2021 as they moved into the company.
- Focus since then on ensuring the destination of all young people is known
- Improvements in NEET and also “not knowns”. This work has brought Slough 32nd out of 150 LAs.

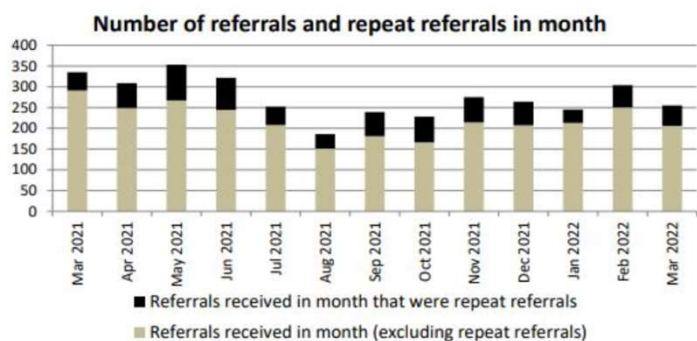
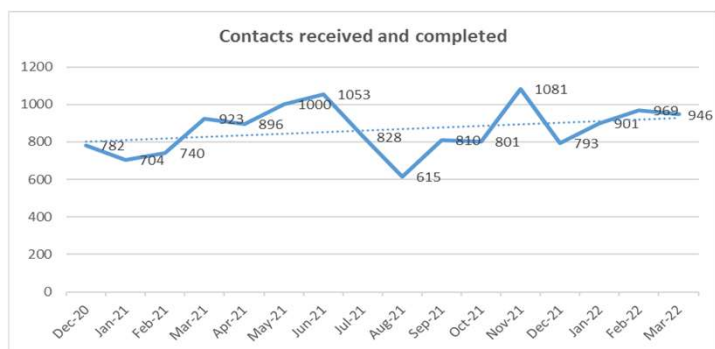
| | Slough Mar 2022 | South East | England |
|------------------|-----------------|------------|---------|
| NEET | 2.4% | 2.4% | 2.7% |
| Not Known | 0.6% | 2.6% | 1.8% |
| NEET & Not Known | 3.0% | 5.0% | 4.5% |

Service Improvement: MASH



Ofsted focused visit – January 2022 confirmed work to continually strengthen the MASH have been successful “Systems within the MASH are effective at ensuring concerns about children are effectively progressed. Decisions within the MASH are timely, proportionate and take account of relevant multi-agency information.”

Page 104



Better

- Three Partnership workshops held in February 2022 to strengthen multi agency decision making
- Low number of MASH referrals which are only applied when appropriate remains a strength.
- Consistently able to make the majority of decisions in 1 day. 99.4% of contacts where a decision was made in 1 day (99% March 21).
- 21.4% of referrals that were re-referrals (within 12m) ytd: against a target of 22% (17.3% 20/21, SN 20.6%, SE 27.7% & ENG 22.7%)
- Management oversight is making a difference to children Ofsted focused visit stated “*Strong management oversight in the MASH helps to progress prompt decision making for children*”
- Compliant strategy discussions remained a focus for the service and Ofsted saw the outcome of this work. “*Partners work well together and strategy discussions in the MASH are mostly well attended*”.
- Strong but stable agency leadership is enabling a consistency of decision making.
- Dedicated health visitor recruited to MASH
- Daily missing meeting (DMM) with police discusses safeguarding issues from the last 24 hours
- Home Office rep in the MASH for 10 hours per week for timely immigration advice and support for families
- Education safeguarding lead aligned to the Front Door to ensure effective communication and action and to support DSL network

Areas of Focus for further improvement

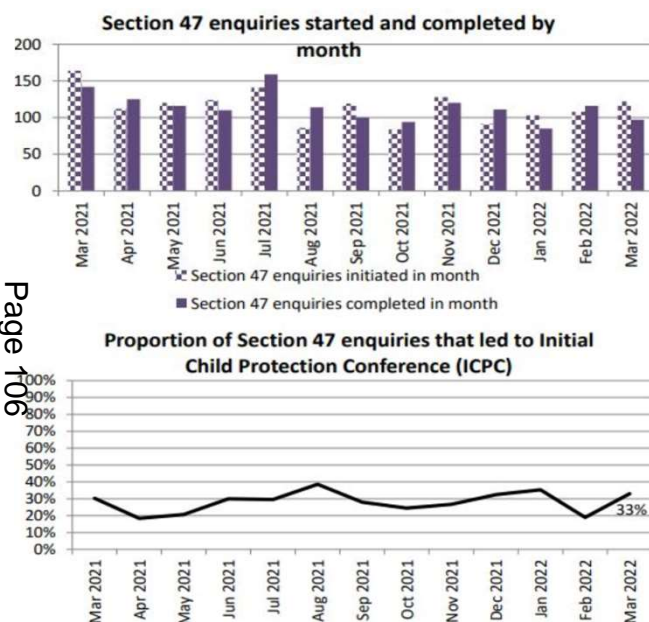
- Low conversion rate and still too few contacts with evidence of other agency intervention. A reliance remains on social care by partners accounting for the high number of referrals
- Health have remained virtual
- Partners struggle to attend multi-agency meetings as a result of their own capacity and recruitment issues, though virtual meetings enable better attendance.
- This is impacting on the DV triage pathway which is not working as it should and further work is required
- Three Partnership workshops held in February 2022 to strengthen multi agency decision making
- Prevent pathway reviewed launched February 2022
- Reducing demand as we are seeing new ‘normals’ in terms of regular peaks throughout the year and demand higher when it had previously been ‘quiet’
- Increased volume of contacts (see graph) starting with the lifting of lockdown in early 2021.
- 39% sustained increase in the number of referrals starting from August 2021 (186) to February 2022 (303). This has slightly reduced in March 2022. Average 269 referrals per month since April 2021
- Conversions rate of contact to referral remains high (28.8% ytd March 22) with multiple and increased complexity across all children
- Starting to see increase in homelessness in families including those not previously known to services and increases in teenage pregnancy. Further analysis of data required to identify and understand any trends

Actions to address areas for further improvement in the MASH



- Embed the new threshold document developed by the safeguarding partnership and more user friendly MARF with partners across Slough
- Embed the understanding of the new offer from Targeted Early Help in MASH to help divert demand away from statutory teams
- Further embed quality assurance activity in the MASH to align with the rest of the company and incorporate multi agency audits of the MASH into the quality assurance programme
- Dip sample changing trends in demand to better understand what is behind changes e.g. hypothesis spike in re-referrals contain larger sibling groups and increases in teenage pregnancy.
- Use the Front Door Monitoring Group and Partnership workshops to reinforce the need for partners to be consistently present, and to drive further improvements in multi-agency decision making to ensure consistent compliance with WT18
- Further develop the interface of the Front Door with multi-agency meetings, e.g. MAPPA, MARAC and Access Panel to support multi- agency risk management
- To continue to ensure children's views and feelings are understood and influence their plans

Service Improvement: Assessment



The Shine Project (Domestic Abuse programme)

- A bespoke 5 and 10 week family focused domestic abuse program for perpetrators and victims has been developed.
- The learning from the 1st cohort was used to make further improvements in advance of the 2nd cohort.
- 87.5% of couples (14 out of 16) have successfully completed the course, and there was a 100% completion of the 2nd cohort which benefited from the earlier learning.

Better

- Assessment timeliness finished the year very strong at 99.6% in March 2022. This has consistently been maintained in the high 80's and low 90%'s to give an average of 85.5% over the year apart from August and September when there were staffing challenges (71.4% and 67.6% respectively) (SN 88.9%, SE 88.7% & ENG 87.6%).
- An increasing number of permanent social workers in the Assessment Team (including overseas social workers to maximise their learning experience) alongside long standing agency staff who are committed to Slough. This creates stability and supports consistency of practice
- Have maintained good quality work by the Assessment Teams who provide direct work and interventions whilst undertaking assessments. Ofsted noted in the focused visit "The quality of assessments is improving"
- Consistency in management team is supporting a continued focus on management oversight (99.4% - 28th March 22)
- "Workers in the assessment teams are knowledgeable about children and this is gained through their regular visits, strong relationships and some engaging direct work". Ofsted focused visit
- Staff have a stronger understanding of Southwark/Lambeth judgements to assess and support 16 - 17 year old homeless young people
- The Clinician effectively supports social workers to prevent children coming into care and builds family resilience
- Assessment Team staff attend in Psycho-social meetings with Wexham Hospital to ensure children are not retained

Areas of focus for further improvement

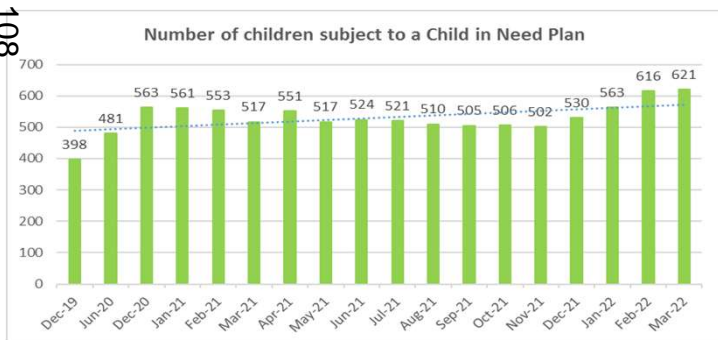
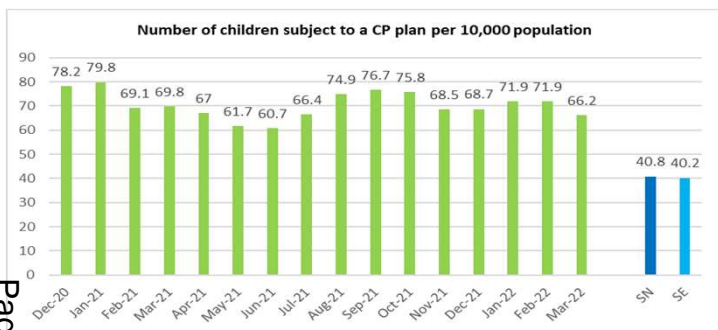
- Fluctuations each month in section 47 enquiries leading to initial CP conference (see graph). 29.4% ytd in March 22 but reached 39% in August 2021 and 35% in Jan 2022 which is comparable to SN 35.6%, SE 32.3% & ENG 36.5%
- The average caseload for the Referral and Assessment service in March 2022 is 26.7 children per worker (not ASYE's or any manager). The average service caseload since April 2021 is 25.5 children (should be 25 children) with a high of 30.6 children in July 2021.
- Although average caseloads reduced after July 2021, they have been rising again from December 2021. Social workers in the Assessment Teams had some of the highest individual caseloads in January to March, with the highest at 43 children on 28th March 2022.
- This rise was partly due to demand, the protected caseloads of ASYE's and overseas social workers and capacity in other services to transfer children.
- The affect on the timeliness of transferring children as a result of capacity issues in Early help and S&FS was noted by Ofsted in the focused visit, but children continue to be visited and social workers continue work whilst waiting to transfer

Actions to address areas for further improvement in the Assessment Teams



- Maintain a dual focus on compliance and quality expectations using the thrice weekly performance information to scrutinise performance, identify issues and necessary actions, as well as the use of increased quality assurance activity including dip sampling to check on quality and understand trends in practice
- Embed Front Door practice guidance and practice standards to ensure consistent practice
- Assessment completion timescales to be reviewed so they are in line with the needs of the child and family
- Continue to reiterate our expectations of the standards of a good assessment, providing training, tools and coaching to frontline staff on what makes a good assessment
- Complete a strategic review on whether short CIN interventions should remain in the front door to limit transfer points for children and ensure timely interventions
- Maintain a focus on the thresholds for instigating S47 enquiries through further dip sampling
- Work towards early permanence for children from the point of referral with effective pre-birth assessments (using the new pre-birth tool) and include well-coordinated and timely discharge planning meetings
- Review and further improve the twice weekly Transfer Meetings within current capacity issues in receiving teams to ensure their effectiveness in a smooth transitions for children to other services
- Piloted Family Network Meetings to be fully implemented to support families in identifying and understanding their needs and they play a key role in the decision made about them and the actions to be undertaken.

Service Improvement: Safeguarding and Family Support



Better

- 7.1% of children subject to CIN (S17) plans for over 12 months: (44 children not including long term CWD) March 2022
- Low figures maintained up to Feb 22 for % of CP plans ended after 2+ years. Was 14.6% in March as a result of a sibling group of 5: Average of 2.7% since April 2021 (SN 5.4% & SE 4.2%)
- Good average figures for Children subject to a CP plan for 2 or more years: 0.7% for Feb 22 and an average of 0.6% since April 2021 (Better than SN 3.1% & SE 2.0%)
- 93.9% ytd Children on a CP plan visited in the last 2 weeks which maintains strong performance since January 2022 (97.7%) but visiting was below our 92% target for most of 2021.
- 88.8% of CIN visits within timescales
- 100% of RCPCs held within timescale in March 22 and 97.4% for the year. This is despite significant tests in the latter part of 2021 from increased numbers of children on a CP plan and staffing challenges for CP chairs
- Supervision timeliness has been improved over the last few months and is measured weekly: 81.5%. Management Oversight is high at 96% for the service (Both 28th March 22 Compliance Report).
- The Head of Service has been focussed on the quality of management oversight through weekly meetings with the Team Managers but there is recognition there have been a very challenging year with significant management and staffing turnover in the service
- Children subject to PLO plans are subject to more regular review of their plans. Where there is delay this is now more purposeful
- Following a pilot, there is now an agreed template for pre-birth risk assessments for use in pre-proceedings.

Area of Focus for Further Improvement

- **Maintaining a focus on compliance whilst focusing on quality**
 - 79.3% of children subject to a CP Plan visited and seen alone
 - Number of children on repeat plans within 2 years has increased from the end of 2021 in line with the increase in number of CP plans (average of 15.8% since Oct 2021). This is largely due to large sibling groups. 13.5% for the 2021/2022 year against a 10% target
 - Monthly fluctuations in % of ICPCs held within statutory timescales also due to large sibling groups. 75.5% March 22 compared to 83.3% Feb 22. 74.2% ytd is below SN 84.3%, SE 82.0% & Eng 83%.
 - CIN review timeliness remains an issue at 80.2%. The main issues behind this are timeliness of the initial review and timely recording of reviews on ICS.
- **Demand**
 - At 66.6 per 10,000 population, the number of children subject to CP plans has reduced from a high of 79.8 in Jan 21. This rate is still high when compared to SN 40.8 & SE 40.2 (see graph)
 - In Aug 21 the highest number of children became subject to a CP plan in 1 month (44) with the lowest number coming off a plan also in the same month (7)
 - Nov 21 and March 2022 were the 2 highest months for children coming off a CP plan (48), though 27 and 23 became subject to a plan respectively in the same months
 - Overall number of children on a CIN plan has risen again from its lowest this year of 502 in Nov 21 to 626 children (March 22).
 - There has been a 22% increase in CIN children numbers from early in the pandemic (481 in June 2020) to 626 now.

Actions to address areas for further improvement in Safeguarding and Family Support



Children in Need

- Continue to improve CIN practice, including evidence informed interventions, and ensure there is a clear pathway to ensure plans are progressing in a timelier manner and avoid drift and delay (Ofsted action)
- Review of all Children In Need plans to identify those who would benefit from a timed step down to new Targeted Early Help teams
- Regularly review case closures to ensure safe decision making
- Strengthen the timeliness and quality of CIN reviews by ensuring there is stronger agency involvement and contingency planning
- Ensure timely and quality recording of CIN reviews on ICS to support practice

Children subject to the child protections process

- Continue to improve CP practice within the service ensuring timely visits, quality recording on children's files and effective management of risk (Ofsted action)
- Ongoing review all children on a CP plan 9 months plus with each to have clear actions recorded on their file to be undertaken
- Continue to work to reduce the number of children subject to a CP plan (currently 289 children)
- Introduce and embed the Edge of Care service to reduce the number of 10 – 18 years old on a CP plan (currently 123 children)

Children subject to PLO and Care Proceedings

- Embed the new approach to permanence planning for children at different stages of their journey
- Ensure the timely reviews of PLO plans and distribution of plans and minutes to families and professionals.
- Genograms to be multi-generational and consider both the child's maternal and paternal

network.

- Implement the Community Based Assessment Team to reduce the reliance on external capacity for completing complex assessments and frontload these to support timelier decision making by courts

For all children in the service

- Focus on those recently stepped up from Early Help and the exercise of thresholds
- Continued focus on timely and quality visits to children to drive children's plans
- Improve direct work with children through the regular and consistent use of direct work tools which promote the voice of the child
- Further develop and embed processes for hearing from and acting on the voice of parents from children and families to drive CIN and CP plans
- Pre-birth assessments completed and shared with families at least four weeks prior to the birth of an unborn child
- Family Network Meetings (FNM) to be embedded as a model of intervening with families and used to support children and families throughout the child's journey.
- Children subject to plans have a SMART outcome focussed plan which meets their individual needs and improve contingency planning
- There is still more to do despite management oversight being more present on cases (96% in the service 28th March 2022) to improve its quality and how this drives children's plans
- Further improve the quality and consistency of supervision (81.5% present 28th March 2022)

Staffing

- Improve staff stability and permanency to improve the effectiveness and progression of plans and reduce the number of social workers families have to work with.
- Reduce caseloads through a permanent, graduated and sustainable solution to the three additional Innovate Teams

Service Improvement: Corporate Parenting



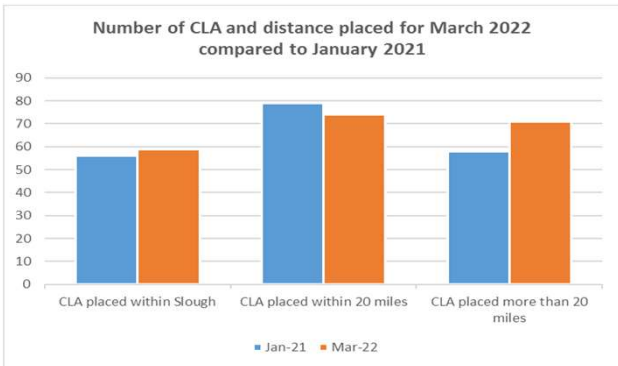
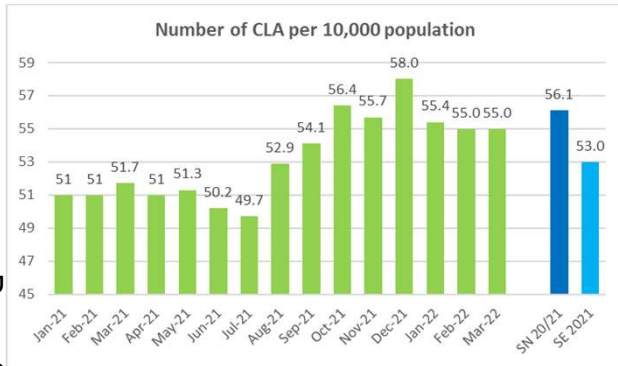
Corporate Parenting Panel

- Comprises elected members from Slough Borough Council, officers from Slough Children First, partners including education, health and housing as well as young people
- Each elected member on the panel has a lead on one of the strategic outcomes for children
- Refresh of the corporate parenting panel to move to thematic sessions and enable deep dives of good practice and areas for further development. Officer reports are now used as background information to ensure informed discussions rather than being the focus of the meeting
- Trialling how best to hear the voice of young people in Corporate Parenting Panel as some ways of doing this work better than others as part of a refocus in the company to strengthen hearing the voice of the child
- Engagement with the LGA to complete a peer review of the Corporate Parenting Panel in late 2022 to further strengthen it

Elected member engagement

- New elected member for children's services in place since May 2021 who is passionate about improving the lives of children and young people
- Training of current and new elected members to strengthen their role as corporate parents and improve the feedback loop
- CLA and Care Leaver celebration being re-instigated in May 2022 at the request of the lead member. She undertook a sponsored walk in late 2021 to raise £800 from fellow elected members
- We are developing further links with local companies in Slough to enable them to meet their social responsibilities and support the celebration event.
- Revised Corporate Parenting strategy has been signed by elected members
- Care Leaver comfort packs and Children Looked After first night back packs have been created and are available where this support is necessary for children and young people

Service Improvement: CLA and Support Services



Better

- Although placement stability (for children in the same placement for 2 years or more) finished at 66.7% ytd (due to a number of 16 yr olds leaving care), it outperformed SN (69.7%) and SE (68%) for most of the year meaning children were settled in a placement meeting their needs (average of 75.8% each month and a high of 83.6% in May)
- Children with 3 or more placements in the last year continues to perform well at 5.4% against a target of 10%. This is better than SN (8.3%) & SE (11.0%)
- Improvements in the planning of placements in conjunction with the Brokerage Team is supporting placement stability and sufficiency.
- Disruption and stability meetings are now embedded in practice to reduce the number of emergency placements
- 95% of CLA participated some way in their CLA review in March 22 with a ytd figure of 88.8%
- 84.6% of CLA in the CLA service have an up to date assessment following a focus in this area (28th March 2022 Compliance Report)
- Good response to risks for CLA as a service with timely strategy meetings
- The processes for unregulated placements is now embedded in practice and the service has an aim for zero young people under 18 years old to be in unregulated placements.
- Personal Advisors are allocated to CLA when they are 16 yrs old. Joint SW and PA visits are an area of focus for the company.
- Improvement in SDQ completion in timescale (within last 12 months) from 51.5% in April 21 to 67.6% in March 22.
- Permanent Team Managers across the service enable a focus on quality and support the stability of staff.
- Educational outcomes for CLA continue to be outstanding (see Virtual School slide)

Areas of Focus for Further Improvement

- Children placed more than 20 miles away hasn't reduced at 34.8% 21/22 compared to 31% for 20/21 (25% target). This is as a result of an increase in the number of CLA and the number of UASC. (currently 31 against a quota of 31)
- Increasing number of age assessments for UAYP. The skill mix of staff has made this challenging and so we recruited an additional SW to complete. This is also resulting in increased costs for legal advice in a challenging and changing environment
- Visit timeliness is 85.3% overall for CLA in March 2022 and 81.3% for the CLA teams (28th March 2022)
- CLA seen alone (aged 3 yrs +) is higher at 80.6% ytd than 75.7% for 20/21, but is still below our target of 90%
- Children with up to date health and dental checks performance has improved from 62.8% (20/21) to 78.2% ytd. Despite this improvement, this is still below our 90% target.
- Children with up-to-date health checks is 88.5% ytd with performance tested in the last few months.
- Children with up-to-date dental checks has improved from a low base of 34% in March 21 to 67.9% ytd as children access dentists
- Children IHAs within timescale (1m) 40.5% ytd and fluctuate each month. Delays primarily OOB CLA where local escalation processes do not address barriers
- The timeliness of referrals for IHAs also fluctuates each month and is 56% for the year against a target of 90%. 56% is higher than 41.9% for 20/21
- Average number of days to complete an IHA has risen slightly to 23.7 days from 22.9 days in March 2021
- 18.3% (ytd) of CLA leave care due to adoption or SGO which is slightly lower than SN (20.3%) and SE (18.6%), but it should be noted they have also both declined from the previous year.

Actions to address areas for further improvement in CLA Teams

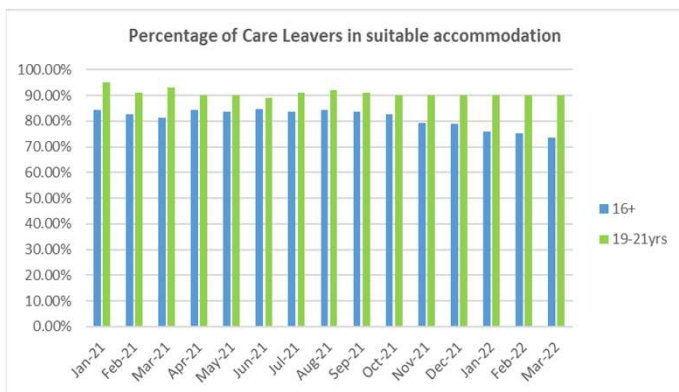
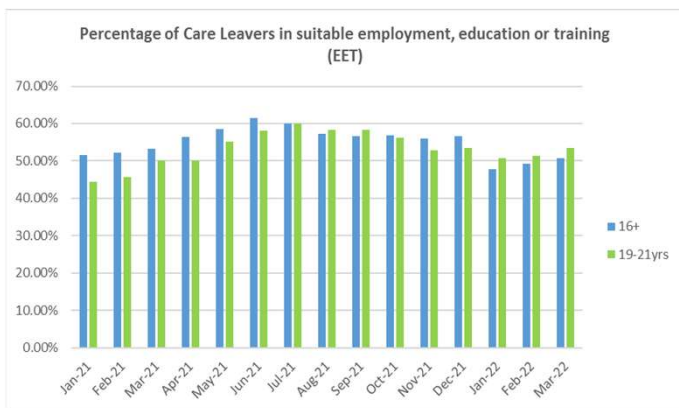


- Focused on both compliance and quality in a number of areas, with compliance remaining as a result of staff turnover
- Attention across the service on up to date and appropriate planning for children looked after
 - Review the requirement to update placement plans every 6 months to ensure they are focused on improving children's outcomes
 - Improve the timeliness and quality of SMART Care Plans, ensuring review minutes are available in a timely way to support planning
 - Improve the quality of pathway plans for young people aged 16 – 18 years old as they are currently not good enough
 - Embed a stronger process of social workers explaining the individual child's care plan
 - Ensure all children in the CLA service have an update to date C&F assessment (84.6% 28th March 2022) addressing via supervision of both the social worker and manager where this is out of timescale

Address the quality and accuracy of case summaries (83.6%) and chronologies (78.2%) on children's files which enable a good and quick understanding of the child's current circumstances

- Ensure managers have a grip on children's files through dip sampling of management oversight and supervision, and taking action to address issues identified
- Ensure the recording of CLA visits reflect the voice of the child and their lived experiences
- Develop effective direct work which is linked to the children's assessment and plan, with impactful outcomes recorded on the child's file.
- There is increased evidence of the voice of the child being seen on children's files but this needs to be further strengthened so their voice influences their planning
- The Life Story Worker to support life story work for the wider CLA cohort
- Embed the new approach to permanence planning for children at different stages of their journey
- Develop the UASC policy for Slough to continue to improve procedures for accommodating and supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- Embed the new Contact Centre service feedback process which started in December 2021 to get better feedback from service users, and use this information consistently and effectively to further improve the experience of children and families using the service.

Service Improvement: Care Leavers



Better

Strong performance for Care Leavers in suitable accommodation (19-21y/o): 90.1%; SN 87.3% & SE 85.0%.

- % of care leavers in education, employment or training (aged 19-21): 53.5% (49.1% March 21), comparable to SN 51.7% & SE 51.0%
- Some direct work with young people with complex needs has reduced the numbers who are NEET
- All managers in the service are now permanent
- Care leavers audits are now embedded in the quality assurance programme
- Revised the Pathway plan format to be more tailored and this has been embedded into practice. Next steps to add into ICS
- Care Leavers group (Space to Talk) continued during 2021 virtually and this group is commencing back to meeting face to face. Recent Hot Topics have focused on housing and the relevant lead member is following up on actions raised
- Increased number of Care Leavers been given independent, tenancy accommodation via the Council

Areas of Focus for Further Improvement

- Despite a difficult few months with recruitment and non-registration of 2 staff, resilience is being rebuilt
- Keeping in touch with 69% and 79% with 17-18 year olds and 19-21 year olds respectively, a slight reduction on last year
- Space 2 Talk to be developed further and extend to include hard to reach groups. The groups has discussed the idea of a podcast to reach more of their peers
- Care leavers with current pathway plans (18+) is 81.6%. Performance dipped below our 85% target in January 2022 following a strong period of meeting the target for most of 2021. Finished at 83.3% in March 2022
- Care Leavers with a current pathway plan (16+) is 51.8% ytd and to be further improved to reach our target of 85%
- Care Leavers offer to be reviewed to ensure we have a robust offer in light of s114 constraints
- 5 young people are Staying Put with fostering households
- Review how we work with Care Leavers aged 21 + as we have been going beyond our statutory duties during Covid to match regulations but still provide support to YP in line with their needs.
- Link with partners to develop a strong Post 16 offer to support young people
- Transfer our good on the ground links with housing to develop stronger strategic relationships to improve the housing offer for Care Leavers

Service Improvement: Children with Disabilities



Better

- Ofsted provided good feedback in the SEND local areas inspection stating "*Support for the needs of children and young people who are known to children's social care is identified clearly in their EHC plans. Records show that child protection plans and EHC plans, for example, are in harmony with one other*"
- Ofsted also noted "*Care leavers and children and young people who are looked after are routinely involved in designing and reviewing their own EHC plans and packages of support*".
- CWD criteria reviewed to support clearer processes and protocols in place for work with other services
- CWD Panel is now embedded into practice with the impact of equitable resource distribution to support children to remain at home and layered management oversight
- Transitions for children who meet criteria for Adult Social Care works very well and children are tracked from 16 yrs old to plan for their transfer to ASC.
- Meeting the needs of children and families to enable children to remain at home
- Staff in the team are creative in their approaches to meeting the needs of children and families
- CAMHs spot purchase support now available
- Improved links with Breakaway, our Children's home to take referrals of two children
- Positive behaviour support is now routinely accessed

Areas of Focus for Further Improvement

- **End of year performance affected by annual leave**
- Management oversight and supervision dipped in March 2022 to 49% and 83% respectively having previously been 96.6% and 100% on 28th Feb 2022 and similar in previous months. This consistency is supported by the stability of the Team Manager and Assistant Team Manager, both of whom are permanent
- Good performance for visiting children also dipped slightly on 28th March 2022 to 89.1%. This had been consistently higher previously (96.6% on 28th February 2022 Compliance report)
- After a period of long term stability, 2 social workers left for personal reasons and 1 social worker went on maternity which was a significant change for a small team. This was alongside the departure of an occupational therapist
- 2 experienced agency social workers have been recruited and 1 social worker vacancy remains
- All CWD children have an up to date assessment to enable packages to be reviewed upon assessment
- Continued challenge with tri-partite funding arrangements which has been escalated strategically
- CWD panel to be inclusive of health
- Further scrutiny to be undertaken on why we are an outlier for packages of support balanced with the number of children in care and the Local Offer
- Work to increase Health and tri-partite funding for placements has been bolstered by extra capacity to help achieve this
- Research and develop a charge rate to undertake OT assessments when children and young people are discharged from hospital
- Development of Short Breaks and link to Local Offer
- Transition into adulthood for CLA (especially OOB) who are not CWD who require support from adult services are not getting the right support.
- CWD team to contribute as a key partner to the implementation of the WSOA

Service Improvement: Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)



The IFA was judged inadequate in April 2019. Following 4 monitoring visits in 2019 and 2020, a judgement inspection in July 2021 found the IFA to be Good. The IFA is currently supporting 49 fostering households with 49 children and an additional 5 young people in Staying Put arrangements (comparison of 45 fostering housings with 48 children and 2 Staying Put arrangements compared to same time last year)

Better

- Stable and experienced managers and social work team enabled a continued focus on outcomes for children, supporting the good judgement
- In early 2022, the Registered Manager became the Responsible Individual and a Practice Manager became Registered Manager providing further continuity. An experienced interim Practice Manager is also in post
- Skilled foster carers with good retention rates (only 5 resignations in 2021 and all with valid reasons)
- Since April 2021, there have been 4 fostering households approved, with 4 more due to panel before the end of April 2022.
- Charms, an electronic case file management system has been implemented which gives a stronger and more comprehensive overview of foster carers
- An increase in the volume of quality assurance activity is identifying gaps in files which can be rectified to ensure their accuracy
- Significant reduction in level of complaints and allegations from children and foster carers over the last 12 months due to collaborative working between supervising social workers and fostering households
- Significant support and guidance continues to be provided to foster carers with an increase in face to face participation and engagement activities as Covid rules have allowed.

Areas of Focus for Further Improvement

- Improve the Fostering Panel which was stable with a long standing Panel Chair and Advisor until January 2021 when the Panel Advisor left. There have been several changes to the Panel Advisor since and the panel was subject to a requirement in the Ofsted inspection.
- Embedding process and systems in Charms as a new system and ensuring accurate and quality recording within
- Key documents including care plans, placement plans, safer care plans to be routinely shared with foster carers and children
- Improve Foster Carer logs through training for carers and use of Charms which enables logs to be written directly onto the system and then audited for quality
- Continue to increase the number of fostering households by 8 per year
- 65 placements have been made between April 2021 and February 2022 . This includes 26 internal and external respite placements. *We are unable to compare against 2020/2021 due to the change to Charms.*
- Further support and training is to be offered to foster carers to enable them to take placements

Service Improvement: Adoption



Slough's VAA joined Coram 'Ambition for Adoption' Regional Adoption Agency in April 2021 so it can match children to a wider pool of adopters quicker and meet the diverse needs of children in Slough.

The adoption service is awaiting an inspection following its last inspection as a voluntary adoption agency in November 2018. The overall judgement was 'Good' in 2018 and the adoption service remains a good service.

Better

- From April 2021 to March 2022, 16 children have been adopted - 4 with Coram and 12 with other agencies including several children with complex needs and "hard to place" children
- This includes a sibling group of 3 and 2 sibling groups of 2 and a 7 year old child (also deemed harder to place) who moved into their adoptive placement in April 2022 - a significant achievement.
- 2 further children have identified adopters, both of whom are their current foster carers and assessments have started
- 32 children in 25 families have received post adoption support
- A trained Theraplay social worker has supported 3 families with positive feedback from professionals and families
- The post adoption service was able to hold a picnic in the summer 2021 which was received positively by families for the chance to get support and advice from the service and other families.
- No disruptions for Slough children have been experienced this year so far
- Continued good education support for adopters from the Virtual School

Areas of Focus for Further Improvement

- Over the 12 months up to December 2021, the Company averaged 634 days against the DfE target of 426. Out of the 16 adoptions made so far, 8 were deemed harder to place and so took longer
- Continue the focus on early permanence for children in Slough through the following activities:
 - Training for frontline staff and managers,
 - Permanency planning meetings,
 - Consistent attendance by the Adoption service Manager at LPMs
 - Working with Coram's Early Permanence Manager
 - Early Permanence champions in Slough
- Provide Coram with a good understanding of the needs of older children and those harder to adopt so they can widen the pool of adopters for these children.
- Work with Coram on a long term strategy to recruit more applicants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds (33% of adopters were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds)
- Continue work to ensure fostering for adoption is considered for each child who we are family finding for, where appropriate
- Use the training needs survey to plan a coordinated approach to workforce development for adopters with RAA partner agencies.

Service Improvement: Virtual School



A strong, effective and proactive Virtual School which has been strengthened with the addition of a Deputy Headteacher to extend arrangements to support all vulnerable children with a social worker. This project is called 'Safer in a Slough School'.

Better

- Employment of a Slough Care Leaver as an apprentice focusing on ePEPs
- Experienced Virtual School team who have distributed leadership across a number of areas
- Joint training of social workers and teachers on the Virtual School's new responsibilities is enabling good outcomes for children. *See next slide for further details*
- Services to 16+ young people have been strengthened as a result of a 16+ Learning Advocate having earlier conversations with young people about careers and education opportunities. This is resulting in positive outcomes for Sep 2021
- 37.5% (6/16 young people) are staying in college for their Yr 14
- 6% (1/16) start employment
- 19% (3/16) start university
- 37.5% (6/16) are NEET - 2 have EHCPs. Efforts are being made to find them traineeships or other Education, employment or training options
- 100% of under 16 ePEPs and also 16+ ePEPs have been completed within timescales
- Children continue to do very well in school in exams
- 7/10 of the Y6 pupils had an EHCP and made good progress against individual targets
- Yr 11 GSCE results were the best ever for the 15 pupils, including 5 with an EHCP. They scored 43 against 21.4 for CLA national (2020) and all have post GSCE destinations
- 97.5% of CLA (155 out of 159 children) attend good and outstanding schools. 4 children attend a 'requires improvement' school and their needs are met.
- 23 young people confirmed at university this year (19 last year), studying a range of courses including criminology, education and nursing. There is also 1 graduation this year

Areas of Focus for Further Improvement

- The retirement of the long standing and well respected Virtual School headteacher brings both great opportunities and risks
- Our focus will be to ensure the Virtual School maintains its high standards whilst we review its delivery model and develop it even further
- Develop a coherent graduated response approach in conjunction with Haybrook College to support our most vulnerable learners with proportionate intervention.
- Continue to focus on reducing the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) and reduce the number of unknown to as low as possible – currently 2.4% for unknown
- No child is missing education who is known to social care in particular those on school rolls but not attending.
- Find and implement effective ways to measure and analyse educational attainment and progress of CIN/CP children.

Safer in a Slough School - Our Approach



- Appointed an Assistant Head from within the Virtual School who has since become the interim Virtual School headteacher
- Built on our successful pilot for children on Edge of Care
- Engaged schools early in our new responsibilities and showed them how this will benefit them.

What everyone can benefit from:

- We are developing a **Webpage** offering a 'one stop shop' with FAQs continually reviewed in line with practice and guidance as well as **Signposting** to partner agencies
- Tailored Training Opportunities for Social Workers, Designated Teachers, Designated Safeguarding leads and other professionals involved with our young people, either face to face or virtually delivering DfE and local practice in respect of the expectation of the education provision of a child with a Social Worker
- We will be sharing of **Local Data and National Trends** for scrutiny to DfE and other partners to help inform further practice across the team around the child

How we can help you as a professional:

- Our **Advice Line** and online support is available during office hours providing advice, information, guidance and support
- **Education Information Surgeries** for Education Providers and Social Workers supported by Virtual School, where appropriate facilitating guest attendance by other professionals such as Attendance and Educational Psychology for Specific Targeted opportunities
- The opportunity to bring children of concern to the **CME / EHE** Group
- Development of **Peer Support** opportunities to share best practice.
- Collaboration to offer **Attachment Awareness Training** for schools
- **'Safer in Slough Schools' recognition** for those education provisions who show best practice and engage positively around the child with a Social Worker

Impact on children:

- Attendance, engagement and attainment improving: For example:
 - A family at the point of prosecution is now working on a graduated re-integration for their child back to school supported by an overseas trained social worker who has also received support on further their understanding of education in the UK.
 - Two young people who had been out of education for some time are now back in education and have started to view colleges for the next stage of their education, potentially preventing 2 young people from being NEET at the end of the school year
- Social workers are more confident in challenging the education system to ensure their children access the right education and have a better education of education – For example
 - YP at secondary school was finding attendance a challenge whilst changing their identity. SW was supported by VSDepHT to negotiate a Pastoral Support Package with the school, allowing the young person time to reintegrate successfully back to school alongside on a long term plan to support their transition.

Sufficiency Achievements



- Focus on providing and commissioning , quality assured, local provision which meets needs and improves children's outcomes
- Increase in in-house foster placements
- Tender for, (implementation by August 2022,) of accommodation and support for young people aged 16-25 to provide 40 beds within Slough and step down arrangements and support to promote tenancy stability
- Procurement of block residential of 4 beds for 11-18 year olds in Slough
- Accreditation of semi-independent providers within 10 miles to improve access and choice. There has been a growth from 10 providers providing 22 beds in February 2021 to 18 providers providing 55 beds in December 2021.
- Joint work undertaken with Slough Borough Council on a contract register which gives SCF access to their providers, for example taxis, to reduce costs.
- AMZ project enabled 3 young people to move back to Slough from distance placements, access education and maintain family contact
- Effective project with the Care Leavers team focused on care leavers aged 18+ who can't go into their own flat on a fully independent basis has brought all but 1 young person back to the local area
- Significant work with local providers to put in place arrangements for out of hour's placements for young people aged 16-18 years.

Serious Incidents April 2021- March 2022



| Date | Incident | Issues | Actions taken |
|-----------|---|---|---|
| July 2021 | 6-month-old baby was on holiday with his mother and grandmother and was found dead in the bed in which they had all slept, after consuming alcohol and smoking. | Neglect Sudden Infant Death/ Safe sleeping | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rapid Review has taken place partners agreed that the case meets the criteria for a Safeguarding Practice Review As the case was only recently referred to Slough and Slough Children First were not in contact with the family RBWM have agreed to lead the SPR. Information about safe sleeping and SUDI have been shared during the Practice Learning Week. |
| 15/08/21 | 2 Young People was stabbed in an incident which took place on 15/08/2021. 1x Young person was a looked after child. | Knife crime Exploitation Trauma and loss (death of a significant adult) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rapid Review meeting has taken place and the agreement was this did not meet the criteria for a SPR. Noted that a significant amount of analysis on knife crime and exploitation had been completed following the death of a young person in 2019 so many elements have been explored. Safeguarding Partnership raised a query regarding the decision and risk analysis in bringing young person back to Slough from a stable, therapeutic placement elsewhere. |
| 15/08/21 | Young person was stabbed in an incident on 15/08/2021. This took place on the same day as the other two incidents but in a different part of Slough | Knife Crime Exploitation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As above |
| 16/02/22 | Child Looked After became ill and died – underlying health conditions complicated by Covid – No safeguarding concerns. | Natural Causes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Rapid Review, National Panel agreed with this recommendation |

Areas of Focus for Further Improvement



- Focus on the consistency of good quality practice to ensure effective child centred interventions
- Recruitment and retention are our biggest challenges, particularly in Safeguarding and Family Support
- Embed our organisational development strategy to assist in the attraction, recruitment, development and retention of experienced, quality staff
- Development of a new Operating Model articulated in our Business Plan include a robust Targeted Early Help Service and a complete continuum of care including the implementation of an effective edge of care strategy
- Develop the role of partners in Slough to help manage some of the demand for statutory services including the role of lead professionals
- Review our CIN interventions to ensure they are timely and evidence informed
- Strengthen our approach to hear the voice of the child in our recording
- Further develop our participation strategy to include CIN, those subject to CP plans, and families wider networks
- Further embed our quality assurance framework to ensure we close the loop and involve front line practitioners and managers more effectively
- Review our exploitation strategy and delivery model, to ensure we maximise the impact on children across the whole child's journey

Conclusion

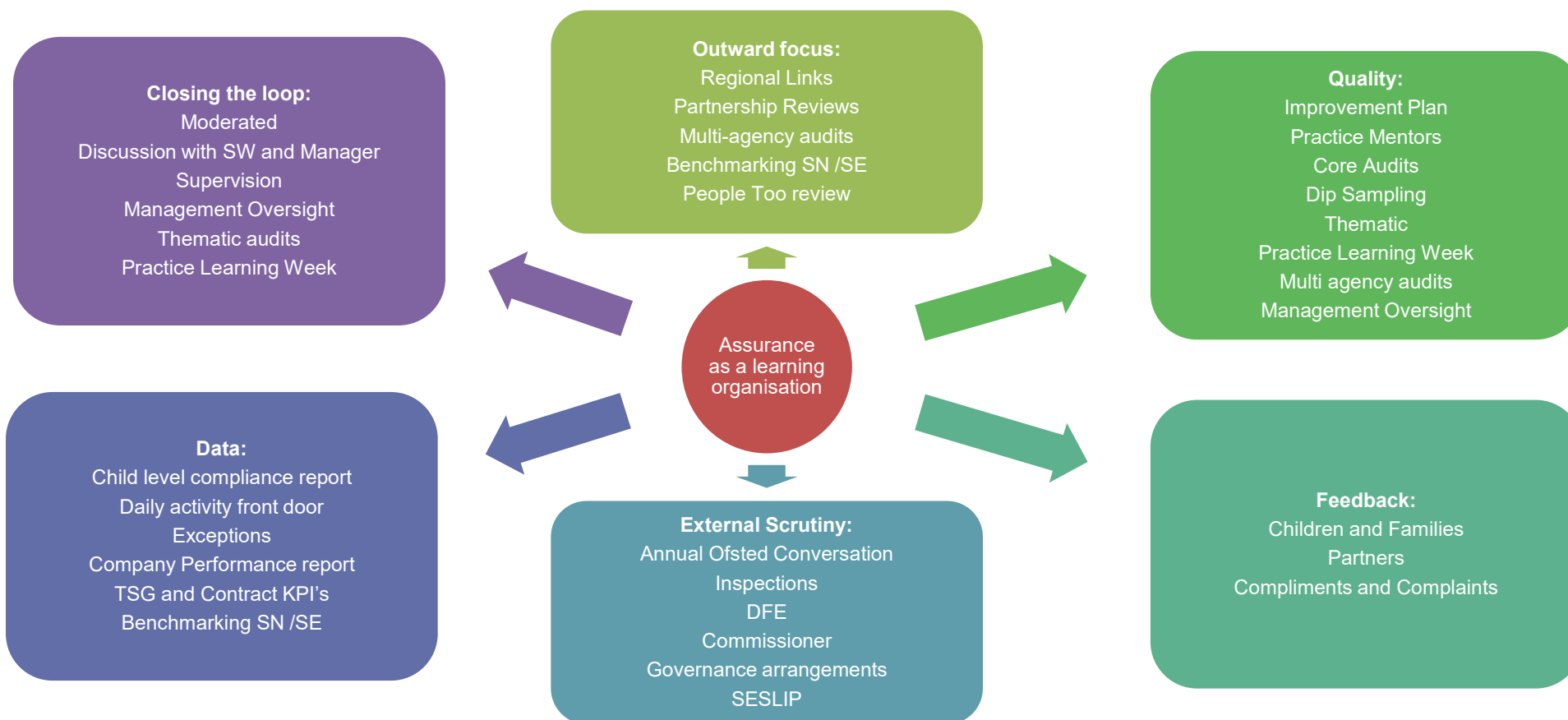


- Services over the last year which have transferred to the Company or have landed well and been developed, which bodes well for future innovation as the Company develops its 7 year Business Plan.
- Services provided to vulnerable children, young people and families in Slough have been tested by increases in demand, staffing issues and Covid and its resulting impacts.
- As a result there remains some variability across areas of practice, in particular the fragility of S&FS confirmed by the most recent Ofsted focused visit.
- Our biggest challenge continues to be the stability of our workforce, despite recent and sustained improvements in the permanent to agency staffing ratio and an early but significant trend of reducing turnover rates.
- We have an amazing workforce seen by Ofsted who stated "Staff like working for Slough Children First, morale is good and they are committed and enthusiastic" and we know our staff are the key to achieving our ambitions.
- We want to be judged as 'good' in the next few years.
- Our plans include the development of a new operating model with an increased focus on early intervention and prevention, a focus on developing and retaining high quality, permanent staff and being an outward facing, learning organisation with children at the heart of all we do.
- This we believe will enable us to turn our strategic priorities and aspirations into reality.



Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance mechanisms in Slough



Quality Assurance: Post Pandemic Support for Staff



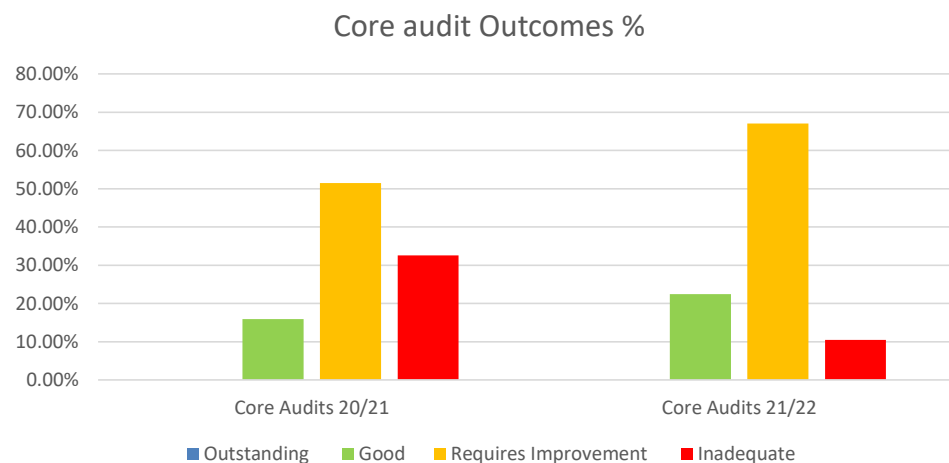
- **4 Core Workshops:** Run on a repeating cycle, created in response to identified areas of improvement and learning from practice audits: Assessment/ Direct Work/ Language in social work practice/ The Child's Journey
 - **Targeted Workshops:** Close the loop S47s, Plans, Care Plans, Pathway Plans (100 attendees)
 - **Specialist Workshops:** With the Virtual School on: Pre-Birth Assessment (SPR), 'Understanding Fostering for Adoption', 'How to write a good Child Permanence Report', 'Promoting the education of children with a social worker',
 - **Coaching:** Individual, including intensive coaching from September to December 2021 for the overseas SW recruits to ensure that they land well and are orientated
 - **Facilitated Peer Supervision for First Line Managers:** Creating a shared learning culture/cohesion
 - **Practice Initiatives:** Permanency Planning Meetings and Family Network Meetings.
- Practice**
- 'Big Three' –getting the basics right - **Chronologies-Case Summaries-Genograms; Plan-Do-Review.**
 - Reducing Parental Conflict and Working with Men
 - Understanding Regulation 24
 - Family Network Meetings
- Coaching**
- First Line Managers – targeted monthly facilitated peer supervision groups.
 - Team-Based coaching in SFS – intensive audit work and coaching offered
 - Overseas recruits to ensure they land well
- Closing the loop**
- Learning from audits – focus on Pre-Birth Assessment -also delivered to Assessment Team and into CLA Whole Service Meeting
 - Understanding and embedding the Practice Framework
 - Practice Learning Week

2021/22 Audit Outcomes



- Improvements in the quality of children’s files, with the company meeting its target of 85% of files RI or better with 90% (110 out of 123) of core audits undertaken in 2021/2022.
- Management oversight overall in timescale finished the year slightly down at 89.5% (March 2022 TSG) but with an average of 92.9% since Jan 2021.
- Where management oversight is directly reported on as part of audits, it was judged either good or requires improvement in the majority of cases, with just 10.5% of the core audits in deeming management oversight inadequate in supporting safe and reflective practice.

Page 126



- 123 core audits completed in 2021/22 compared to 101 in 20/21.
- 6.6% increase in audits graded good 22.5% in 21/22 compared to 15.9% in 20/21
- 15% increase in audits graded as RI 67% in 21/22 compared to 52% in 20/21
- 22% decrease in audits graded as inadequate 10.5% in 21/22 compared to 32.6% in 20/21.
- Of the 49 CP audits 89.8% were graded as RI or good 10.2% CP audits inadequate
- Of the 44 CIN audits 88.6% were graded as RI or good 11.4% inadequate
- Of the 25 CLA audits 88% were graded as RI or good 12% were graded as inadequate.
- Of the 6 Care Leaver audits 100% were graded as RI or good.

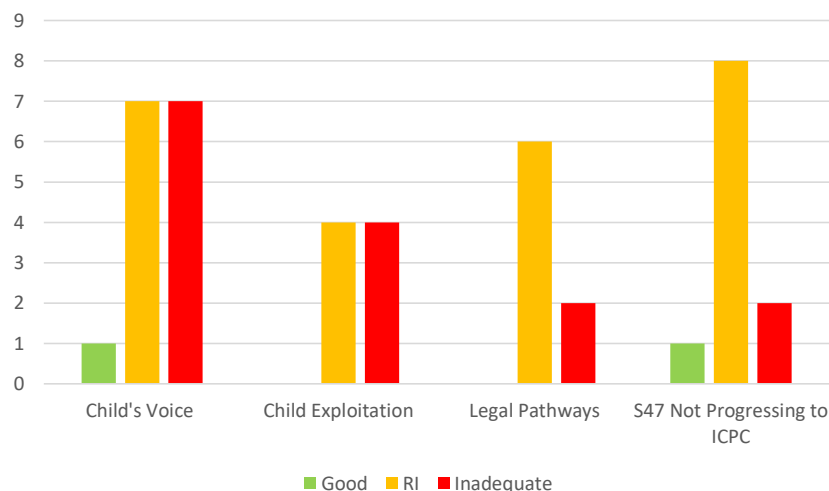
The majority of practice remains in RI overall.

Thematic Audits



- A range of thematic audits have taken place throughout the year which have focused more on specific issues where we felt we need to understand practice better in order to focus on what may need to improve.
- These audits were completed by the Improvement Team over a number of months and findings were used to inform part of the activity supporting the ongoing Improvement Plan supported by DfE funding.

Thematic Audits



Key Findings:

- The thematic audits provided an opportunity to deep dive into specific areas of interest.
- The Improvement Team were able to quickly address inadequate audits with social workers and managers where necessary.
- In two of the thematic audits practice between RI and inadequate was quite evenly split.
- In two of the thematic audits practice was more in line with the core audit outcomes with the majority of practice RI.
- The Improvement Team have been able to implement programmes around a large proportion of the key findings of the themed audits and this remains ongoing.

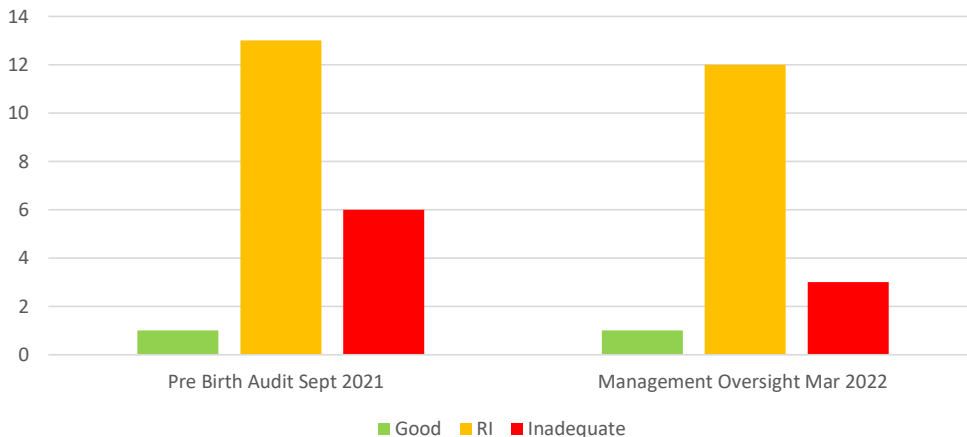
Practice Learning Week



- In the past year we have held two Practice Learning Weeks one in September 2021 and one in March 2022.
- Whilst each of these events have enabled a sharing of a large bank of research, information, learning from Safeguarding Practice Reviews and direct work tools they have also enabled senior leaders to complete additional audits linked to a particular theme or issue.
- In September 2021 the audits were focused on pre birth and baby assessments, linked to a Safeguarding Practice Review.
- In March 2022 the audits were focused on the quality of supervision and management oversight.

Page 128

Practice Learning Week Audits Sept 2021 and March 2022



Key Findings

- The pre birth audits identified a higher number of inadequate audits, as this was at the start of our focus on pre birth assessments as an area for improvement it was expected that we would identify areas for development.
- The majority of practice in both areas of audit activity was RI which correlates broadly with other audit outcomes.



Financial Outturn and Risks

Financial Outturn for 2021/2022

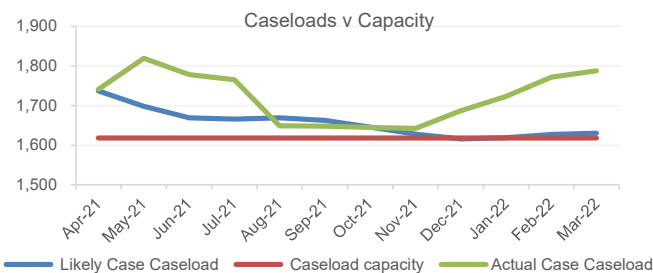


- SCF reported an outturn position of (£1,332k) loss for the full year against a balanced budget.
- The outturn loss was a result of a number of key factors through the year:
 - Covid 19 impacts on demands
 - Growing complexity of cases
 - Reliance on interim staff
 - Growth in UASCs
- The 2021/22 budget set in September 2020, 6 months into the Covid Pandemic, an event not seen in our lifetime nor one anyone could predict. A time when the country had come out of lockdown and Schools were re-opening. The budget assumed we had seen the worst with an expectation for caseloads to fall. With a further lockdown at Christmas, caseloads remained high throughout the year. The impact of Covid had a significant impact on the cost base;
 - Staffing costs overall were adverse, requiring the retention of Innovate teams to meet demands and higher than planned agency staff numbers as turnover remained high due to too high a caseload per worker
 - Increasing complexity of cases, with rising exploitation of the vulnerable, exacerbated through the pandemic with rising mental health issues, the impact being seen in growth in legal proceedings.
 - Legal proceedings were also impacted through closure of courts and delays in proceedings, adding additional legal hours and increasing legal spend.
 - Covid led to continued support for care leavers requiring support and accommodation with no alternate housing options available.
 - The cost pressures were partially offset by additional Covid grant funding.
- The budget worked on the premise of a zero pay rate rise for 2021/22 as set out for all public sector workers. This was not the case, with staff awarded a 1.75% pay increase in March 2022 for the year.
- SCF saw a significant rise in the number of UASCs in the system, rising from 9 at the end of March 2021 to 26 by March 2022 (full time equivalents). This had a significant impact on placement costs in year, partially offset by home office funding.
- SCF were largely successful in delivering on its savings plans, achieving the overall savings targets, over achieving on targeted placement rates and Health contributions against savings plans, offset by under achieving projected reductions in care leavers, delayed with Covid as highlighted above. SCF also managed staffing vacancies to deliver additional underspends to offset the pressures, along with attracting additional income streams to offset the pressures.

Financial Outturn for 2021/2022



| | Full Year | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| | Actuals | Budget | Variance |
| | £k | £k | £k |
| SBC Core Income | 31,534 | 31,534 | 0 |
| DFE Income | 2,701 | 2,454 | 247 |
| Transformation - DFE | 1,459 | 1,481 | (23) |
| Other Income | 3,223 | 1,891 | 1,332 |
| Total Income | 38,917 | 37,360 | 1,557 |
| Pay | (11,513) | (12,457) | 944 |
| Agency | (5,688) | (3,934) | (1,754) |
| Placement Allowances | (14,600) | (13,434) | (1,165) |
| Other Child Support Costs | (3,276) | (2,532) | (744) |
| Legal Fees | (2,171) | (1,406) | (765) |
| Other Overheads | (2,256) | (2,114) | (142) |
| Transformation costs | (1,459) | (1,481) | 23 |
| Total Expenditure | (40,964) | (37,360) | (3,604) |
| Net Surplus/(Loss) | (2,046) | 0 | (2,046) |
| Additional Charges to the Council for Covid | 714 | | 714 |
| Net Surplus/(Loss) | (1,332) | 0 | (1,332) |



Key Variances.

- **DFE income £247k favourable** - £100k new grant for extension of virtual school duties, £137k final agreed running cost grant to meet costs.
- **Other Income £1,332k favourable** - £491k Home office funding of increase in UASCs, £152k health funding contributions to packages, overachievement on budgeted savings targets, £262k Public Health contribution to CSC costs for early help, £110 Troubled Families funding of costs for running the programme and contribution to early help staffing, £115k DA duty grant, new income stream to cover costs of working with families, £72k Covid winter grant to help provide additional support to those families most vulnerable through Covid, £60k COMF funding to support the coordination of support into families through Covid, VAT rebate £42k
- **Pay & Agency (£810k) adverse** - (£1,796k) extension and increased rates for Innovate teams to meet the continuing higher than planned demands on service, (£412k) additional costs of grant activity funded above, including extension of virtual school duties, running cost grant, DA duties and troubled families. (£210k) pay inflation paid which was not budgeted for, partially offset by vacancies £1,608.
- **Placements (£1,165k) adverse** - (£505k) increase in UASCs as highlighted, (£540k) increase in residential & (£196k) fostering rates, partially driven by the increased complexity of needs presenting, also reflecting the additional support needed for young people in care through Covid. The increased rates were partially offset by reduced demand for remand services in year against budgeted projections.
- **Other support costs (£744k) adverse** - (£371k) care leavers, extended support through Covid with no alternate housing arrangements available, (£182k) additional support to children and families through additional grant funding highlighted above, including extension of duties for virtual school, Covid winter grant and COMF funding. (£191k) additional S17 spend to support young people through Covid.
- **Legal Fees (£765k) adverse** - sustained higher than planned proceedings with increased complexity of need and rising demands alongside delays from court closures as a result of covid, resulting in the added pressure.

Central Government Funding



| Funding Stream | 2021/22 Funding Amount | 2022/23 Funding Amount | Status |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Pupil Premium Plus | | | |
| Remand Grant | | | Reduced in 2021/22 |
| Youth Justice Board Grant | | | |
| Strengthening Families | | | |
| Department for Education | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Corporate Risk Register

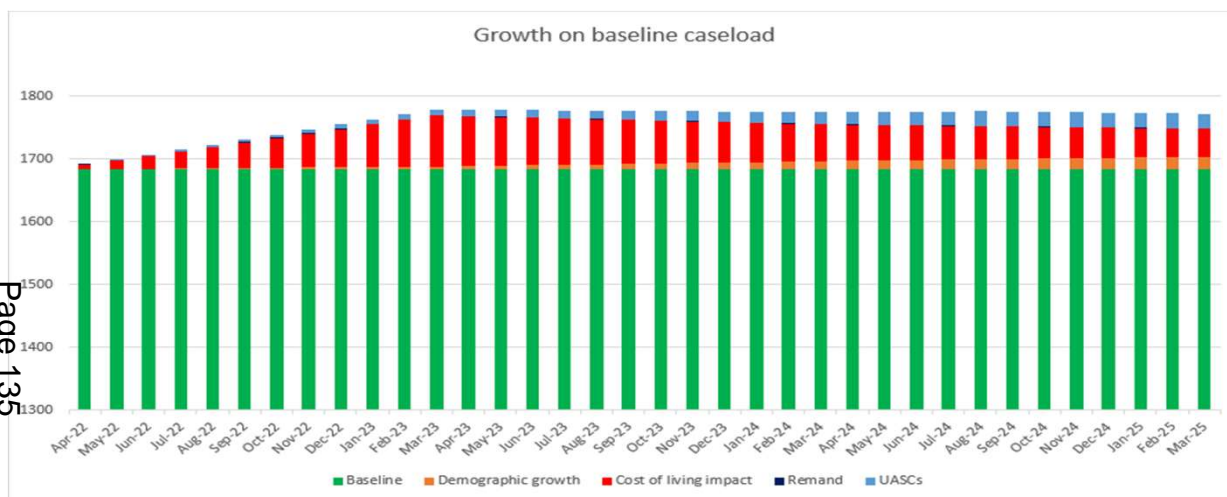


- The Company Corporate Risk Register captures the urgent and high-level risks across the company, which are reviewed regularly by ELT, the Audit and Risk Committee and the Company Board.
- The highest ranking risks managed in 2021/22 were:
 - Sustainability within budget
 - Stable skilled and permanent workforce
 - Stable and skilled executive leadership
 - Covid-19
 - Compliance against Regulations and Quality Assurance
 - Transition to wholly owned company
 - IT equipment and services not sufficient for requirements
 - Update of business continuity plan
 - Getting to good - Practice quality and improvement
 - Introduction of IR35
 - Whistleblowing's



What's Next

Expected Demand: Next 2 years



| Average caseload profile | | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2024/25 |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Targeted early help | Baseline | 985.0 | 985.0 | 985.0 |
| | Demographic growth | 1.5 | 6.3 | 12.0 |
| | Cost of living growth | 28.7 | 45.0 | 33.1 |
| | Total targeted caseloads | 1,015.2 | 1,036.2 | 1,030.1 |
| Statutory services | Baseline | 1,783.9 | 1,683.9 | 1,683.9 |
| | Growth in UASCs | 5.0 | 14.6 | 22.6 |
| | Demographic growth | 2.4 | 9.1 | 17.0 |
| | Cost of living growth | 44.0 | 68.9 | 50.8 |
| | Growth in CL | 12.2 | 0.3 | 29.8 |
| Total statutory caseloads | 1,835.3 | 1,776.5 | 1,774.3 | |

- There is an expectation for the pressures on cost of living growth to increase in the next two years but will start to ease over time. However, this still remains a risk with ever increasing projections.
- Demographic growth will continue to increase year on year.
- We expect to see a greater increase in UASCs over the next two years.
- Although we expect an initial decrease in care leavers this is likely to increase in the next two years.
- Overall we expect demand for statutory services to increase in the next two years due to various social and economic factors, and this is a pattern being seen nationally across the country.

Strategic Priorities and Outcomes for Next Year 2022/23



Getting to Good

- Consistently good practice throughout a child's journey
- Improved and evidenced outcomes
- Scale and scope of children's services
- Embedding the new practice model
- Voice of the child influences services across the continuum of care
- Reduced caseloads for staff across the services

Workforce Stability and Development

- Leadership stability
- Staff engagement and buy-in
- Increased retention
- Career development for all roles
- Balanced skills mix with right people for right job
- Staff wellbeing
- Culture and environment
- Right tools and systems to support the workforce

Child Focused Partnerships

- Relationship with SBC
- Partnerships across the child's journey
- Work with key partners to develop the continuum of services
- Joint learning and development across partnerships
- Working with partners to develop capacity and support in Slough

Value for Money

- A secure and sustainable organisation
- High quality and cost-effective outcomes
- Transformation capacity and capability in SCF
- Strong and transparent governance
- Supporting SCF and SBC savings

2022/23 Focus



- Continuous improvement of practice with children and their families in our trajectory to Good
- Development of the SCF 7 year Business Plan
 - 3 Invest to Save projects in place:
 - Continuum of care (Prevention and Early Help)
 - Edge of Care
 - Workforce- recruitment and retention
- Implementation of new Practice Framework across SCF staff and partners
- Review of threshold document through the Local Safeguarding Partnership
- Further development of strategic partnership arrangements
- Regulatory inspections expected: HMIP YOT inspection, Breakaway and Ofsted ILACs inspection

Document Control



Changes

| Version | Status | Date | Changes Made | Changes By |
|---------|--------|----------|---|--|
| 0.1 | Draft | 18/08/22 | Initial Draft | Priya Bhudia, Project Manager |
| 0.2 | Draft | 19/08/22 | Updated context and performance sections | Carol Douch, Director of Operations |
| 0.3 | Draft | 19/08/22 | Updated performance, finance and risk sections | Priya Bhudia, Project Manager Alex Pilgerstorfer, Finance Business Partner Carol Douch, Director of Operations |
| 0.4 | Draft | 19/08/22 | Updated context, regulated services, performance and risks sections | Priya Bhudia, Project Manager Carol Douch, Director of Operations |

Page 138

Approvals

| Version | Status | Name and Role | Signature | Date |
|---------|--------|---|-----------|------|
| 1.0 | Final | Andrew Fraser, Chief Executive (SCF) and Executive Director: Children's (SBC) | | |

Review of governance arrangements for Slough Children First – Updated September 2022

| Aim | Recommended evidence | Evidence found | RAG rating | Actions recommended | Responsible person/body |
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| Governance aims | | | | | |
| C1 There should be evidence that the council and senior management recognise the importance of establishing appropriate and proportionate governance arrangements for the oversight of entities | The council has sufficient control to ensure that its investment is protected, appropriate returns on investment can be obtained and that the activities of the entity are aligned with the values and strategic objectives of the council | <p>Articles of Association set out aims of SCF and list of reserved matters (Article 6 sets out 9 objects of the Company including around safeguarding, high quality services, innovation and improvements, working collaboratively and demonstration of value for money).</p> <p>The reserved matters are set out in Article 29. This includes the requirement to approve annual business plan, a function that is reserved to Cabinet for all its connected entities. In addition it includes restrictions on borrowing from third parties above £250k, forming a separate legal entity or participating in any partnership of joint venture, giving a guarantee or indemnity outside of ordinary business, selling or disposing of part of the business, including assets, dealing with surpluses unless agreed in business plan or SDC, acquiring interests in land, obtaining charges over assets and commencing, defending or settling significant claims or litigation except during ordinary course of business.</p> <p>The Council has a service delivery contract with SCF, which sets out a mechanism for</p> | Amber – due to risks around financial sustainability | <p>Clarify role of scrutiny committees/panels.</p> <p>Clarity over role of Audit & Corporate Governance Committee</p> <p>Clarify extent to which SCF is subject to internal controls of the Council ie. expenditure control panel.</p> <p>The Principal Lawyer to undertake a review of the Articles of Association to consider whether to recommend changes to the number of Council nominated NEDs</p> | <p>Monitoring Officer / Scrutiny Officer</p> <p>Principal Lawyer</p> <p>s.151 Officer</p> |

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| | <p>“Teckal” companies demonstrate compliance with relevant exemption requirements under EU procurement law</p> | <p>negotiating the contract sum on an annual basis and a mechanism for negotiating any in-year changes. There are detailed provisions around the information to be provided to support this and to include in the annual business plan.</p> <p>Control test – company is wholly owned with a list of reserved matters that must be decided by the Council</p> <p>The Articles allow the Council to appoint up to 3 NEDs, subject to the independent NEDs being in the majority (Article 8.3).</p> <p>Function test – The company is wholly engaged in delivery of statutory services on behalf of SBC and the Council has right to decide if the SCF wishes to enter into arrangements to deliver services to third parties (Article 29 – entering into new third party contract to provide services to third parties over set value.</p> <p>4 August 2022 Work undertaken to simplify contractual arrangements. Company has utilised the contractual mechanism in relation to in-year contract sum negotiations and improvements made in relation to business case submission.</p> | | <p>and independent NEDs and the quorum rules.</p> | |
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| | | <p>September 2022 update</p> <p>The Council has nominated a new NED to align with the gaps identified in the skills audit. The individual was interviewed by SCF directors prior to appointment and will be provided an induction by SCF.</p> <p>The Council's Principal Lawyer has acted as the equivalent of a "shareholder representative" and has met with NEDs leading on governance and will be attending the SCF board meeting on 22 September 2022.</p> <p>More work is needed to ensure the elected member bodies have proper oversight of financial and service performance, however this has been delayed by the delay in approving a comprehensive business plan for SCF. Cabinet received a report on the Annual Business Plan in February 2022 and September 2022, but there has been no opportunity to take this through scrutiny. Risks arising from the operation of SCF have been reported to Audit and Corporate Governance Committee as part of an enhanced corporate risk register. The annual report is being presented to cabinet in October 2022, however in future years this needs to be presented earlier in the financial year, as it is a summary of the previous year's performance.</p> | | | |
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| <p>C2 There should be evidence of a culture of challenge and clarity relating to the purpose, efficiency, effectiveness, specific objectives, and freedoms of the entity</p> | <p>There is a culture of challenge</p> <p>There is a clarity of purpose</p> <p>The entity has clear objectives</p> | <p>There is evidence of challenge in member meetings, including Cabinet when receiving reports such as the annual business plan, including a decision only to approve the plan on an interim basis.</p> <p>There is less evidence of clarity in relation to the Council's purpose in governing the company – for instance performance data on children's social care is presented to multiple forums, including scrutiny, but the Council's effectiveness in governing SCF has not been subject to the same level of scrutiny.</p> <p>The business plan could have more of a focus on efficiency and effectiveness, including use of benchmarking data and external assurance outside of the Ofsted visits.</p> <p>The entity has objects set out in its Articles (see C1) and various aims and objectives set out in its business plan, however there could be more work to ensure these are more closely aligned with the Council's corporate plan and strategic priorities.</p> <p>There is considerable confusion around the freedom of SCF and a lack of understanding around the contractual mechanisms around the</p> | <p>Amber – due to risks around deadlines not being met and documents not being in accordance with contractual requirements.</p> | <p>SCF need to ensure that whoever is undertaking company secretariat functions is ensuring that the board of directors fully understand the contractual mechanisms and the requirements for contract sum re-negotiation and business plan submissions.</p> <p>Clarify role of scrutiny committees/panels.</p> <p>Clarity over role of Audit & Corporate Governance Committee</p> <p>SBC to review business plan to ensure it aligns with its own corporate plan and priorities.</p> | <p>SCF Director of Finance</p> <p>Monitoring Officer / Scrutiny Officer</p> <p>s.151 officer</p> <p>SBC Chief Executive</p> |
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| | <p>The entity has sufficient freedoms to achieve its objectives</p> | <p>contractual sum and business planning process.</p> <p>Update 4 August 2022 Steps taken to simplify contractual meeting arrangements, including re-drafting ToR for SCG and monitoring groups. Improvements made in relation to complying with contractual mechanisms.</p> <p>September 2022 update The board of directors received training from external lawyers on 18 July 2022 on the contractual mechanisms. An in-year change request was submitted in July 2022 which provides some assurance in relation to understanding the contractual mechanisms, although council officers had to request additional information to ensure the request complied with the requirements of the contract. This has also been the case in relation to the annual business plan. SCF has a comprehensive handbook setting out the terms of reference for its board and committees. SCF has confirmed that an annual timetable is to be created to ensure deadlines are met regarding submission of required documents to the Council for approval.</p> | | <p>September 2022 update The induction programme for new directors to include training/briefing on contractual requirements. Annual timetable of deadlines for submission of documents to the Council for approval to be provided by SCF to the Council.</p> <p>Report on governance review to be taken to Cabinet in October 2022, alongside a review of financial sustainability of SCF as commissioned by the DfE.</p> <p>The annual business plan to be provided to the Council by 30 September each year to allow it to be</p> | <p>SCF Chair/SCF CE</p> <p>SBC Principal Lawyer</p> <p>SCF CE</p> |
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| | | | | taken through scrutiny and cabinet prior to approval of the contract sum as part of the Council's budget setting. | |
| C3 There should be a clearly designated council shareholder role or function which is both understood and recognised by the council and the entity (and documented in terms of reference) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council has a designated "shareholder" role to represent its ownership of the entity The shareholder provides oversight of any decisions taken by the entity The shareholder provides a regular review of whether the entity provides the most effective | <p>The company is limited by guarantee, not by shares. Some of the reserved functions are reserved to Cabinet.</p> <p>Decisions below this level should be decided by an officer who is not the DCS (as this officer is also chief executive of SCF). There is a conflict of interest protocol appended to the secondment agreement that makes clear that reserved functions cannot be exercised by this officer.</p> <p>Oversight is provided via the contractual mechanism, with a contract manager and finance lead, although this could be simplified. These individuals can be used to fulfil the "ownership" role as well with the decision made by the Council's Chief Executive, who is the lead officer under the contract.</p> <p>There is less evidence of a comprehensive review of whether the entity provides the most effective vehicle to deliver the outcomes required – there was some historic work undertaken by Mutual Ventures, however SBC</p> | Green | <p>September 2022 update A formal review of the KPIs and other performance indicators to be undertaken.</p> <p>Engagement with DfE on an options appraisal to consider delivery models for children's services in Slough.</p> <p>Contract liaison group to continue and to report to contractual and other forums as appropriate.</p> | <p>SBC Contract Manager/ SCF CE</p> <p>s.151 officer/SBC CE</p> <p>SBC Contract Manager</p> |

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| | <p>vehicle to deliver the outcomes it requires and whether there are suitable alternatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process for appointing a shareholder is set out in terms of reference | <p>is under statutory intervention and the DfE view is that these functions should be delivered by a separate entity. SBC therefore does not have the right to terminate the arrangement or insource services without the explicit consent of the Secretary of State.</p> <p>The Articles restrict SCF’s ability to join another entity and having additional members would require a change to the articles, which is a decision reserved to the Council as sole member. In addition DfE consent would be required.</p> <p>4 August 2022 Interim MO/Principal Lawyer acting as equivalent of “shareholder rep” at officer level. Clear reserved matters to cabinet.</p> <p>September 2022 update There is an officer contract liaison group attended by the Principal Lawyer (as lead on governance), finance officer (as lead on finance) and contract manager (as lead on contract management), as well as attendance from officers leading on delivery of support services. These officers between them represent the Council at contract monitoring meetings, the strategic commissioning group and the partnership meeting chaired by the DfE commissioner and are responsible for reporting</p> | | | |
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| | | <p>to elected members on the performance of SCF.</p> <p>A report was taken to cabinet in September 2022 seeking delegated authority for officers to engage with the DfE on an options appraisal, informed by the DfE commissioned review of the financial sustainability of SCF.</p> <p>At the strategic commissioning group, SCF chief executive and Director of Operations agreed to review the KPIs as a result of concerns that the contractual KPIs were not properly capturing the risks which are being presented to other forums.</p> | | | |
| <p>C4 There should be clarity regarding the role of shareholder, with reserved matters clearly documented and updated as required, reflecting any changes made as the entity has developed, in a shareholder's agreement (or</p> | <p>The council has sufficient control to ensure that its investment is protected, appropriate returns on investment can be obtained and that the activities of the entity are aligned with the values and strategic objectives of the council</p> | <p>The company is limited by guarantee and only has a sole member, therefore a membership agreement is not required. The reserved matters are clearly set out in the Articles (see C1).</p> <p>The concerns around protection of investment and Teckal compliance are covered in C1 and not repeated here. Therefore the assessment is solely focused on clarity around the role of the shareholder in documentation – a need to ensure clarity of role in certain member meetings is picked up in C2.</p> <p>4 August 2022 update</p> | Green | <p>September 2022</p> <p>A review of the articles of association be undertaken particularly in relation to number of independent NEDs and council nominated NEDs and quorum rules.</p> | <p>SBC Principal Lawyer/SBC Chair</p> |

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| as set out in the company's governing articles of association) | "Teckal" companies demonstrate compliance with relevant exemption requirements under EU procurement law | The "shareholder rep" function where this can be exercised at an officer level is being exercised by the CE or the MO/Principal Lawyer, depending on decision. The Council's constitution sets out clearly which reserved matters need to go to Cabinet. | | | |
| C5 There should be evidence that the individual undertaking the shareholder role is provided with suitable training and support commensurate with the role | <p>There is a culture of challenge</p> <p>There is a clarity of purpose</p> <p>The entity has clear objectives</p> <p>The entity has sufficient freedoms to achieve its objectives</p> | <p>The member role is not undertaken by a single individual, nor would this be appropriate as decisions will be of varying sizes, with more significant decisions reserved to full cabinet.</p> <p>The Council has a contracts manager and a senior finance lead and the Principal Lawyer attends the SBC contract group and advises on company governance. These officers would advise the s.151 officer and SBC Chief Executive who would make decisions under reserved functions where these are not referred to Cabinet. If a matter was referred to cabinet, the report would be cleared by finance and legal to ensure appropriate compliance with governance.</p> <p>Concerns around clarity of purpose for other member meetings is picked up in C2. The assessment is based on Cabinet and the above officers understanding of the shareholder role.</p> <p>4 August 2022</p> | Green | <p>September 2022 update</p> <p>The Principal Lawyer to continue acting as equivalent of "shareholder rep" under delegation from chief executive, as opposed to the new Monitoring Officer.</p> <p>The Principal Lawyer has advised and delivered training on company governance to Council officers and was the lead internal lawyer on negotiating the changes to articles of association and service delivery contract and has a</p> | Principal Lawyer/SBC Chief Executive |

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| | | <p>The MO/Principal Lawyer has been in communication with the NED and other board members who are leading on governance. There is a closer relationship with the board on the role of the shareholder and the Council as commissioner of services.</p> <p>September 2022 The Principal Lawyer has met with two NEDs who are leading on governance and attended SCF board meeting on 22 September 2022.</p> | | good understanding of these. | |
| C6 There should be evidence of formal periodic shareholder/ Chair/CEO meetings with effective supporting papers to inform subsequent company board meetings | <p>The shareholder has a mechanism to communicate its views to the entity</p> <p>Periodic and effective shareholder/Chair/ CEO meetings are documented</p> | <p>There are minuted meetings between the Council, SCF and the DfE called Transition Steering Group/Continuous Improvement Board, as well as contract meetings. However, the strategic contract meetings have not always happened in a timely manner, nor with the right attendees. The Council's Chief Executive should chair these meetings, however this has been difficult with changes in personnel.</p> <p>There are multiple meetings between personnel in the Council and SCF, including meetings involving the Chairman, the DfE commissioner and elected members, however the purpose of these meetings is not always clear and this leads to considerable duplication.</p> | Green | <p>Regular strategic contract meetings should be arranged, with the Council having internal agenda planning meetings in advance. These should be chaired by the Council's chief executive.</p> <p>The role of the TSG should be reviewed to avoid duplication between this and the contract management meetings.</p> | <p>SBC Chief Executive</p> <p>DfE commissioners / DCS / SBC Chief Executive</p> |

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| | | <p>There is a clear governance framework set out in the SDC and this should be followed, although a review should be undertaken to ensure close alignment between performance and finance and reduce the number of meetings.</p> <p>4 August 2022 The ToR for SCG and monitoring group have been simplified and the role of the improvement board (TSG) reviewed. The MO is working closely with the NED leading on governance and has supported the board with a skills audit and governance review and identified a NED with the skills to fill the identified gaps.</p> <p>September 2022 The role and ToR of the TSG (now called Continuous Improvement Board/Getting to Good Board) have been reviewed and will be more of a partnership board in future.</p> <p>The Principal Lawyer has met with the independent NEDs leading on governance and been in communication with the Chairman of the Board, as well as attended the SCF board meeting on 22 September 2022. The Principal Lawyer has led the governance review of SCF, involving officers and SCF personnel as appropriate.</p> | | <p>September 2022 The SBC Chief Executive to continue to chair the strategic commissioning group, with the Principal Lawyer in attendance, as well as other appropriate officers. The elected members should not be invited to these meetings, as this should be an officer forum, but appropriate briefings should be provided and formal updates taken to cabinet as appropriate and as part of the annual business plan approval process process.</p> | SCB Contract Manager |
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| Council oversight, scrutiny and governance framework | | | | | |
| C7 There should be documented evidence of transparent member and officer scrutiny, oversight, and approval of business plans | <p>There is a clearly defined governance framework underpinned by clear governance principles</p> <p>The role of the shareholder is separate from the board</p> <p>The business plan is current and updated at least annually</p> <p>The business plan is challenged and monitored by the board</p> | <p>The Articles reserve approval of the annual business plan to the Council.</p> <p>The SDC clearly sets out the requirements and dates for submission of the business plan.</p> <p>A comprehensive review of the business plan took place, resulting in it being re-written and submitted to Cabinet late. A comprehensive report went to Cabinet, recommending approval on an interim basis, a requirement for scrutiny to review the plan and a requirement for an updated version to be submitted. This has been delayed due to concerns about the deliverability of savings and a high level longer term business plan has been re-drafted, which will go through the same approval process.</p> <p>There is a clear separation of function between Cabinet and the Board of Directors, albeit that the Lead Member for Children's Services was a council nominated director – the Council's Code of Conduct permits council appointed post holders to stay and vote in meetings and the letter of appointment set out the requirements of the role. The Lead Member for Children's Services correctly declared her interest in the meeting. This member has since resigned from the board and attends meetings as an observer. The Council needs</p> | Amber – the board needs to receive further support to enable it to effectively challenge and hold executive directors to account on deliverability of the business plan and management of demand in statutory services. | <p>SCF to provide copies of board minutes to demonstrate that the board of directors appropriately challenged the business plan, to understand how plans were submitted that were later identified as undeliverable.</p> <p>September 2022 If the lead member for children's services is to attend board meetings as a participating observer, a protocol should be draw up to SCF setting out conditions, including confidentiality requirements.</p> <p>Whilst there is some evidence of good</p> | <p>SCF Director of Finance</p> <p>SCF Chair</p> <p>SCF Chair, in consultation</p> |

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| | | <p>to consider its approach to nominating directors to the board.</p> <p>4 August 2022 The role of the equivalent of “shareholder rep” is clearly separated from the board and the Principal Lawyer is undertaking this function.</p> <p>The LM for Children’s Services is permitted to attend the board meetings as a participating observer, however there is no documented agreement setting out the purpose of this role and any confidentiality requirements. This risks confusion in terms of decision making.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF has confirmed that board challenge of the business plan took place at meetings on 5 October, 9 December 2021, 11 January, 15 March, 29 March, 5 April, 25 May, 8 July and 18 July 2022, as well as at committee meetings in February and July 2022.</p> <p>An extract of the minutes for 9 December 2021 has been provided as evidence. This demonstrates appropriate challenge on the clarity of the strategic programme of plans and the importance of partnerships and workforce issues. There was limited evidence of challenge on the deliverability of the financial savings and the risks associated with these. This appears contrary to the significant</p> | | <p>challenge by the board on the business plan and the NEDs in particular appear to be growing in confidence in their ability to challenge assumptions and risks, there is still limited evidence of proper scrutiny of financial management, deliverability of projects and management of risks, including around workforce, projects and demand pressures.</p> <p>Consideration to be given to what support could be provided to the board from an independent Director of Children’s Services from another local authority or from</p> | <p>with DfE Commissioner.</p> |
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| | | <p>concerns that were raised by council officers, elected members and both the DfE and DLUHC commissioners, which led to the plan being approved on an interim basis only.</p> <p>It is unclear how the challenge on partnerships and strategic programme of plans were captured in the updated plan, as these continued to be concerns of the Council and commissioned with the updated business plan.</p> <p>An extract of the minutes for 11 January 2022 has been provided as evidence. Good discussion about link with public health on universal services and 0-19 health visitor/school nursing provision. Limited assurance or response given in relation to request for update on early help provision. Good discussion on continuing health care. Reference to “very underdeveloped workforce” but no action in response. Discussion on retaining Innovate Teams and risk of non-delivery of savings, with assurance being given that biggest target is health funding and an opportunity to offset pressures elsewhere. Feedback of Council’s officers concerns focused on strategic priorities for next 3 years and that the Council was concerned the plan will not achieve what is says. Feedback refers to need for outcomes focused approach and clarity in terms of money. There was limited</p> | | <p>external organisations such as the LGA or Institute of Directors. This should include how to scrutinise financial management and risks and hold executive officers to account for a statutory, demand led service and how to review and challenge performance data.</p> | |
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| | | <p>discussion on deliverability and risks particularly in terms of financial savings.</p> <p>An extract of minutes from 15 March 2022 has been provided. Reference for need for plan to go to scrutiny in September (this was inaccurate as the expectation was for updated plan to go to scrutiny in Quarter 1 of 2022/23. Appropriate reference to the Council commissioning the service and need to plan and cost services around the commissioned model. Intention to have a workshop to discuss business plan in more detail.</p> <p>An extract of minutes from 25 May 2022 has been provided. Appropriate challenge in relation to assumptions that were made that have proved to be inaccurate and directors highlighted need for the business plan to be realistic and not to meet a budget target irrespective of risk.</p> | | | |
| C8 There should be evidence of a clear set of KPIs that fall out of the business planning process | The council regularly undertakes an objective assessment of how successfully each entity supports its policies and strategies | <p>Performance monitoring is undertaken during contract management meetings, which take place quarterly. The KPIs are set out in the SDC.</p> <p>The performance data should be reported in the annual business plan and be considered as part of the scrutiny process of the business plan. To date the Company has been submitting its performance data independently</p> | Amber – due to need for the KPIs to be formally reviewed. | September 2022 update SCF to review KPIs and other performance indicators as set out in service delivery contract. | SCF CE/Director of Operations |

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| | <p>KPIs are relevant to “SMARTER” goals</p> <p>KPIs are reported and monitored within the context of the governance framework</p> | <p>of this process and a separate annual report going to scrutiny panel.</p> <p>Performance data is also presented to TSG, therefore it is presented and monitored at multiple meetings – there is an opportunity to simplify this process.</p> <p>4 August 2022 update A contract review has been undertaken streamlining the finance and performance meetings. KPIs are in place and regularly monitored, however there is limited evidence of a link between the reported KPIs and the stated risks around safeguarding children, which may indicate that the KPIs need a review or that the business plan risks need to be backed up by better data.</p> <p>September 2022 update At the strategic commissioning group in August, SCF CE and Director of Operations agreed to review the contractual KPIs to ensure they remain the right indicators to correctly flag risk and performance concerns.</p> | | | |
| C9 There should be evidence that senior company staff are performance | Board, committee, chair, and director performance is evaluated annually, including against agreed KPIs | <p>The Council has no evidence of this from SCF and should request this evidence on at least an annual basis.</p> <p>There has been considerable change in the board of directors and a need to ensure that</p> | Red – whilst the set up of the RNAC is positive, no evidence has been | September 2022 update The RNAC to be responsible for reviewing effectiveness of the | SCF chairman and chair of RNAC. |

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| <p>managed against KPIs</p> | | <p>there are appropriate induction, training and development programmes in place to support directors to undertake their functions.</p> <p>The assessment is based on a lack of evidence and can be reviewed if evidence is supplied by SCF.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF has confirmed that the Chair appraised the NEDs and CE and the CE manages and appraises the executive directors. Overview of the system is the responsibility of the Remuneration, Nominations and Appointments Sub-Committee (RNAC), reporting to the Board. The first meeting of this committee took place in July 2022.</p> | <p>provided of effective performance management.</p> | <p>board and sub committees and to provide assurance evidence to SBC.</p> | |
| <p>C10 There should be evidence of ongoing assessment of value-for-money and quality offered by the entity through an adequately resourced monitoring function</p> | <p>Regular reviews take account of value-for-money and performance quality</p> | <p>There are regular contract monitoring meetings and benchmarking evidence is presented. There is a need to align the performance monitoring with the finance monitoring as they are linked.</p> <p>Further assurance is required as to the steps SCF is taking to monitor its budget, as overspends have in the past been presented late and as a fait accompli. There is no evidence that the in-year contractual mechanism has been used to re-negotiate the deficits and therefore SCF is rolling these over</p> | <p>Red – whilst there appears to be some evidence of effective monitoring and external review, no documentary evidence has been provided of this or the changes that</p> | <p>September 2022 update SBC to request sight of external reports and internal assessments of value for money and quality on a minimum of an annual basis, to be incorporated into the Annual Report submitted by SCF. The outcome of</p> | <p>SBC Principal Lawyer/ SBC Contracts Manager</p> |

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| | | <p>and drawing down on its loan. This does not demonstrate effective governance within SCF.</p> <p>4 August 2022 SBC has undertaken a contract review and agreed to streamline the performance and finance monitoring meetings. Budget monitoring data is provided, but this indicates substantial overspends and limited use of the contractual mechanism to re-negotiate contract sums.</p> <p>An updated business case has been presented, which forecasts significant overspends, which has resulted in Mutual Ventures being commissioned by the DfE to undertake a finance review.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF confirms that quality is monitored through the Quality and Practice Improvement Sub Committee (QPIC), Performance Board, Ofsted and Transition Steering Group. The Essex DfE Partners in Practice programme reviewed SCF's performance and Mutual Ventures are currently reviewing the business plan. PeopleToo also undertook a review in October 2021. Internal audit did a value for money audit and governance audit in May and June 2022. NEDs have taken part in the Practice Learning Week.</p> | <p>have resulted.</p> | <p>these should be included in reports to elected members.</p> <p>SCF to ensure it utilises the in-year change mechanism to deal with demand pressures and invest to save pressures and the information provided is in accordance with the contractual requirements and backed up by independent evidence where available.</p> <p>SCF to consider which of its committees should be responsible for assessing and monitoring value for money and performance and to provide minutes of meetings to SBC upon request, as well as provide the</p> | <p>SCF Chair/SCF CE</p> <p>SCF Chair</p> |
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| | | <p>No documentary evidence has been supplied for this and the reference to Ofsted and TSG as evidence of effective monitoring systems in place in the SCF misinterprets their role. There was no formal reporting back to the Council on the PeopleToo review or the Essex DfE Partners in Practice programme review, which was a missed opportunity to demonstrate to the Council, as sole member, the steps being taken by SCF to review its own performance and seek independent assurance.</p> | | <p>opportunity for Council officers to attend on at least an annual basis. If a finance committee is required, this should not be delayed pending a further council nominated director being appointed. The independent NEDs should have the capability to chair such a committee.</p> | |
| <p>C11 There should be ongoing assessment of risks relating to the entity, supported by processes to ensure that risks are managed as part of the council's overall risk management approach, with appropriate</p> | <p>The council regularly reviews risks relating to its entities and establishes whether they are effectively managed and scrutinised</p> <p>The council's overview and scrutiny committee (or equivalent) provides overview, pre-decision scrutiny and call-in</p> | <p>Further work is needed to ensure the risk management processes in SCF are fed back to and align with the Council's risk management processes. Significant risks should be presented to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee as part of the Council's corporate risk register.</p> <p>The role of scrutiny needs to be clarified – in the past an annual report on performance has been presented, but there have been no reviews of business plans or the Council's role in governance of SCF. If any decision is taken to change the services or functions delivered, scrutiny should be involved in this process.</p> <p>4 August 2022</p> | <p>Amber – risks are being reported, however the processes in place should be reviewed to ensure this accords with the Council's new risk management strategy.</p> | <p>September 2022</p> <p>Consideration to be given to scrutiny's role in scrutinising the performance of SCF and other Council companies as part of the wider scrutiny review.</p> <p>There should be a formal review of KPIs and agenda'd discussions on risk at contract monitoring group meetings, reported</p> | <p>Monitoring Officer / Scrutiny Officer</p> <p>SBC Contract Manager/SCF Operations Director/SCF CE</p> |

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| escalation and reporting | decisions in relation to the entity | <p>Training and work planning has been carried out for scrutiny members and an experienced officer is supporting members in a scrutiny officer role.</p> <p>Risk reporting should come through the contract monitoring meetings and feed into the Council's risk register. At present it is unclear where the risks sitting in SCF are being reported and we need to ensure that these are clearly being reported via the contract meetings.</p> | | up to strategic commissioning group where appropriate. This should be in addition to risks being included in the Council's corporate risk register and reported to Audit and Corporate Governance Committee. | |
| C12 There should be evidence of a consistent approach across the council when it comes to engaging with its entities | All council entities are managed in a consistent way with appropriate support, guidance and controls | <p>SCF delivers statutory children's functions in accordance with a DfE direction. This is covered by a SDC and it is therefore quite different from some of the Council's other companies, which are set up for the purpose of trading or regeneration or owned for a specific narrow purpose.</p> <p>The involvement of the DfE also means that the Council does not have the freedoms that it has with its other Council companies. The Council has a governance side agreement with the DfE which requires it to consult and in prescribed circumstances get consent before certain decisions are taken. This includes decisions relating to:</p> | Green | 4 August 2022 No update | |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal or appointment of chairman of the board • Removal or appointment of the Chief Executive or changes to his or her terms of appointment • Changes to membership of the Company • Approval of company to participate in joint venture or partnership or to form any legal entity which it would be a member • Approval of voluntary winding up or dissolution of the Company or appointment of liquidator or administrative receiver • Terminate the SDC • Sub-contract or delegate any of the obligations under the SDC • Exercise step in rights <p>During the intervention period, the Secretary of State can also give written notice requesting the Council exercises its rights under the Articles.</p> | | | |
| C13 The council should have clear and unfettered access to audited | The council's audit committee pays specific attention to accounts and audit reports | <p>The Council has open book accounting rights under the SDC.</p> <p>SCF shares its draft accounts with the Council for comment and its unable to change its auditors without consent of the Council.</p> | Green | The Council should ensure that its internal auditors programme in audits relating to the functions of SCF, as well as the | SBC s.151 officer |

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| accounts for its entities | The council's internal auditors are able to gain clear and transparent access to financial information and oversight of internal controls | The SDC permits the Council's internal auditors to undertake audits of activities undertaken within SCF. | | governance of the company. 4 August 2022 update Internal audit do include SCF in its audit plan. More focus needs to be given to agreeing the annual audit plan to ensure it is properly addressing risks. | SBC s.151 officer |
| Business case for the entity | | | | | |
| C14 A business case which assessed the risk involved in establishing the entity and recommended its establishment, taking account of other potential delivery models, should be available to review | There is a clear and comprehensive business case that recommended the creation of the entity The business case took account of alternative delivery methods, with the case for the entity's creation having clear benefits over other methods | There is a business case, informed by an options appraisal by Mutual Ventures, which informed the decision to change SCF from a trust to a wholly owned entity. The decision to set up a separate trust to deliver services was made by the DfE and the current direction requires prescribed statutory functions to be undertaken by SCF. Doncaster City Council also had a trust established in similar circumstances and this changed to a wholly owned company. DCC is now out of statutory intervention and has taken a decision to terminate the arrangement and bring the services in-house due to the costs of running a separate entity. Examples of Council | Red – due to risks of insolvency and risks to safeguarding of children being flagged from current model | The Council should consider whether it wishes to commission an options appraisal for the future operating model, however whilst the services are under statutory intervention, this should be commissioned with the agreement of the DfE and the appointed commissioner. | SBC Chief Executive |

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| | | <p>owned companies that are delivering high quality children's services include Achieving for Children, Worcester Children's First and Together for Children (Sunderland).</p> <p>September 2022 update A review of the business plan has been commissioned by the DfE and this recommends consideration of alternative delivery models which secure the services of a local authority partner. A report to cabinet in September recommended that officers engage with DfE on an options appraisal for alternative delivery models.</p> | | <p>September 2022 update Council officers to engage with DfE officials and the DfE commissioner on commissioning an options appraisal to consider alternative delivery models.</p> | SBC Chief Executive |
| <p>C15 Objectives of the entity should be clearly defined and documented, and regularly reviewed to ensure that its operation continues to support council policy and strategy, including periodically reviewing the business case</p> | <p>The objectives of the entity are clearly articulated, defined and documented</p> <p>The objectives are regularly reviewed</p> <p>The objectives continue to reflect council policy and strategy</p> <p>The business case and objectives are regularly reviewed to ensure they are still valid</p> | <p>The Articles clearly set out the overarching objects of SCF. These were reviewed and amended in April 2021.</p> <p>The annual business plan sets out the strategic vision and aims of SCF. These have been reviewed by the board of directors and Council officers, before being approved as part of the business plan approval process.</p> <p>The business plan is updated every year, giving an opportunity for this to be aligned with the Council's corporate plan and strategic priorities.</p> <p>SCF's chief executive is also the Council's DCS and a member of the Council's Corporate Leadership Team. This provides an</p> | <p>Amber – the business planning process must adhere to the contractual timescales and objectives must align to the Articles, contract and Council priorities.</p> | <p>September 2022 update Future year's business plans should have clear objectives linked to the Articles of Association and service delivery contract as well as to the Council's priorities. These priorities must include value for money, as well as quality of practice.</p> | SCF CE/SCF Chair |

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| to ensure it is still valid | | <p>opportunity for him to represent the interests of SCF and the services it is running in any discussion about the Council's priorities and plans.</p> <p>September 2022 update There has been a lot of work on the longer term business case to get it to a position whereby it could be recommended to elected members, however there are still concerns about the length of time that investment will be needed, before the service can be delivered within budget. A review has been commissioned by Mutual Ventures, which raises issues about the golden thread going through the plans and the multiplicity of objectives and aims.</p> | | | |
| Agreements with the entity | | | | | |
| C16 Agreements should be documented between the council and the entity for any support or services provided by either party to the other party | <p>The council and entity have clear and documented agreements for any services or support provided by either party to the other party</p> <p>There is a clear process for escalation if the support or services agreements are not</p> | <p>There is a service delivery contract in relation to services SCF delivers on behalf of the Council. There is also a support services agreement in relation to services delivered by the Council to SCF. There are contract monitoring and performance mechanisms in both agreements.</p> <p>The escalation processes are clearly set out in a schedule of the SDC.</p> | Green | <p>Ensure that relevant individuals understand the contractual and governance mechanisms and that these are adhered to and non-compliance is reported.</p> <p>4 August 2022 Meeting held between SBC and</p> | <p>SBC Contract Manager</p> <p>SBC Contract Manager</p> |

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| | performed to either party's satisfaction | | | SCF re. Governance and contract matters. Simplifying contract meetings. Strategic commissioning group meetings need to be properly agenda'ed and prioritised by senior leaders in both organisations. | |
| C17 All agreements should be clear, up-to-date, and regularly monitored and reviewed, with any changes to agreements documented so that a clear audit trail exists | <p>Agreements for support or services between the parties are up-to-date and regularly monitored and reviewed</p> <p>Changes to agreements are documented with a clear audit trail</p> | Any changes to agreements would be undertaken by way of a formal variation of contract. Depending on the extent of the change, consent or consultation with the DfE would be required and approval of cabinet should be sought. | Green | <p>4 August 2022</p> <p>No update.</p> | |
| Avoiding and managing conflicts of interest | | | | | |
| C18 There should be evidence that a culture exists whereby actual or potential conflicts of | All parties have been trained and demonstrate a commitment to avoiding and monitoring actual or potential conflicts | <p>The DCS/SCF CE has been provided with a copy of the secondment agreement, with the conflict of interest protocol, despite the fact he is an agency worker.</p> <p>All non-executive directors nominated by the Council were provided with a letter of</p> | Amber – due to need for wider SCF training to be undertaken and need for assurance | Evidence of induction and training for directors and senior managers in SCF to be provided. | SCF Chief Executive / Chairman |

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| <p>interests are identified, declared, and acted upon, including evidence of appropriate training across the organisation</p> | | <p>appointment setting out the need to declare interests and manage conflicts of interest. The letter confirms the provision of training and availability of advice.</p> <p>When the Lead Member for Children’s Services was a director, she appropriately declared her interest at the meeting of cabinet that discussed the business plan. She was permitted to stay and vote by way of a general dispensation in the Code of Conduct for Members.</p> <p>All reports relating to reserved matters are either presented in the name of the s.151 officer or Council Chief Executive or in the joint names of these officers and the DCS/SCF Chief Executive. The fact that the DCS is also the chief executive of SCF is made clear in these reports.</p> <p>Directors of the company have had access to specialist advice where required on their duties and responsibilities.</p> <p>All Council staff are bound by a code of conduct for employees.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF confirm that induction training was provided to directors at the board meeting in July 2021. NEDs have participated in training</p> | <p>checks on the documentary evidence.</p> | <p>September 2022 update Training to be provided by SCF on conflicts of interest on a company wide basis.</p> | <p>SCF Chief Executive / Chair</p> |
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| | | <p>on Liquid Logic system. Two legal briefings have been given and there have been two board development days in the first year of the new arrangement. The independent NEDs are also experienced as company directors and have participated in training provided by organisations to whom they are affiliated and are familiar with the Nolan Principles. Conflict of interest declarations are sought at every committee meeting and board meeting and the register is updated as necessary. No new conflicts have been identified during 2021-22 and 22-23.</p> <p>Internal audit conducted a review of governance and considered the arrangements for managing conflicts of interests and were satisfied that sufficient systems were in place.</p> <p>SCF has confirmed that all staff including board directors are required to complete an annual declaration of interests and associations with SCF.</p> | | | |
| C19 The council should have clear and up-to-date policies and processes to consistently manage actual conflicts or | <p>There is a clear conflict of interest policy which is managed actively</p> <p>There is a clear process for investigating and</p> | <p>These procedures are covered by the Council's codes of conduct and staff disciplinary procedures.</p> <p>The terms of appointment for directors sets out the requirements of the role, including in relation to management of conflicts of interest.</p> | Green | <p>September 2022 update</p> <p>The Council will deliver training on management of conflicts of interest for its officers or elected members</p> | SBC Monitoring Officer / Principal Lawyer |

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| <p>potential conflicts of interest, including a clear process for investigations and procedures for appropriate disciplinary actions in the event of breaches</p> | <p>dealing with breaches of the conflicts of interest policy</p> <p>Internal and external auditors review the management of conflicts of interest and escalate any concerns to the Monitoring Officer</p> | <p>There is a conflict of interest protocol specifically for the joint post holder of DCS / SCF CE, which makes it clear that he or she must not exercise any of the reserved functions and flags the potential for conflicts of interest and how these should be managed.</p> | | <p>who are to be nominated or appointed to an outside body.</p> | |
| <p>C20 The roles, responsibilities and reporting lines of officers and members who are involved in council oversight of the entities, the provision of services between the entities or the running of the entities should be clearly defined and documented</p> | <p>Officers and members make themselves available to scrutiny and other council governance forums</p> | <p>The SDC sets out requirements for Company personnel to provide information and make themselves available to attend scrutiny and other council governance forums.</p> <p>The provision of services and the role of individual officers in terms of managing the contract are clearly set out in the SDC.</p> <p>4 August 2022 There has been confusion in the past with SCF officers deputising for the SBC ED and attending and receiving papers for SBC CLT meetings. This has now stopped and consideration is given to what information is shared with SCF personnel</p> <p>September 2022 update</p> | <p>Green</p> | <p>.</p> | |

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| | | <p>Decision making to nominate individuals as NEDs is delegated to the chief executive, unless this is an elected member, in which case this is a decision for full council.</p> <p>Reserved matters decisions that are not reserved to cabinet sit with the relevant executive director or chief executive in accordance with the Council's scheme of delegation and can be further delegated to relevant officers. The Executive Director of People – Children is prevented from making decisions that are reserved matters or "client-side" due to his role as chief executive of SCF.</p> <p>There is a clear separation of functions between officers exercising and advising on "client-side" functions and those sitting on the Company board, either in an executive or non-executive role.</p> | | | |
| Council appointments to the board | | | | | |
| C21 There should be evidence that appointments to the board are subject to a documented formal, rigorous, and transparent procedure based on merit and published | <p>Board members have completed declaration of interest forms</p> <p>Appointments to the board are relevant to the post or office of the council</p> <p>Council appointed directors cease to</p> | <p>A skills audit took place for the board before non-executive directors were appointed. There was a transparent recruitment process for the chairman of the board and the independent NEDs. The Council nominated NEDs were nominated once a skills analysis had been undertaken of the independent NEDs.</p> <p>Council nominated directors would cease to be directors if their role changed and are made based on the role or post, rather than the individual.</p> | Amber – due to need for further review. | <p>Declarations of interest to be provided by SCF to the Council as evidence of compliance</p> <p>A review of the board to be undertaken to identify which council officers or</p> | <p>SCF Director of Finance</p> <p>Principal Lawyer/SBC Chief Executive</p> |

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| <p>objective criteria which also promote diversity</p> | <p>be members if they leave their qualifying roles</p> <p>The process for the appointment and renewal of directors is set out in the articles of association</p> <p>If there is a remuneration committee, relevant matters are referred appropriately</p> <p>Appointments are based on a review of the skills, qualifications, diversity, and other attributes required for the role</p> <p>Where a board member is eligible for renewal and reappointment, this is subject to considering their performance to date</p> | <p>The process for appointment and renewal of directors is clearly set out in the articles.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF confirm that board directors are required to complete annual declarations of interests and associations with the SCF.</p> <p>SCF is currently carrying out its annual appraisals/evaluation of the Board and individual directors. The CE will be subject to an annual appraisal at the end of his first year in post (Dec/Jan). The DfE is conducting an annual appraisal of the Chair of the Board. The Council can request access to the RNAC for an overview of their priorities and work plan.</p> | | <p>members should be nominated to the board or whether the Council should nominate independent persons (consideration to be given to remuneration as there is currently a restriction on remunerating council nominated members).</p> <p>Evidence to be submitted by SCF of the annual evaluation process of the board and individual directors.</p> <p>4 August 2022 The Board has undertaken a comprehensive skills audit and the identified skills gap has been used to fill one of the Council nominated NED</p> | <p>SCF Chairman</p> |
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| | and skills, and the needs of the board | | | <p>roles. A new RNA Committee is considering the nomination and making contact with the candidate to ensure a good fit.</p> <p>September 2022 update Further information is required to provide assurance there is an effective system of evaluation and performance management of the whole board and individual executive directors. It is concerning that no evidence has been provided of performance management of executive directors and the chief executive and the information provided by SCF suggests an annual appraisal will be completed at the</p> | SCF Chairman |
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| | | | | end of the first year, when the post holder is an interim and only intended to be in post for 12 months. | |
| Articles of Association | | | | | |
| E1 The entity's articles of association should be clear, up-to-date, and reflective of how the entity is run | <p>The entity has articles of association, documenting its constitution</p> <p>The articles address the entity's purpose, conduct of meetings, and role and appointment of directors</p> <p>If the entity is a Teckal company, the articles demonstrate that the council exercises control</p> | <p>SCF has articles of association which were amended in April 2021.</p> <p>The articles address all matters referred to.</p> <p>The articles demonstrate that the Council exercises control both in terms of reserved matters and in terms of the ability to nominate independent directors.</p> | Green | 4 August 2022 No update. | |
| Business planning | | | | | |
| E2 There should be evidence of an up-to-date business plan that is reflective | There is an up-to-date business plan, setting out the organisation's objectives and how | The business plan is in the process of being reviewed, particularly in relation to resourcing requirements. | Red due to delays in submission of previous business plan | Business plan to be updated and approved by the Council. | SCF Chief Executive / SBC Chief Executive |

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| of the current circumstances and environment in which the entity operates | <p>these will be resourced and achieved</p> <p>Requirements to meet the legal criteria in relation to any Teckal companies are reflected in the business plan</p> | <p>The business plan makes clear that SCF's sole focus is delivery of children's services within Slough, which meets the function test.</p> <p>4 August 2022 The business plan approval process has been convoluted and led to multiple versions of the document having to be submitted. The plan is showing a significant overspend and forecasting large overspends each year. The early versions of the plan did not properly flag risks and contain sufficient detail as to how projects to deliver savings were to be managed. The 2022/23 plan is still only approved by SBC on an interim basis and there has been no opportunity for scrutiny to be involved in reviewing the plan.</p> <p>September 2022 update DfE has commissioned an independent review of the business plan. The business plan covers a longer period than set out in the service delivery contract and does not make provision for repayment of the Council's loan at the end of the current contract term.</p> | and concerns about content. | In future years, annual business plans must be submitted within the deadlines set out in the SDC and must have been subject to appropriate scrutiny by the board. | SCF CE / Chair |
| E3 There should be evidence that the board meets regularly to consider, review and record | The board meets regularly, and all decisions are recorded and documented | <p>The board of directors have been meeting and holding extraordinary meetings where required, however evidence of minutes have not been requested or supplied to the Council.</p> <p>September 2022 update</p> | Amber – further information and evidence required to deliver assurance. | Samples of minutes and dates of meetings to be provided to the Council for assurance. | SCF Director of Finance / SCF CE / Chairman |

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| discussions and conclusions | Decisions are taken at the appropriate place, including deferral and recommendations of decisions on matters that are reserved for the shareholder | <p>SCF has confirmed that Board and sub committee meetings are held regularly as set in its annual meetings timetable. In addition to these scheduled meetings, Extraordinary Board meetings also take place as necessary. Dates of 2021 Board meetings – 28/01, 01/03, 25/03, 20/05, 25/06, 29/07, 03/09, 05/10, 09/12 Dates of 2022 Board meetings – 11/01, 15/03, 29/03, 05/04, 25/05, 08/07, 18/07, 22/09</p> <p>There are four sub committees – Workforce Strategy Group (WSG) 2021 – 08/03, 15/04, 13/05, 17/06, 15/07, 19/08, 16/09, 11/11 2022 – 22/02, 22/05, 14/07, 15/09, 15/12 Audit and Risk Sub Committee (ARC) 2021 – 13/01, 11/03, 13/05, 15/07, 16/09, 18/11 2022 – 16/02, 26/04, 05/07, 18/10, 13/12 Quality and Practice Improvement Sub Committee (QPIC) 2021 – 21/03, 29/06, 29/09, 16/12 2022 – 22/02, 22/05, 08/08, 18/11 Remuneration, Nomination and Appointments Sub Committee (RNAC) 2022 – 08/06, 18/08, further dates to be arranged.</p> <p>Minutes were taken and have been agreed by the relevant chair and attendees for all of the above meetings.</p> | | <p>September 2022 update Whilst dates of meetings have been given, no documentary evidence has been supplied of agendas or extracts of minutes to demonstrate the quality of the discussion and conclusions. Further evidence is required to provide assurance on this.</p> <p>The Principal Lawyer to attend meeting on 22 September 2022 to discuss governance review and levels of assurance required moving forward. This is likely to include attendance by Council officers as observers on an annual basis.</p> | <p>SCF CE / Chairman</p> <p>SBC Principal Lawyer</p> |
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| <p>E4 There should be evidence of delivery of strategies and plans, including scrutinising key operational and finance performance information</p> | <p>The board has delegated detailed scrutiny to committees or directors with appropriate skills, including financial management</p> <p>The board challenges performance and key financial and operational reporting</p> | <p>The business plan and performance data demonstrates that SCF is delivering the services with appropriate delegation.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF has confirmed that challenge to financial and operational information is a significant part of sub committee meetings, with the Risk Register documenting areas for particular attention at Audit and Risk Sub Committee (ARC). Matters of significance at committees are included in the board agenda and dealt with at board. - There has been careful consideration given to the allocation of NEDs sitting on the sub committees, so that there is challenge at sub committees and at Board by those directors not on those sub committees. The Board has committed to set of SCF values (delivering together, honest, and respectful, child focused, improving constantly and looking ahead) which complement those of the Council, in support of the vision to enable all children, young people and their families to be safe, secure, and successful.</p> <p>High level list of members for each sub committee supplied. Operational scheme of delegation supplied Financial scheme of delegation supplied.</p> | <p>Amber – due to need for further review of number of committee and make up of board.</p> | <p>Evidence of board challenge to be provided to the Council.</p> <p>Internal scheme of delegation to be provided to the Council.</p> <p>September 2022 update Remove Councillor Hulme from list of members of committees and if the lead member is to attend board meetings, draft a protocol setting out her role and management of any issues such as access to confidential information.</p> <p>Review the articles of association to consider whether the split of</p> | <p>SCF Director of Finance / Chairman</p> <p>SCF Chief Executive</p> <p>SCF Chair SCF Chief Executive</p> <p>SBC Principal Lawyer / SCF Chair</p> |
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| | | <p>The list of members includes reference to Councillor Hulme being appointed to committees as a participating observer. As Councillor Hulme is no longer a director and there is no documentation in place governing the “participating observer” role, it is not appropriate for her to be named as a member.</p> | | <p>independent NEDs and council nominated NEDs is appropriate, given the lack of membership of a finance committee and need for at least one independent NED to chair more than one committee.</p> <p>Review best practice to consider whether 5 committees of the board are required and whether quality of practice and finance and business could be merged into an operational practice committee, to avoid financial performance and quality of practice being considered in isolation.</p> | <p>SCF Chair</p> |
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| <p>E5 There should be evidence of the desired culture and behaviours</p> | <p>The board promotes the success of the company</p> <p>The board provides entrepreneurial leadership</p> <p>Prudent and effective controls are demonstrated where risk is assessed and managed</p> <p>The board sets strategic aims and ensures sufficient resources (financial and human) are available to meet objectives</p> <p>The board reviews management performance, including that of the CEO/MD and leadership team</p> | <p>Evidence is not available to assess this.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF has confirmed: The Chair and NEDs were appointed by the DfE in accordance with a stated set of values, culture, and behaviours. The Board has committed to set of SCF values (delivering together, honest, and respectful, child focused, improving constantly and looking ahead) which complement those of the Council, in support of the vision to enable all children, young people and their families to be safe, secure, and successful. SCF Comms promotes the success of SCF. The ARC is managing and assesses risk with the effective controls. The Board sets strategic aims and ensures sufficient resources (financial and human) are available to meet objectives and this is detailed in the business plan). The Board reviews management performance, including that of the CEO/MD and leadership team via the newly established Remuneration, Nomination and Appointments Sub Committee. The Board ensures obligations to shareholders and others are met via contracts for services.</p> | <p>Amber – further work is required to provide assurance on this, although significant change and progress has been made during the last year.</p> | <p>Evidence to be provided by SCF.</p> <p>September 2022 update The SCF Board to consider its current set of values and behaviour as part of its annual review and put in place any required actions in response. In accordance with good governance instituted recommendations, SCF will undertake a survey of key stakeholders on this. Working with the Council, SCF Chairman to review the make up of the board in relation to number of independent NEDs and council nominated NEDs to ensure appropriate</p> | <p>SCF Chairman / SCF Chief Executive</p> <p>SCF Chair / SCF CE</p> |
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| | <p>The board sets corporate values and standards</p> <p>The board ensures obligations to shareholders and others are met</p> | | | skills, experience and knowledge. | |
| E6 The company structures should be regularly scrutinised in order to ensure they remain fit for purpose | <p>The company structures are regularly reviewed</p> <p>Financial and performance benchmarking exercises are carried out</p> | <p>SCF has recently reviewed its structure to take account of the additional services that transferred to it in July 2021.</p> <p>Benchmarking data is regularly presented in performance reports. There is some evidence of financial benchmarking data, although this could be improved.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF has confirmed that a high level benchmarking exercise was undertaken by PeopleToo and relevant statistics were included in the business case.</p> <p>Mutual Ventures have been commissioned by the DfE to undertake a review of the current business plan and the results of that will be presented to Cabinet. This review has recommended that there is an additional director responsible for strategy and transformation to ensure that projects are effectively monitored and delivered and</p> | Amber – further work is required to review the senior leadership team to ensure that it is able to provide effective corporate leadership and deliver on its business plan priorities. | <p>SCF to include its organisational structure in its annual business plan</p> <p>Consideration given to financial benchmarking data to be included in reporting</p> <p>September 2022 update The organisational structure is included in the latest version of the business plan. The senior leadership team structure and management teams beneath to be reviewed in light of</p> | <p>SCF Chief Executive</p> <p>SCF Chief Executive</p> <p>SCF Chief Executive</p> |

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| | | <p>savings targets linked to these are appropriate and regularly reviewed.</p> <p>The Innovate teams remain in place due to workforce issues regarding recruitment and retention, which means that whilst the structure may be appropriate the meanwhile structure does not reflect this, which is adding cost. This issue has been raised with the DfE, as it reflects a national issue.</p> | | the Mutual Ventures report. | |
| E7 There should be evidence that the board has clear policies and procedures for its members to ensure that actual or potential conflicts of interests are identified, declared, and acted upon | The board regularly monitors conflicts of interest, including with suppliers and users | <p>No evidence available.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF has codes of conduct for staff, terms of appointment for independent NEDs, declaration and registers of interests and policies for managing conflicts of interests in general. Conflict of interests are also a standing item on all Board and sub committee agendas.</p> | Amber due to documentary evidence not being supplied. | <p>SCF to provide details of its codes of conduct for staff, terms of appointment for independent NEDs, declaration and registers of interests and policies for managing conflicts of interests in general.</p> <p>September 2022 update Written assurance given, but no documentary evidence. SCF to supply a copy of the terms of appointment for</p> | <p>SCF Chief Executive</p> <p>SCF Chairman / SCF CE</p> |

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| | | | | independent NEDs, its code of conduct for staff which applied to executive directors and an extract of minutes to demonstrate the effectiveness of its current systems. | |
| Role and behaviours of company directors | | | | | |
| E8 There should be evidence that directors have sufficient skills and experience to run the entity | <p>Directors' skills align well to the organisation's purpose and objectives</p> <p>Directors are trained so that they are competent in undertaking their roles and responsibilities</p> | <p>Skills audit undertaken before refresh of the board in 2021.</p> <p>Evidence of training is not available.</p> <p>Evidence of evaluation of board and individual directors not available.</p> <p>September 2022 update A copy of the skills audit of the current board has been provided and the gaps identified in that have been used to inform the council nomination to the board. The independent NEDs have a mix of skills and are experienced in company governance. No further documentary evidence has been supplied in relation to whole board effectiveness or effectiveness of individual directors, including executive directors.</p> | Amber – further work needed to evaluate effectiveness of the board as a whole and individually | <p>Evidence of induction and training to be supplied</p> <p>Evidence of process for evaluating effectiveness of board to be supplied</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF to undertake a review of the Board effectiveness and to evaluate the effectiveness of individual directors, including executive directors.</p> | <p>SCF Chairman</p> <p>SCF Chairman</p> <p>SCF Chairman</p> |

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| | | Information has been given on the induction and briefings given to the new board, although documentary evidence has not been supplied. | | | |
| E9 There should be evidence that directors' behaviours are aligned with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 and the Nolan Principles as well as Cabinet Office's Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies | <p>Directors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> act within their powers <input type="checkbox"/> promote the success of the company <input type="checkbox"/> exercise independent judgement <input type="checkbox"/> exercise reasonable care skill and diligence <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> avoid conflicts of interest <input type="checkbox"/> do not accept benefits from third parties <input type="checkbox"/> declare an interest in proposed transactions or arrangements with the company <p>Directors act in accordance with the seven Nolan Principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> selflessness | <p>Terms of appointment for Council nominated NEDs address these matters.</p> <p>Evidence to be supplied for independent NEDs and executive directors.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF confirms that independent NEDs have been recruited by the DfE. All members of SCF are experienced board members holding senior positions at board or councils in other organisations and are familiar with the Nolan principles. References were sought prior to appointment.</p> | Amber – due to need for further information to be supplied for executive directors. | <p>Evidence to be supplied</p> <p>September 2022 update No documentary evidence supplied, although the Council was involved in recruitment processes for the SCF Chair, independent NEDs and council nominated NEDs. Further information required in relation to the two remaining executive directors. Evidence could include reference to objectives in an appraisal, training undertaken, extracts of board minutes demonstrating behaviours as examples.</p> | <p>SCF Chairman</p> <p>SCF Chairman / SCF CE</p> |

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| | <input type="checkbox"/> integrity <input type="checkbox"/> objectivity <input type="checkbox"/> accountability <input type="checkbox"/> openness <input type="checkbox"/> honesty <input type="checkbox"/> leadership | | | | |
| E10 The scope of directors' authorities should be documented and clear to all parties | <p>Directors' authorities are demonstrated in a scheme of delegation</p> <p>The scheme of delegation includes reference to matters that are reserved for board decision and cannot be delegated</p> | <p>No evidence of internal scheme of delegation available</p> <p>September 2022 update Scheme of delegation supplied for decision-making in relation to children. The SCST Board handbook supplied, which sets out board and committee terms of reference for all but one of the committee. SCF has supplied documents as evidence of a finance scheme of delegation, however one is a presentation relating to spend in relation to casework and the other document is the company's financial regulations and refers to SCST. It has not been reviewed since the change in articles of association and new board structure. Neither document is a clear financial scheme of delegation at officer level and no documentary evidence has been supplied in relation to a scheme of delegation for HR or procurement decisions.</p> | Red due to lack of evidence of compliance being supplied. | <p>Internal scheme of delegation to be supplied, including terms of reference for committees</p> <p>September 2022 update The ToR of each committee/sub-committee should be reviewed urgently by the board and on an ongoing basis at least every two years. Documentary evidence to be supplied that there is an effective scheme of delegation in place covering all operational functions to include,</p> | <p>SCF Chief Executive</p> <p>SCF Chairman</p> |

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| | | | | but not limited to, finance, HR and procurement. | |
| Company board composition | | | | | |
| E11 There should be evidence that the board has a diverse membership with the collective skills and attributes needed to lead the entity effectively | <p>There are between five and ten directors on the board</p> <p>At least half of the directors are independent non-executives</p> <p>Appointments to the board are subject to a formal, rigorous, and transparent selection procedure based on merit and published objective criteria</p> | <p>Skills audit undertaken prior to appointment of NEDs. Recruitment process to appoint chairman and independent NEDs.</p> <p>Over half the directors are independent or council nominated NEDs, including the chairman.</p> <p>4 August 2022 Skills audit undertaken and nomination made to fill identified skills gap.</p> | Green | Council to review who to nominate as council nominated directors | SBC Chief Executive |
| E12 There should be evidence that board membership is reviewed regularly for composition and fitness for purpose | Board composition and individual director performance is reviewed periodically to evaluate board composition, the effectiveness of individual | <p>Skills audit undertaken prior to appointment of NEDs. Refresh of board undertaken in 2021.</p> <p>No evidence of evaluation process.</p> <p>4 August 2022 Skills audit undertaken, NEDs are recent appointments. Documentary evidence supplied for skills audit of each director, but not for evaluation process.</p> | Amber due to lack of documentary evidence. | Evidence to be supplied of evaluation process | SCF Chairman |

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| | contribution, and how effectively board members work together to achieve the objectives of the entity | | | | |
| The board and risk management | | | | | |
| E13 There should be evidence that the board understands the organisation's risk profile and the effectiveness of key controls and regularly reviews risks and risk appetite | <p>The board demonstrates ultimate responsibility for risk management within the entity and ensures that appropriate risk management arrangements that are in place</p> <p>The board regularly reviews risks and how they are being managed</p> <p>The board is aware of its appetite for risk and determines the risk profile for the entity</p> | <p>There is evidence of risk management in relation to delivery of services, however there is less evidence of risk management in terms of financial performance, nor how these risks are managed and flagged, including use of contractual mechanisms to negotiate the annual contract sum.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF confirms that review of risk management is a key component of the ARC meetings. A recent development in the process was to highlight business critical risks for urgent action and discussion at the council's Strategic Commissioning Group. Matters of significance are included in the board agenda. A particular example is given in relation to the risk of delay in progressing the early help proposal and the serious threat to the success of the business plan. The document to support this is an agenda item to ARC titled "Corporate Risk Register – Update and Refresh for the Audit and Risk Committee". The risks are highlighted as:</p> | Red – whilst it is clear that a considerable amount of work has been done, risk management procedures and processes do not appear to be effectively managing and reporting risk both internally and to SBC as commissioner of the services and sole owner of SCF. | <p>Risk management procedures to be supplied</p> <p>Sample of minutes to be supplied to demonstrate consideration of risk, in particular financial risk</p> <p>September 2022 update Risk management strategy to be formally reviewed and agreed at the board and a copy of strategy and the minutes of discussion to be supplied to the Council.</p> | <p>SCF Chief Executive</p> <p>SCF Chief Executive</p> <p>SCF Chairman / SCF Chief Executive</p> |

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| | <p>The board's approach to risk is proportionate and appropriate to its model</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SCF - going concern status 2. Independence and effectiveness of the board 3. Strong, stable and skilled leadership 4. Inability to recruit and maintain a stable, skilled and experienced workforce 5. Failing to continuously improve and transform services and 'getting to good' <p>Mitigations are set out in relation to the first one, namely submission of a refreshed business plan and improvement delivery plan. There are limited mitigations presented in relation to the independence and effectiveness of the board. In relation to strong, stable and skilled leadership reference is made to permanent recruitment to leadership and management roles in SCF and SBC, but no further detail given. A workforce strategy is referenced but with limited detail. A governance review and review of back office provision and steps to improve quality of service with cost savings through efficiency gains, but again with limited further information.</p> <p>The corporate risk register and risk management policy has been supplied. The former is a detailed document and demonstrates an effective model and process is in place. However, there are some concerns about mitigations. For example:</p> | | <p>The lead member for children's services to be removed as risk owner and her role in attending board meetings to be clarified and a protocol to be drawn up if the lead member continues to attend board meetings.</p> <p>SCF to consider commissioning support from SBC or an external provider on reviewing its risk management procedures and delivering training on risk management.</p> | <p>SCF Chairman</p> <p>SCF Chief Executive</p> |
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| | | <p>(a) SCF being a “going concern”, reference is made to the DLUHC commissioners owning SBC’s responsibilities in supporting SCF to deliver services to children, young children and their families, which is an inaccurate statement as the DLUHC commissioners are not responsible for managing the SCF contract or agreeing the Contract Sum. No reference is made to the DfE or the DfE commissioner’s role.</p> <p>(b) Independence and effectiveness of the SCF board - the only mitigations referred to relate to the governance review, which is being led by the Council, the same comment about the DLUHC commissioners role, which is inaccurate and the need to secure support and funding for the business plan.</p> <p>(c) Under strong, stable and skilled leadership, reference it made to SBC being run by temporary executives and commissioners, when this should presumably focus on SCF’s leadership team. Reference is correctly made to the interim nature and turnover of SCF CEOs and to the fact that the SDC was signed without board involvement. The mitigations do not appear to address the</p> | | |
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| | | <p>concerns and the risk owners include reference to the lead member for children’s services and SBC – SCF risks must have risk owners who are SCF staff or directors, even if the solution involves liaison with SBC.</p> <p>The sample of minutes include extracts from 3 meetings of ARG: 18 November 2021 – effective challenge on the need to include risks related to the CIPFA/governance reports for SBC. 16 February 2022 – some challenge on alternative options for high cost placements and suggestions on utilising care leavers as mentors. 26 April 2022 – effective challenge on why the “going concern” risk had not appeared in risk reporting at earlier stage. The explanation does not address the issue. There is some challenge on the historic financial issues, although limited discussion on mitigations. On the discussion about independence and effectiveness of the Board, there is reference to the Director of Finance spending 80% of his time serving the Council. This is presumably a reference to the amount of time spent responding to council queries or addressing concerns in the quality or information provided by the Council, as the individual is not an officer of the Council.</p> | | | |
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| | | <p>Under strong and stable leadership, there is reference to the need to commence the recruitment process for a new CEO and a recognition that this was shared with the Council due to the joint role and an action for this to be raised with SBC CE.</p> <p>Under failing to continuously improve and transform services, it was recognised that the lead member for children's services should not have been listed as risk owner.</p> | | | |
| Board members' skills and development | | | | | |
| E14 There should be documented evidence that the board regularly undertakes a skills audit to ensure that it has an appropriate balance of skills and experience | <p>The board regularly undertakes skills audits</p> <p>The entity has a board which includes a range of skills and backgrounds including commercial, financial, business development, technical, legal and HR experience</p> | <p>A skills audit was undertaken in April 2021. The independent NEDs bring a range of skills, including the chairman who has a background in children's services.</p> <p>4 August 2022 Detailed skills audit undertaken in 2022 and supplied to SBC</p> <p>September 2022 update In response to the skills audit, the Council has nominated an individual as director to meet some of the skills gaps and he has been interviewed by board members.</p> | Green | <p>Details of last skills audit to be supplied</p> <p>September 2022 update A review of the Articles of Association to be carried out to consider whether the board composition, particularly in terms of the number of independent and council nominated directors is appropriate.</p> | <p>SCF Chairman</p> <p>SCF Chairman/ SBC Principal Lawyer</p> |

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| <p>E15 There should be evidence of ongoing professional training provided to ensure that all board members are up-to-date in their understanding and supported in their roles</p> | <p>Regular training and updates cover legal roles and responsibilities, company directors' roles and companies generally</p> <p>Directors' training includes responsibilities under the Companies Act 2006, Insolvency Act 1986, Bribery Act 2010, Modern Slavery Act 2015, Data Protection Act 2018 and Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974</p> | <p>Evidence is not available of training, although it is clear that directors understand their duties under the Companies Act based on requests for specialist advice.</p> <p>SCF relies on the Council in relation to health and safety practices in the offices and buys certain services from the council in relation to IT and HR.</p> <p>September 2022 update Induction was provided to Directors at the first SCF meeting in July 2021. The board of directors received training from external lawyers on 18 July 2022 on the contractual mechanisms. SCF has commented: Whilst recognising the benefits of formal training, the directors have kept up to date with relevant knowledge through personal efforts and information available free of charge as there is no budget available for formal training. Training records in the last year to be requested from Board Directors and to be provided. (This will be a useful exercise to identify any gaps to be made up).</p> | <p>Amber – lack of evidence of training provided, although independent NEDs do appear to be experienced company directors.</p> | <p>Training records to be supplied</p> <p>September 2022 update Whilst a narrative has been given, no evidence of training on company director duties has been given. The lack of a budget is not an acceptable reason as if there are experienced company directors on the board, they could presumably deliver the training to the rest of the board. Training records should be collated and sent to the Council and a board development programme to include training and briefings on company director duties should be put in place.</p> | <p>SCF Chief Executive</p> <p>SCF Chairman</p> |
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| The role of executive directors and non-executive directors | | | | | |
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| E16 There is evidence that the role of executive directors is clearly defined and documented | <p>Executive directors' roles are clearly defined and documented</p> <p>Directors' roles are focused on running the entity's business activities and implementing the board's plans and policies</p> | <p>Executive directors have role profiles.</p> <p>The SCF Chief Executive's responsibilities are set out in the secondment agreement.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF has confirmed that role profiles exist for executive directors, but has not supplied copies.</p> <p>The SCF Chief Executive's responsibilities are set out in the secondment agreement which was produced by the Council.</p> | Amber due to lack of evidence supplied. | <p>Role profiles for all executive directors to be supplied</p> <p>September 2022 update Role profiles to be supplied for all executive directors and if there is a plan to increase the number of executive directors following the Mutual Ventures report, the role profile should be provided in draft to the Council in advance of recruitment.</p> | <p>SCF Chief Executive</p> <p>SCF Chief Executive</p> |
| E17 Non-executive directors are in place to bring an independent judgement to bear on issues | <p>Non-executive directors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> challenge, and contribute to the development of the company's strategy | <p>NEDs were involved in reviewing and approving for submission the business plan, they have also been involved in reviewing financial performance and flagging concerns.</p> <p>September 2022 update</p> | Amber due to the NEDs and the board in general having access to the right | <p>Further evidence to be supplied by SCF</p> <p>September 2022 update Despite good evidence being</p> | <p>SCF Chairman</p> <p>SCF Chairman</p> |

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| <p>of subject matter expertise, strategy, performance, resources including key appointments, and standards of conduct</p> | <p> <input type="checkbox"/> scrutinise performance of management in meeting agreed goals and monitor reporting of performance <input type="checkbox"/> satisfy themselves on the accuracy of financial information and that financial controls and risk management are robust and defensible <input type="checkbox"/> determine executive directors' remuneration and prime role in appointing/removing senior management </p> | <p>SCF has confirmed that board challenge of the business plan took place at meetings on 5 October, 9 December 2021, 11 January, 15 March, 29 March, 5 April, 25 May, 8 July and 18 July 2022, as well as at committee meetings in February and July 2022.</p> <p>An extract of the minutes for 9 December 2021 has been provided as evidence. This demonstrates appropriate challenge on the clarity of the strategic programme of plans and the importance of partnerships and workforce issues. There was limited evidence of challenge on the deliverability of the financial savings and the risks associated with these. This appears contrary to the significant concerns that were raised by council officers, elected members and both the DfE and DLUHC commissioners, which led to the plan being approved on an interim basis only.</p> <p>It is unclear how the challenge on partnerships and strategic programme of plans were captured in the updated plan, as these continued to be concerns of the Council and commissioned with the updated business plan.</p> <p>An extract of the minutes for 11 January 2022 has been provided as evidence. Good discussion about link with public health on universal services and 0-19 health visitor/school nursing provision. Limited</p> | <p>information at the right time.</p> | <p>supplied to demonstrate the value that NEDs are adding, this is reliant on the right information being provided at the right time and that requires a culture and governance arrangements that are receptive to constructive challenge and the need for assurance. This needs to be kept under review over the next 12 months and considered as part of the review of board effectiveness.</p> | |
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| | | <p>assurance or response given in relation to request for update on early help provision. Good discussion on continuing health care. Reference to “very underdeveloped workforce” but no action in response. Discussion on retaining Innovate Teams and risk of non-delivery of savings, with assurance being given that biggest target is health funding and an opportunity to offset pressures elsewhere. Feedback of Council’s officers concerns focused on strategic priorities for next 3 years and that the Council was concerned the plan will not achieve what it says. Feedback refers to need for outcomes focused approach and clarity in terms of money. There was limited discussion on deliverability and risks particularly in terms of financial savings.</p> <p>An extract of minutes from 15 March 2022 has been provided. Reference for need for plan to go to scrutiny in September (this was inaccurate as the expectation was for updated plan to go to scrutiny in Quarter 1 of 2022/23. Appropriate reference to the Council commissioning the service and need to plan and cost services around the commissioned model. Intention to have a workshop to discuss business plan in more detail.</p> <p>An extract of minutes from 25 May 2022 has been provided. Appropriate challenge in relation to assumptions that were made that</p> | | |
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| | | have proved to be inaccurate and directors highlighted need for the business plan to be realistic and not to meet a budget target irrespective of risk. | | | |
| E18 There is documented evidence that the board values the role of non executive directors, and their views are influential in the board's decisions | The board values its non-executive directors, so that they are able to demonstrate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> sound judgement and an enquiring mind <input type="checkbox"/> knowledge of the business, its operating environment, and issues it faces <input type="checkbox"/> integrity, probity, and high ethical standards <input type="checkbox"/> objectivity as the basis for questioning and challenging accepted thinking of executives <input type="checkbox"/> strong interpersonal skills | Evidence is not available to allow assessment. September 2022 update SCF has confirmed that there are annual appraisal systems in place and the DfE is appraising the chair, including receiving feedback from relevant stakeholders. The NEDs are chairing the current board committees, which is good practice. A comprehensive skills audit has been undertaken to ensure there is clarity on any skills gaps and presumably to inform a training and development programme. A sample of minutes has shown effective challenge by the NEDs, however this has included queries as to why risks have not been flagged at board level at an earlier date. This could be an indication that the culture that exists does not always appreciate the important role that NEDs play and the need for the board to receive assurance and to constructively challenge the information it receives. | Amber – further work to embed the role of the NEDs into the governance processes. | Sample of minutes of meetings to be provided for assurance purposes September 2022 update The review of the effectiveness of the board should consider the culture of SCF in terms of valuing the role of NEDs and of the right information being provided at the right time. | SCF Chairman SCF Chairman |
| The role of the board chair | | | | | |
| E19 There is evidence that the chair | The chair is primarily responsible for: | The role of the chairman is complicated by the fact he is appointed by the DfE and reports directly to the DfE and appointed | Red due to no documentary | Evidence to be supplied | SCF Chairman / |

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| <p>provides clear board leadership, supporting the directors and chief executive and taking account of the shareholders views</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> the workings of the board <input type="checkbox"/> its balance of membership subject to board and shareholders' approval <input type="checkbox"/> ensuring that all relevant issues are on the agenda <input type="checkbox"/> ensuring that all directors, executive and non-executive alike, are enabled and encouraged to play their full part in its activities <p>The chair is able to stand sufficiently back from the day-to-day running of the business to ensure their board is in full control of the company's affairs</p> <p>The chair is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> formulating the board's strategy | <p>commissioner. It would be usual for the chairman of the board to have regular meetings with the Council as sole member.</p> <p>The chairman has attended member level meetings and meetings with Council officers and demonstrates an independence of mind and he was involved in formulating the business plan. It is less clear how he has influenced the direction of the company in terms of its strategic vision and aims, nor how he has ensured the board has the skills and ability to do its role.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF has confirmed that SBC will need to make this request of the DfE in collaboration with the Chair.</p> <p>A request has been made to the DfE for evidence of the appraisal system in place and the extent to which the Council was consulted in advance of this.</p> | <p>assurance information being supplied.</p> | <p>September 2022 update The Council to formally request information and evidence to demonstrate the appraisal process in place to assess the effectiveness of the Chair.</p> | <p>DfE Commissioner to supply details of meetings held to demonstrate that the chairman is fulfilling the role to the satisfaction of the DfE.</p> <p>SBC Principal Lawyer</p> |
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| | <input type="checkbox"/> promoting the efficient and effective use of staff and other resources <input type="checkbox"/> delivering high standards in terms of integrity and propriety | | | | |
| Financial management | | | | | |
| E20 There should be a fully documented and approved business plan that is consistent with and no more than 12 months older than the previous business plan. The changes within the updated business plan should accord with the trajectories that are apparent from monthly financial and non-financial | The business plan and business planning process are critical parts of the governance culture and environment | <p>Previous business plans have lacked detail in terms of financial performance and projections. In addition business plans have been presented with savings targets that have not been achieved and were arguably undeliverable at the point of submission. This raises serious questions in terms of the culture and governance within SCF.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF has confirmed that there is a submitted business plan approved by the SCF Board and the Board accepts there is more to do to finalise this to the standard required and seek consequential approval. It also confirms that there are systems in place to update the business plan and that this will be in place to manage and monitor assumptions underlying the plan and the performance and financial consequences.</p> <p>It is of concern that the board approved the 2022/23 business plan, when other</p> | <p>Red – lack of assurance given and this should be subject to further review in relation to submission of annual business plan for 2023/24.</p> | <p>Evidence to be supplied and evaluation of performance of the board in terms of monitoring and management of financial performance.</p> <p>September 2022 update Whilst there is evidence of challenge on the business plan by NEDs, the business plan process has been convoluted and the historic issues with overspend have been replicated in</p> | <p>SCF Chairman</p> <p>SCF Chairman/ SBC s.151 officer</p> |

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| performance reports | | stakeholders had concerns about its deliverability which has resulted in it only being approved on an interim basis and significant overspends being reported. | | the first year of trading, with the in-year change mechanisms not being utilised until July 2022. More evidence is required to demonstrate that the business plan is effective and focused on the right priorities. This will be informed by the Mutual Ventures report. | |
| E21 The financial transactions and values attributable to the company within the council's medium term financial plan should agree with the projections in the business plan | The business plan provides the basis for monitoring financial performance and feeds into the medium-term financial planning of the council in situations where it expects to receive dividends, loan repayments, capital financial support in | <p>SCF is constrained by the Council's lack of a comprehensive MTFS and historic poor financial governance.</p> <p>There is evidence of SCF passively accepting savings targets without properly engaging with the process and assessing the deliverability of such targets. This has resulted in a culture of overspends, as opposed to use of the contractual mechanisms to have sensible, robust conversations about the need to re-negotiate the contract sum either in-year or annually.</p> | Red due to lack of evidence that effective systems are in place. | <p>To be addressed in future business plans</p> <p>September 2022 update The board should be able to effectively scrutinise and challenge financial information and agreed and monitor budgets. A training and development</p> | <p>SCF Chairman and SCF Chief Executive</p> <p>SCF Chairman / SCF Director of Finance</p> |

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| | terms of working capital or longer-term finance | <p>This does not result from a lack of a documented process – this is clearly set out in the SDC, but is not followed. This demonstrates a serious failure of financial governance.</p> <p>4 August 2022 Updated business plan forecasts cashflow insolvency by end of 22/23, including utilising the £5mil loan. Future years forecast losses and any invest to save plan is not expecting to deliver a return for over 5 years.</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF appreciates the seriousness and complexity of this alignment and welcomes the ongoing support and challenge that SBC is providing on this crucial issue. There is a desire to bring in NEDs with financial expertise to assist with this.</p> | | <p>plan should be supplied to the Council to demonstrate that appropriate support is being given to the board to undertake its functions. Whilst SCF can review whether further financial expertise is required on the Board, the reliance on one individual to address this issue fails to recognise the role of NEDs and the board as a collective.</p> | |
| E22 Board reports should include clear presentation of the monthly income and expenditure position of the company as well as a cash flow | Board reports feature clear articulation of the current financial position of the company in terms of its trading position (income and expenditure), liquidity (cash flow) | <p>Evidence not available to assess</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF has supplied documentary evidence as follows: Presentation relating to the risks of insolvency and factors contributing towards this. Report to 24 May 2022 board meeting on budget pressures. The report is detailed, however it does flag issues with the overly</p> | Red due to insufficient assurance and evidence of overspend occurring without contractual mechanisms being used to | <p>September 2022 update There is insufficient information supplied to demonstrate the board is receiving appropriate financial information on a regular basis and managing the risks</p> | SCF Director of Finance |

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| statement and balance sheet | and solvency (balance sheet) | <p>optimistic assumptions that were being made to inform the earlier business plan and the lack of risk management in place to address these. The report presents the pressures as something that could not be foreseen, but the issues around caseloads, workforce, court costs, inflationary pressures and demand should have been considered and assumptions tested appropriately. Clearly the bid for transformation funding had been assumed and the reduction in DfE funding may not have been anticipated, but this does call into question the assumptions that are being built in for funding that has not been agreed. Board meeting reports supplied from 15 March 2022 meeting. Only the reports have been provided, so it is not possible to ascertain what discussion took place. However it is of note that the report are relatively short and do not have a financial implications section. This includes a report on the agreed pay inflationary increase, the business plan and the finance update (although the latter is clearly wholly focused on finance). On the finance update reference is made to three fact finding cases requiring QC support, however no detail is provided on the actual cost. Use of a QC on particularly complex cases is not an uncommon occurrence and it would be expected that there would be a contingency arrangement within the legal</p> | address these. | <p>appropriately. An action plan to address this should be provided.</p> <p>SCF Board should consider whether reports should have a financial implications section as standard.</p> | SCF Chairman |
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| | | budget to cover a certain number of complex cases each year. | | | |
| E23 There should be evidence of an annual audit letter from the council's external auditors, confirming the degree of confidence they hold in respect of consolidation or treatment of financial instruments entered by the company | <p>The council's external auditor has provided an annual audit letter annually</p> <p>The annual audit letter confirms the degree of confidence they hold in respect of consolidation or treatment of financial instruments entered by the company</p> | <p>The Council's external auditors issued statutory recommendations in 2021 and had concerns about company governance and financial systems in place to ensure separation of functions and accounting. This was not specifically in relation to SCF.</p> <p>SCF has separate external auditors and its accounts are independently auditors from the Council's accounts.</p> | Amber due to the Council's external auditors needing to be satisfied that concerns on company governance have been properly addressed. | <p>September 2022 update</p> <p>Assurance processes in place regarding treatment of financial instruments and consolidation.</p> | SBC s.151 Officer |
| E24 Documented financial policies and procedures should be available | The company has an independent financial status from the council, including separate bank accounts and designated signatories. | <p>SCF has a separate bank account and independent status from the Council.</p> <p>Financial policies to be supplied to allow assessment.</p> <p>Borrowing and overdraft limits are set out in the Articles.</p> | Red due to policies not having recently been reviewed and no financial scheme of delegation. | <p>Financial policies to be supplied.</p> <p>September 2022 update</p> <p>Financial policies to be reviewed, updated and approved by board.</p> | <p>SCF Director of Finance</p> <p>SCF Director of Finance</p> |

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| | <p>The financial transactions of the company are recorded on the company's own, separate ledger system and the council is able to demonstrate how the results of the company are consolidated into its own group accounts.</p> <p>The company has a set of documented financial policies and procedures which describe areas such as borrowing and overdraft limits and levels which are reserved for council approval</p> | <p>September 2022 update The financial regulations have been supplied. As these refer to the SCST and former directors, it is apparent they have not been reviewed since the change in articles of association and new board structure.</p> | | <p>It is not appropriate to wait for the set up of a new finance committee, unless this is happening imminently.</p> | |
| E25 There should be evidence of an effective annual internal audit programme | <p>The company operates a system of internal controls that are consistent with financial</p> | <p>Evidence not available to assess</p> <p>September 2022 update SCF has confirmed it is subject to internal audit by the Council's internal auditors, RSM. This has included recent audits in relation to</p> | Green | <p>September 2022 SBC to consider the effectiveness of the internal audit programme for SCF and the quality of</p> | <p>SBC s.151 officer</p> |

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| | <p>policies and procedures</p> <p>The company's internal controls are subject to periodic testing by internal auditors</p> | <p>governance and value for money. These reports have been referenced in the Council's most recent Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.</p> | | <p>internal audits undertaken in 2022/23.</p> | |
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Slough Borough Council

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| REPORT TO: | Cabinet |
| DATE: | 17 th October 2022 |
| PORTFOLIO: | Councillor Hulme – Lead Member Children’s Services Councillor Pantelic – Lead Member Social Care and Public Health |
| SUBJECT: | Procurement for Health Visiting School Nursing (0-19 service) |
| CHIEF OFFICER: | Marc Gadsby Executive Director of People (Adults) |
| CONTACT OFFICER: | Jonathan Lewney Interim Deputy Director of Public Health Daniel Devitt Senior Public Health Practitioner Daniel.Devitt@Slough.gov.uk Mob: 07395258207 |
| WARD(S): | All |
| KEY DECISION: | YES |
| EXEMPT: | NO |
| DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN: | YES |
| Appendices | Appendix A The Healthy Child Programme/National Framework for Maternity Children and Young People. Appendix B Equalities Impact Assessment Appendix C Indicative Timetable of Processes and Key decisions to October 2024 |

1.0 Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report seeks approval for a further one-year extension for the Health Visiting and School Nursing (0-19s) Services Contract from 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024 to allow officers more time to develop and agree a more integrated, collaborative approach with neighbouring local authorities to commissioning the Services. The report updates Members with progress to date, sets out the benefits of a collaborative approach, and the reasons why approval is being sought to extend the Contract for a further year from 30 September 2023.

1.2 Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1 Agree that the contract for Health Visiting and School Nursing (0-19s) Services be extended for a further year from 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024
- 2 Delegate authority to the Executive Director of People (Adults), in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills and Lead Member for Social Care and Public Health to agree the terms of that contract extension and to arrange for the legal agreement to be sealed
3. Agree a direction of travel for Slough Borough Council to collaborate on an East Berkshire basis in relation to commissioning of health visiting and school nursing services in the future
4. Note the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to oversee a joint commissioning approach with local partners with a suggested deadline of February 2023 for assessment of progress. If suitable progress has not been made at this time, the authority will pursue a solo provider selection and commissioning process from 1st April 2023.

1.3 Reason:

1.4 The previously agreed contract extension of the Health Visiting and School Nursing service contract (the 'Contract') for one year to 30 September 2023 allowed exploration by officers of a collaborative commissioning approach with neighbouring local authorities in Berkshire East and this initial exploration has now been completed.

1.5 This exploration identified that to commission the service collaboratively requires alignment of commissioning timelines with the other neighbouring local authorities, and alignment with changes to national procurement legislation and to national guidance on service provision.

1.6 The benefits of this to Slough residents come from the opportunity for greater integration with other healthcare services (including a more streamlined offer with maternity services), increased stability of the workforce (at a time of local and national shortage of health visitors and school nurses) and economies of scale to benefit services and the council as a whole.

1.7 The collaboration must proceed at a scale and pace that ensures strengthened local service provision in Slough. Progress will be monitored by a Task and Finish Group who will determine if sufficient progress has been made in February 2023 to move ahead with the procurement on a partnership basis. If insufficient progress has been made at this time, Slough Borough Council will proceed with procurement on its own from 1 April 2023, with the aim of completing this process by 31 March 2024.

2. Report

Background

- 2.1 An effective Health Visiting and School Nursing (0 to 19s) Service will assist the Council in its strategic commitments in support of children and young people's (CYP) health. This includes contributions to priorities in the Slough Health and Wellbeing Strategy and is a key service to support the Council in its recovery and improvement journey.
- 2.2 At the March 22 Cabinet permission was granted to extend the current Contract by 12 months – from October 1st, 2022, to September 30th, 2023, to enable exploration of options for collaborative procurement and delivery of the Health Visiting and School Nursing (0 to 19s) services.
- 2.3 Initial exploration of a collaborative approach clarified the need for cabinet sign-off in each local authority, and alignment of commissioning timeframes. This identified that Slough would need to begin a procurement towards the end of 2022, which was one to two years before contracts in the other two local authorities ended.
- 2.4 The difference in contract end dates meant that the required sign-off for a collaborative approach from neighbouring local authorities was not achieved when SBC began their procurement approach.
- 2.5 Under the current timeframes from May 2022 SBC would have to focus on the delivery of a solo procurement and modernisation of the 0 to 19 service specification.
- 2.6 The exploration period led to high-level discussions across Berkshire East local authorities and the NHS Frimley Integrated care Board (which came into existence in July 2022). These discussions highlighted that a collaborative, East Berkshire approach to commissioning Health Visiting and School Nursing services was seen as highly beneficial. The benefits of this approach are outlined in more detail below.
- 2.7 The exploration period also clarified that a further one- year extension of Slough's Contract would be required to achieve the collaborative procurement and the desired benefits. The reasons for the requested one-year extension are also set out below.
- 2.8 Why an East Berkshire Health Visiting and School Nursing service is seen as the best option for Slough**

Initial scoping of the collaborative approach has indicated that it would provide the following benefits:

- Greater opportunities for integration with health care services; all three local authorities in East Berkshire form part of the Frimley Health system and these services (including maternity and paediatric services) are commissioned across East Berkshire and this provides the opportunity for more streamlined services
- More streamlined services are recommended in terms of improving outcomes both for individual service users and the general population; for example, the Frimley

Children and Young People Programme points out that Slough has the highest fertility rates in the country – more integrated services can help address this ([see for example Care continuity between midwifery and health visiting services](#))

- A stronger workforce – currently in Slough, and nationally, there are vacancies across health visiting and school nursing which severely impact on access to services for patients
- Economies of scale both in terms of the services commissioned and the commissioning process, allowing more capacity to focus on system-level work to improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities

2.9 Why a further year is required and what will be done in that time

2.9 (i) The extension allows alignment of timelines with the other two local authorities:

The initial one-year extension, agreed in March 22, was to explore possible alignment with the two other local authorities in East Berkshire.

That exploration highlighted that the current timelines (including the previously agreed extension) for each local authority would not allow for a collaborative approach to commissioning.

With the contract for Slough ending in September 2023, commissioning of the new service would need to start around October/ November 2022 to allow enough time both to complete the process of selecting the provider (under current processes) and for the service provider to have enough time to be able to begin service delivery on 1st October 2023.

To complete commissioning of that service as part of an East Berkshire collaboration, the other two local authorities in East Berkshire would have needed to have completed their own internal governance procedures for full approval, including cabinet approval, of that approach.

Further exploration following March cabinet has highlighted that it is not feasible to undertake a collaborative procurement with the neighbouring East Berkshire authorities for a new contract to commence in October 2023. See Appendix C with indicative timeframes phases and key decisions for the collaborative procurement.

A further extension of SBC's Contract allows the other two local authorities to complete their own internal governance processes so that commissioning can proceed on a collaborative basis. Whilst the range of provider selection mechanisms is still to be confirmed it is clearly understood that the new commissioning framework will allow for different approaches including open competitive selection or direct appointment of providers which local commissioners can choose to adopt (see 2.9 ii) below).

The contract extension would permit Slough Borough Council to continue work with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Bracknell Forest Council, who have indicated a commitment to continue to explore all opportunities for future collaboration on commissioning these services on an East Berkshire basis.

A Task and Finish Group would be established to ensure that there was strategic oversight of works across the three boroughs, and it is suggested that this group provide regular briefings and updates to all local system partners on progress and commitments made through each local areas democratic and commissioning systems.

The Task and Finish Group would manage development of shared products, including public and professional consultation materials, reports, updates, and briefings, and help develop a service specifications and other technical documents in support of the collaborative to assist in delivery of works across Berkshire East

2.9 (ii) The extension allows for changes in procurement procedures

In March 2022, when the current contract extension was agreed, an open procurement (starting in late 2022) for a new contract was the simplest route to secure compliance with current public procurement rules and SBC's Contract Procedure Rules.

Throughout the recent exploration period, discussions with the Frimley ICB, the Chief Executives of Bracknell Forest and Windsor and Maidenhead councils, and senior SBC council and Slough Children First officers stressed both the continued desirability of the collaborative approach and also of specifically aligning the upcoming procurement to the emerging national [Provider Selection Regime](#)..

The new Provider Selection Regime (PSR) is intended to provide a regulatory framework for the award of healthcare contracts by NHS commissioners and local authorities that sits outside the formal public procurement regime and means that those contracts will not need to be procured in accordance with the rules in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 or their successor legislation. The PSR is a new framework accompanying the Health and Care Act 2022. Commissioners of health care services will need to consider all of the key criteria in the PSR when deciding on the appropriate approach to arranging services, and must be able to justify their decisions in relation to these criteria. The key criteria are:

- Quality and innovation
- Value
- Integration, collaboration, and service sustainability
- Access, inequalities and disparities, and choice
- Social value

The Government consulted on the PSR. in Feb 2022 and the final framework is expected later this year with a grace period for implementation.

Commissioning through the proposed PSR is likely to offer greater control over service provision and development to ensure more targeted improvement of outcomes

2.9 (iii) The extension allows for alignment and integration within the Frimley Children and Young People agenda

During the process of exploring options for an East Berkshire collaboration, the Frimley ICB set out a clear agenda for Children and Young People that encompasses healthcare and local authority commissioned services.

In this, the Health Visiting and School Nursing services is aligned with the 'Starting Well' ambition. This is the Frimley-wide ambition to improve outcomes for children and young people. It is led by the Frimley lead for Maternity and Starting Well. Many SBC Public Health-commissioned services for adults are encompassed in the 'Living Well' agenda and this has seen more progress in recent years than the Starting Well ambition. The Director of Public Health is the convenor of this ambition and there is an established network for this already which involves the Directors of Public Health of East Berkshire, Surrey and Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

The current proposal for a further extension of the current Contract for Health Visiting and School Nursing services allows these services to be better aligned with this ambition, and with Frimley Health services for children and families.

2.9 (iv) The extension allows continued alignment and integration with local Slough Children's First and education-facing service offers.

There are clear advantages to embedding Health Visiting and School Nursing service offers into local provision, e.g., in the emerging Family Hubs and transformed Children's First offer for SBC and Education sector partners (ranging from Early years provision to primary secondary and further education settings). This will ensure that children's public health nursing services are at the heart of local provision. Such alignment will ensure that Health Visiting and School Nursing services will be well placed to meet the challenges faced by services for parents, carers, babies, children, and young people as SBC continues to revise and strengthen its front door and related care and support offers for a wide range of different service users.

This alignment across core agendas (including safeguarding and early intervention, health improvement, health protection and parity of esteem between physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing) will help maximise the impact and effectiveness of multiagency working across the life course and help the service align with the wider transformation agenda to ensure local responsiveness. The school nursing service is also an area where public health commissioned services could help improve coterminosity with the overall SEND offer and strengthen links to local SEND offer improvement works

2.9 (v) The extension allows alignment with changes to national policy

In late May 2022 the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities announced that the Healthy Child Programme was being refreshed and reframed as the National Framework for Maternity Children and Young People and that this new Framework would be published later in 2022 (see Appendix A). A further extension will therefore also allow development of a service specification which is in line with the new framework.

2.10 Given the very real complexity and challenges associated with the Children and Young People's health agenda the opportunity for collaboration and alignment

with local system partners is to be welcomed. The collaboration must proceed at a scale and pace that ensures strengthened local service provision in Slough. It is essential that there is clarity on the progress made across the proposed collaboration and any risks to delivering it. It is crucial that all system partners are fully aware of any emerging issues with the collaboration that might threaten its delivery, and that they have an appropriate timescale within which they can pursue their own local solutions should the collaborative not proceed for any reason.

2.11 To safeguard this it is proposed that a Task and Finish Group - with strategic representation from all three Berkshire East local authorities, is established. This Task and Finish Group would provide scrutiny of the proposed collaboration and report on a monthly basis across the collaboration. A specific report to Cabinet from the Task and Finish Group in February 2023 outlining progress to date would be delivered, with regular Cabinet facing briefings and a decision paper delivered before the end of the financial year 2022/23 to recommend if the collaborative is to proceed or be replaced with local solo approaches from the 1st April 2023.

3. Commissioner Review

It is disappointing that more progress has not been made to date to progress the partnership working outlined in this report – therefore necessitating a second extension.

The Commissioners approve this extension on the basis that a decision must be made in February 2023 whether to continue with the joint procurement work, if appropriate progress has been made, or to pursue a lone procurement process if this is not the case. This milestone will allow sufficient time to undertake a relevant procurement process during 2023/24 with a view to entering new contract(s) in 2024.

4. Implications of the Report

4.1 Financial implications

4.1.1 The recommended contract approach will require funding of the service on the current basis for two years at the current rate with a proportionate uplift - covering staffing costs pressures - against inflationary pay increases.

4.1.2. The Public Health grant is the source of the funding for the service, and it has been confirmed that spend on the 0 to 19 services is available within the Public Health Budget and that it will continue at current rates with required uplift for inflationary pressures associated with the national recruitment and retention issues associated with Health Visiting and School Nursing services and the impact of Agenda for Change on staffing costs (see 4.1.3 below)

4.1.3 Current funding for the 0 to 19 offer - and linked Enuresis service (co-commissioned with NHS support) is set out below

- 0-19 service: £2,749,000 per annum - £5,498,000 for the two-year extension
- Enuresis service: £34,000 per annum (50% of costs contributed by the local NHS commissioners)

4.1.4 The contract extension for two years will cost £5,498,000, plus an uplift of £86,000 in the first year and £90,000 for the second year to take account of the impact of the Agenda for Change pay deal agreed with NHS and non-NHS providers of health services.

4.1.5 Officers have been able to achieve a cost containment within the current budget with the current provider in spite of inflationary pressures. The existing provider is not able to deliver the service at a lower cost due to the impact of inflationary pay increases. At this time there are no immediately available evidence-based options available to the Council to reduce the contract price without reducing the current level or stability of service delivery, or retain the current cost with an expanded and more impactful service reach

4.1.6 Subject to approval by Cabinet, Public Health will set out a timetable of reports on the collaboration across Berkshire East and will set out a detailed analysis of the cost/benefits of the modernisation and alignment works set out above. (See Appendix C for an initial outline of proposed activity.)

5. Legal implications

5.1 Section 2B of the National Health Service Act 2006 (2006 Act) (the “**2012 Act**”) requires each local authority to take such steps as it considers appropriate for improving the health of the people in its area.

5.2 Schedule 1 of the 2006 Act sets out further provisions about services. Paragraph 1 requires a local authority to provide for the medical inspection at appropriate intervals of pupils in attendance at schools maintained by the local authority and for the medical treatment of such pupils. Paragraph 2 provides a power for a local authority to provide for medical inspection or treatment of pupils attending other educational establishments which are maintained by the local authority and for children who are educated otherwise than at a school. Paragraph 7A provides a power for a local authority to provide for the weighing and measuring of junior pupils in attendance at any school or early year’s provider. Regulations made under the 2006 Act require local authorities, as far as reasonably practicable, to provide for the weighing and measuring of any relevant children (being children in school years where majority of children are 4 or 5 years old and where majority of children are 10 or 11 years old). This provision only applied to registered children in a maintained or academy school or certain prescribed colleges within the local authority’s area.

5.3 Regulations made under the 2006 Act also mandate services in relation to health visitor reviews. These specify that under section 2B of the 2006 Act, each local authority must, so far as reasonably practicable, provide or make arrangements to secure the provision of a universal health visitor review to be offered to or in respect of eligible persons. Eligible persons are women who are more than 28 weeks pregnant, a child aged up to 2 weeks old, a child aged between 6-8 weeks old, a child aged between 9 and 15 months and a child aged between 24 and 30 months. A universal health visitor review means an assessment of the health and development of the person and a review of their health and development as set out in the Healthy Child Programme.

5.4 Guidance published by Public Health England – Best start in life and beyond – sets out guidance for local authorities in relation to the commissioning of the healthy child

programme 0-19. This refers to the wider, overarching duties of local authorities which good commissioning of 0-19 services can contribute to. This includes the following duties:

- Eradication of child poverty – The Life Chances Act 2010 – the specific duties for local authorities set out in the originally worded Child Poverty Act 2010 have now been repealed, however there remain target duties for the Secretary of State.
- Health and wellbeing strategy – under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, local authorities, in conjunction with statutory partners, have duties to assess relevant needs and to prepare a joint health and wellbeing strategy. This includes considering the extent to which needs can be met by way of making arrangements under s.75 of the National Health Service Act 2006.
- Safeguarding and promoting welfare of children – the Children Act 2004, s.11 sets out a duty for statutory partners to make arrangements for ensuring that their functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- Educational provision – under the Education Act 1996, local authorities have a duty to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental, and physical development of the community by securing that efficient primary and secondary education is available to meet the needs of the local population and a duty to promote high standards and fulfilment of potential.
- Children with SEND – under the Children and Families Act 2014, local authorities have duties to support participation in decision-making, early identification of children with SEND, greater choice and control over support, collaboration between agencies and a focus on inclusive practice and removing barriers to learning.
- Looked after children – the Children Act 1989 contains a specific duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of looked after children and to make services available for children cared for by their own parents as appears reasonable.

5.5 All procurement must comply with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's contract procedure rules.

5.6 Under Regulation 72 (1) (b) of The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCR) variations to contracts are permitted to accommodate additional services by the original contractor, which have become necessary but were not included in the initial procurement, where a change of contractor cannot be made for economic reasons, and would cause significant inconvenience or substantial duplication of costs for the council. Any increase in price must also not exceed 50% of the value of the original contract.

Under Regulation 72 (1) (c) of the PCR where the need for variations to a contract arises from circumstances which a diligent contracting authority could not have foreseen, these will be permitted provided that the change does not alter the overall nature of the contract, and each increase in price does not exceed 50% of the value of the original contract.

In the circumstances here:

- SBC's procurement function was impacted by the Covid pandemic and is still recovering

- Changes in service provision required as a result of changes in the legislative and policy realms are substantial and these will take time to work through
- There is a desire from partner organisations for SBC to work on a collaborative basis with other organisations nearby to commission and provide a single cohesive service. This will take time to come to fruition and there are contract alignment issues to take into account.

Current expectations are that the new Provider Selection Regime will come in (subject to Parliamentary approval) towards the back end of 2022.

5.7 Taking all of this uncertainty and change into account, the council needs some time to review the longer term 0-19 health services commissioning and procurement, and it is not ready to go out to market for a competitive procurement at this stage. A rushed or incomplete or partially considered procurement would be likely to cause economic loss in the longer term, and inconvenience and substantial duplication of costs for the council if it wants to change arrangements and go out to procurement in a relatively short period of time when the new PSR and collaborative arrangements materialise.

And providers are unlikely to want to bid for a short-term contract. Equally, the proposed collaborative arrangements and the advent of the PSR were not fully known and are still not fully known and we cannot have foreseen what is unknown.

Therefore Regulations 72 (1) (b) and (c) of the PCR are engaged here and justify the further one-year contract extension.

5.8 It will be necessary to agree a waiver of SBC's Contract Procedure Rules to agree the one-year contract extension.

6.0 Risk management implications

6.1 There are a number of risks associated with the contract extension set out below with RAG rating and suggested RAG status with mitigation using the NHS Risk rating schedule. These risks have been entered onto the Public Health Team risk register and will be entered onto the Directorate Risk Register once finalised.

| Risk | Impact | Likelihood | Severity | Mitigation/RAG Rating |
|--|---------------|-----------------|-------------|--|
| Lack of time to complete formal provider selection process within the required timescales, impact on Provider workforce retention | Severe | Unlikely | HIGH | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently a shared procurement process is both desirable and viable at this time and a collaborative approach has Chief Executive support in each authority • The contract extensions significantly |

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| | | | | <p>expands the amount of time available to deliver provider selection and new service mobilisation of 24 months (October 2022 to September 2024)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SBC Public Health and the Berkshire East Public Health Hub have experience, expertise, capacity and adequate time to deliver the works for the contract extension and solo procurement exercise • A robust programme plan is being assembled to mitigate risks to SBC and across the Berkshire East system • Provider engagement communications will stress the need to ensure retention and staff wellbeing are prioritised throughout any transition that may occur. |
| <p>Lack of Appropriate Provider identified following on from Procurement</p> | <p>Severe</p> | <p>Possible</p> | <p>HIGH</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market and System engagement exercises will be conducted at Berkshire East level as the provider selection |

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| | | | | <p>approach is clarified</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialisation of upcoming approach to market will align with NHS system developments and national procurement system developments • Procurement of a larger service is likely to be more attractive to providers |
| <p>Lack of appropriate budget and resources to address the mandatory and advisory elements of the Healthy Child Programme 0 to 19</p> | <p>Severe</p> | <p>Possible</p> | <p>HIGH</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Public Health Budget contains appropriate funding to support the service proposal and is a recurring item of spend in line with mandated and recommended service provision • The proposed modelling and resulting Cabinet Paper will highlight the imperative to secure appropriate funding for the 0 to19 service offer • An East Berkshire Health Needs Assessment has been completed by the Public Health Hub with local area teams including SBC PH and this underlines the necessity to |

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| | | | | <p>support the case for further investment in the service to improve outcomes for Children and Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current service model and resources available have elements where development of a service specification reflecting the revised national Framework can deliver enhanced outcomes and the extended timescale for the re-procurement allows for a richer analysis of system delivery efficiencies and local engagement to drive a nuanced local delivery alongside generic service offers |
| <p>Lack of preparedness of supplier from 1st October 2024</p> | <p>Severe</p> | <p>Unlikely</p> | <p>HIGH</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preliminary socialisation and market testing/ engagement followed by robust approach to market when the procurement approach is agreed • Extended current contract duration supports more detailed provider and system preparedness |

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| | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six-month mobilisation period to enable any required migration of caseloads, TUPE processes etc. |
| <p>Risks arising from system working, local drives to realise efficiencies, different starting points in resourcing, delivery, systemic differences across Berkshire East</p> | Severe | Possible | HIGH | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an awareness across the Berkshire East Public Health system of the risks and challenges to collaborative ventures. With the ongoing proposed scrutiny of progress for the collaboration and monitoring of commitments an key decisions across system partners there is a strong commitment to ensure local nuance in commissioning, procurement and delivery reflect local needs. • With a Task and Finish Group steering the works and ongoing reporting on ensure cross border collaboration there is an enhanced ability to ensure the collaborative does not adversely impact on local services and timescales |

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| | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing works – with additional capacity from the Public Health Hub – will improve the capacity and capability to support the programme of works and assist in the delivery of a more comprehensive engagement and consultation process and address issues arising from the re-procurement • Reports at key junctures from the Task And Finish Group, including the key progress report in February 2023, will provide opportunities to reframe the approach to the collaborative or solo commissioning of the new service model. • Both options (Collaborative or solo approaches) are achievable within the timeframe suggested. |
| <p>Risks arising from the NHS Act to health and care services and systems arising during the lifespan of the procurement</p> | <p>Severe</p> | <p>Possible</p> | <p>HIGH</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Task and Finish Group delivering the collaborative will constantly monitor and report on the regulatory and legislative |

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| | | | | <p>environment and address issues as they arise to ensure the re-procurement evolves in line with the NHS Act and other system frameworks etc</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service model and specification at its heart will require provider(s) to respond and adapt to system changes arising from national, regional and local drivers including legislation, Needs Assessment, Service user insight – including inbuilt service iteration plans - learning from best practice evidence assessment, and ongoing system consultation. |
| <p>Non-Agreement of the proposal around Berkshire collaboration in any or all boroughs</p> | <p>Severe</p> | <p>Possible</p> | <p>HIGH</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The collaborative will continue to engage with local system leadership and through socialisation of opportunity and ongoing consultation processes with local democratic and system leadership seek to support capture of progress and |

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| | | | | <p>provide reports to each local area to enable scrutiny of the works conducted and the specific February 2023 report on the overall collaborative and key decision to proceed or pursue local (solo) approaches from 1st April 2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the collaboration is not supported in one or more local councils, the Berkshire East Public Health Hub will work with local commissioners to support a common starting point for the approach to modernising each 0 to 19 service offers in response to the national programme requirements• Local public health commissioning capacity would require additional specialist input to make up for the loss of cross border collaboration if this did not proceed• A solo provider selection– if the collaborative did not proceed |
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| | | | | <p>following scrutiny in February 2023 and a decision on a solo process from 1st April 2023 was called for would be deliverable by October 2024.</p> |
| <p>The collaborative approach to provider selection and service delivery does not address the specific demographic and population health issues of Slough Borough Council residents and reflect their concerns, priorities and needs</p> | <p>Severe</p> | <p>Unlikely</p> | <p>HIGH</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local demographic factors will be a starting point for the collaborative approach and will be the core of the se The Council's Public Health Team has led on the development of the proposed modernisation and with the Berkshire East Public Health Hub is seeking to ensure that alongside core offers across each local area that individual demography, health needs assessments and population health factors drive a nuanced, modular approach to the development of the service The service will be developed from first principles to ensure that the specific needs of each local area are addressed and that each councils unique |

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| | | | | <p>needs are amply reflected in local service delivery, alongside elements where a common approach is both proportionate and effective (Recruitment and retention, in service development and skill mix approaches, portability of accreditation and continuing professional development required by HCP delivery being immediate first steps for aligned working)</p> |
|--|--|--|--|--|

Table 4 Risk Assessment and mitigations

7.0 Environmental implications

7.1 There are opportunities in the updated specification to place emphasis on environmentally sustainable work practices, including reduction in paper records and minimising travel by allowing professionals to work in an agile way. A key element of service user insight and co-production will focus on identification of possible additional supports within the service that could promote active travel and have a positive impact on emissions.

8.0 Equality implications

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

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

8.3 There are significant opportunities to advance equality of opportunity and to reduce health inequalities from a re-procurement of the 0-19 service. The service delivers key outcomes that support children and young people in general, parents and carers with

additional needs, and children and young people with SEND and other specific needs. Tailored support is provided to certain communities, including but not limited to Black, Asian, Eastern European, Roma and Traveller communities, as well as looked after children, teenage and young parents and parents who are sole carers.

8.4 It is important to note insights from [Census](#) and [Health Needs Assessment](#) data on the CYP groups in Slough and how these impact on Health inequalities and Equality issues in a wider context. The proposed collaborative works will seek to address these needs for a wide range of children and young people who require additional support or service focus:

- Nearly a quarter of Slough's population are under 15 years of age which is a significantly higher proportion than national and regional averages.
- There are significant health inequalities faced by children and young people in Slough and these are known to intersect with equality characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, disability and more generally deprivation and other risk factors.
- Whilst the collaborative work that is underway will aim to reduce inequalities and improve access and outcomes for children and young people from all backgrounds, it does have a specific focus emphasis on supporting those most vulnerable and at risk of negative outcomes.
- The resulting specification will be evidence –based, align to the emerging National framework and the selection regime will ensure that the providers can demonstrate understanding of Equality, Health Inequalities and Health Equity issues and the different demographics and emerging issues in the Berkshire East area.
- The collaborative will establish and ensure the ongoing monitoring of Key equality indicators and outcomes amongst different groups
- The EIA is a fluid document and will be updated throughout the process, and thereafter through contractual review and the diverse service user voice and co-production elements that are being planned.

8.5 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed in January 2022 and refreshed in August 2022 - See Appendix B - and will continue to be updated during the lifetime of this project and following release of the revised national Framework as mentioned in section 2.0 above which considerably strengthens the inclusion and equalities agenda for both mandated and advisory services.

9.0 Procurement implications

9.1 Subject to the approval of the Procurement Board a contract extension for two years would be issued, in response to the March 2022 Cabinet decision as a contract variation to the existing provider with a duration from 1st October 2022 to 30th September 2024.

9.2 Options for the commissioning methodology will be set out in full form as the national [Provider Selection Regime](#) is understood .

10.0 Workforce implications

10.1 There are no workforce implications arising from this report.

11.0 Property implications

11.1 None known at this time.

12. Background Papers

None

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Appendix A – The Healthy Child Programme/National Framework for Maternity Children and Young People.

Health Visiting and School Nursing Overview & Vision

Overview: The [Healthy Child Programme](#) (HCP) and new **National Framework**

Since 2008 the HCP has been the **national evidence-based universal health programme for children aged 0 to 19**. The 0 to 5 element is led by health visiting services and the 5 to 19 element is led by school nursing services. Together they provide place-based services and work in partnership with maternity services, education and other providers where needed. The universal reach of the HCP provides an invaluable opportunity from early in a child's life to identify families that may need additional support and children who are at risk of poor outcomes.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities announced a revised model for HCP which is being renamed as **The National Framework for Maternity Children and Young People's Health and Wellbeing**. The core of the new Framework will continue to be the National [Model Specification](#)

The HCP and national framework is comprised of **mandatory** (Health Visiting) and **advisory** (School Nursing) service offers operating from the perinatal life course stage to transition into adulthood from the 18th or 25th year¹. Whilst the HCP expressly addresses public health physical health priorities for CYP and their parents or carers parity of esteem for MH & Wellbeing and physical health is a consistent aspect of the offer across all age ranges.

The HCP has been substantially updated by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) in 2020 and is now explicitly linked to a number of other agenda areas ([Maternity Services](#), [Best Start for Life – tackling the first 1001 days](#), [Family Hubs](#), [SEND Code and review](#), CYP Mental Health and wellbeing and both Covid 19 Pandemic safe delivery and restoration of services for CYP.

The HCP has two interrelated Domains with **Four Levels of Service offer**: Community, Universal, Specialist and Targeted alongside **Three Core aspects to the delivery model**: Health and Wellbeing Reviews, Personalised Needs Based focus, Six Core High Impact Areas.

| Mandated HCP elements | Advisory HCP Elements |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • antenatal health promoting review • new baby review • 6 to 8-week review • 3-month contact • 6-month contact • 1-year review • 2 to 2-and-a-half-year review | Universal health and wellbeing reviews & contacts as part of overall support 5 to 19, or 25 if appropriate , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 to 5-year-old health needs review • 7 to 8-year-old health needs contact • 10 to 11-year-old health needs review • 12 to 13-year-old health needs review • school leavers post-16 health needs review • transition to adult services • 18 to 24 year old health needs review |

The [High Impact Areas](#), with additional information for maternity, provide an evidence-based framework for those delivering maternal and child public health services from preconception onwards. They are central to the health visitor and school nurse delivery model.

¹ Depending on the complexity of the health needs of individual CYP and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) status

| High Impact areas for Health Visiting | high impact areas for School Nursing |
|--|---|
| Health visitors lead the Healthy Child Programme 0 to 5 and the 6 early years high impact areas: | School nurses lead the Healthy Child Programme 5 to 19 and the 6 school age years |
| Supporting the transition to parenthood | Supporting resilience and wellbeing |
| Supporting maternal and family mental health | Improving health behaviours and reducing risk taking |
| Supporting breastfeeding | Supporting healthy lifestyles |
| Supporting healthy weight, healthy nutrition | Supporting vulnerable young people and improving health inequalities |
| Improving health literacy; reducing accidents and minor illnesses | Supporting complex and additional health and wellbeing needs |
| Supporting health, wellbeing and development: Ready to learn, narrowing the 'word gap' | Promoting self-care and improving health literacy |

Taken together, the High Impact Areas describe areas where health visitors and school nurses can have a significant impact on health and wellbeing, improving outcomes for children, young people, families and communities. These High Impact Areas do not describe the entirety of the role and of the health visiting and school nursing services but give a clear outline of priority areas for alignment and integration including Maternity and School based services.

Vision for the 0 to 19 Service Offer:

0 to 19 services face significant challenges associated with rising levels of need, severity of presentations and widespread and enduring workforce challenges that make it hard to see a continuance of provision if opportunities for local and regional level working is not embraced.

The wide range of issues covered by health visiting and school nursing services present clear opportunities for alignment of resources, strengthening of current multiagency practices and colocation of personnel across priority agenda areas as shown below

| Service Area | Suggested priority areas for alignment, integration, colocation, etc |
|---------------------|---|
| HVs - 0 to 5 | Maternity Services Family Hubs |
| SNs - 5 to 19/25 | Mental Health and Wellbeing Long Term Conditions |
| All Service areas | Family Hubs & Parent and Carer support Safeguarding SEND Mental Health and Wellbeing Child Death Prevention and Bereavement Support Vulnerable Cohorts/Health Inequalities |

A collaborative and nuanced approach to aligning the commissioning of 0 to 19 services at a regional level could empower and accelerate the areas of alignment and integration set out above and provide additional and earlier supportive inputs to the communities that depend on having access to effective 0 to 19 services. Such alignment could be both sustainable and help improve the reach, quality of service delivery and sustainability of 0 to 19 public health services.

Appendix B Equality Impact Assessment

| | |
|--|---|
| Directorate: Adults and Communities | |
| Service: Public Health | |
| Name of Officer/s completing assessment: Daniel Devitt | |
| Date of Assessment: 31st August 2022 – refresh of original EIA Draft in January 2022 | |
| Name of service/function or policy being assessed: Re-procurement of the 0 to 19 Health Visiting and School Nursing Services (Healthy Child Programme) Service | |
| 1. | <p>What are the aims, objectives, outcomes, purpose of the policy, service change, function that you are assessing?</p> <p>The Healthy Child Programme is a universal programme available to all children and aims to ensure that every child gets the good start they need to lay the foundations of a healthy life. The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development including physical, intellectual and emotional, are established in early childhood. In 2009, the Department of Health set out an evidence-based programme of best practice, The Healthy Child Programme (HCP 2021), with the ambition of making everywhere as good as the best by developing improvements in health and wellbeing for children and young people. Sustaining this across the life course for school-aged children and young people is important to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities through universal provision and personalised response for supporting physical and mental health and wellbeing. Universal and targeted public health services provided by health visiting and school nursing teams are crucial to improving the health and wellbeing of all children and young people.</p> <p>Key service elements have been developed since the original Health Child Programme Model in 2009 and over time the service model has been refined. In 2015 Local authorities became the commissioners of HCP related services as the health and Social Care Act 2012. The existing providers contract has at its heart a specification that was generated across 2015 and 2016 and is coming to its natural end on the 30th September 2022 after five years. Alongside this there have been two significant developments in both the wider NHS and a national Modernisation programme.</p> <p>1 The National HCP Modernisation programme: The delivery of HCP services has undergone major changes with a national Healthy Child Programme modernisation programme under way since 2018.</p> <p>2 Health Service reforms currently underway herald major changes in the local NHS and greater opportunities for wide scale collaboration in the new Integrated Care System and Partnerships that will come into place from April 2022.</p> |

Modernising the Healthy Child Programme is intended to enable effective, focused services where additional needs are identified along with use of the latest evidence on effective practice and helping to bring local authorities, the NHS and partners together to achieve priority outcomes for children and families:

It is proposed that an additional extension of the service for the service, alongside that already granted by the Cabinet in March 2022, amounting to a total of two years is granted to permit the further development of a cross border model that aligns the HCP offers of Slough and its neighbouring boroughs, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Bracknell Forest. The aim of the collaborative re-procurement is two-fold

- To support modernisation of local HCP offers across Berkshire East in line with national models in a way that supports evolutions in integrated working practices across health education and social care systems including the NHS Frimley Integrated Care System
- To ensure each borough can benefit from efficiencies of scale without compromising the different requirements arising from the very different demographics and service imperative arising from each area.

In summary the HCP an early intervention and prevention orientated programme, tackling health inequalities faced by children and young people from birth through the school years to the age of 19, consolidating the good practice programmes and interventions for this age range. It is an evidence-based programme outlining a universal service to promote optimal health and well-being for children and young people.

The HCP will shortly be reframed as the National Framework for Maternity Children and Young People by the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities. It will substantially restate the core principles of the HCP and wider NHS and Local Authority Public Health works to support and improve the health of Children and Young People from preconception to transition into adults services.

It is important to note insights from [Census](#) and Health Needs Assessment data on the CYP groups in Slough and how these impact on Health inequalities and Equality issues in a wider context. The proposed collaborative works will seek to address these needs for a wide range of children and young people who require additional support or service focus:

- Nearly a quarter of Slough's population are under 15 years of age which is a significantly higher proportion than national and regional averages.
- There are significant health inequalities faced by children and young people in Slough and these are known to intersect with equality characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, disability and more generally deprivation and other risk factors.
- Whilst the collaborative work that is underway will aim to reduce inequalities and improve access and outcomes for children and

| | |
|----|---|
| | <p>young people from all backgrounds, it does have a specific focus emphasis on supporting those most vulnerable and at risk of negative outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The resulting specification will be evidence –based, align to the emerging National framework and the selection regime will ensure that the providers can demonstrate understanding of Equality, Health Inequalities and Health Equity issues and the different demographics and emerging issues in the Berkshire East area. • The collaborative will establish and ensure the ongoing monitoring of Key equality indicators and outcomes amongst different groups • The EIA is a fluid document and will be updated throughout the process, and thereafter through contractual review and the diverse service user voice and co-production elements that are being planned. <p>Anticipated and pertinent strengthening of the programmes inclusion and support offers for particularly vulnerable groups will range across all age ranges and specific attention will be required – as an extension of existing provision – for Babies Children and Young People with a range of additional needs including SEND status, Black and Minority/Minoritised Ethnic Communities, Asylum seekers, Children Looked After and Care leavers, parity of esteem for physical and mental health conditions, LGBT and those impacted by Economic/Health Equity considerations including the cost of living crisis.</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>Slough’s Healthy Child Programme is commissioned by the Public Health Department with support from the commissioning team in the Adults And Communities Directorate. It is currently being delivered by Solutions 4 Health.</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 service modernisation programme and re-procurement will have the impacts as set out in the table below</p> |

| Characteristic | Positive , Negative, Neutral or Unknown Impact | Rationale for Assessment |
|--|---|--|
| Age | Positive | Health Visitors will continue to provide a universal offer to families with children aged 0-5 years who live in Slough. The School nurse service will continue to offer a service to children and young people aged 5-19) who attend mainstream schools in Slough. Both groups, their parents and carers, will benefit from the modernised service model which enhances early intervention and support to deliver prevention of ill health |
| Disability | Positive | The revised HCP is considerably more inclusive - specifically in works in support of CYP with SEND and Neurodivergent needs across the life course from birth to transition to adults. The local development plan will explicitly factor in works to improve and augment SEND provision in response to the ongoing works on the Written Statement of Action following on from the SEND inspection in November 2021. |
| Gender Reassignment: | Positive | Though gender reassignment is largely an area for adults service provision, the revised HCP is much more inclusive and embracing of diversity and better equipped to meet the needs of CYP with emerging gender identity issues, and related support needs. A focus on enhanced mental health and wellbeing alongside additional welcome focus on diversity and inclusion across the related relationship and Sexual Education agenda in school and college aged children will provide additional support to CYP with gender identity support needs. |
| Marriage and Civil Partnership: | Positive/ Neutral | The revised programme is explicit on refreshing the awareness of diversity and the different models of relationships and structures supporting couples with children or young people. |
| Pregnancy and maternity: | Positive/ Neutral | The HCP is by design inclusive and supportive of pregnancy and maternity and specifically supportive of the health needs and supports in the peri-natal phase including but not limited to health and care inputs to support parental mental health, infant feeding, child development and positive parenting, early intervention and support and accessibility of support for parents and carers from birth to transition to adults. |
| Race: | Positive | The HCP is by design inclusive and supportive of different ethnicities and cultural groups. Explicit focus in local delivery on meeting the needs of CYP, parents and carers from minoritised |

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| | | | communities (including but not limited to Black, Asian, Eastern European and Gypsy Roma and other Traveller communities) is a core element of the offer. |
| | Religion and Belief: | Positive | The HCP is by design inclusive and supportive of different cultural groups and offers a culturally sensitive model of health care and support in an inclusive and culturally sensitive matter. This is a particular feature of early years (0 to 5) and school aged developmental and health care delivery in support of the RSE curriculum alongside works with parents and carers with diverse faith backgrounds and practices. |
| | Sexual orientation: | Positive | The HCP is by design inclusive and supportive of different sexualities and in its early parent support offer embracing of different family compositions and in school aged children supportive of emerging sexual identities in CYP. I |
| | Other: CYP/Parents and carers Neurodivergent needs, Mental Health needs and Children Looked After/Care leavers | Positive | <p>The service will be positive for three different additional groups:</p> <p>Neurodiverse Parents, Carers and CYP through a strong focus on raising awareness of neurodiversity and approaches to early identification and support alongside diagnostic pathways and education and social care support</p> <p>Parents, Carers and CYP with specific Mental Health and Wellbeing needs from early years to transition into adult services with the new approach to holistic service development and collaborative working relationships with Mental Health services including school based Mental Health Support Teams and other offers.</p> <p>Children Looked After/Care leavers will receive additional support alongside existing provision through the modernised HCP and local works to ensure the 0 to 19 service offer is fully meeting requirements for support arising from the Children and Social work Act 2017s requirement for additional support to be in place till the age of 25. An earlier and more developed approach to in borough and out of borough support and preparation for transition of health and care needs will be an additional supportive input.</p> |
| 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>See above</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>None.</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 is a wide range of evidence in support of the national modernised Healthy Child Programme that show the clear positive impacts and outcomes for the works it delivers. A concise bibliography of some of the main sources of evidence in support of the initial and revised programme is presented below including</p> <p>What Works to enhance the effectiveness of the Healthy Child Programme – an evidence update EIF 2018 Saving Babies Lives Care Bundle NHS England 2017 Better Births Four Years on – a review of progress NHSE 2020 1001 Critical Days The Importance of the conceptions to Age Two Period (WAVE TRUST 2014) Rapid Review to Update Evidence for the Healthy Child Programme 0–5 DHSC 2015 Future in Mind DHSC 2015 No Child Left Behind UKHSA 2020 SEND Code of practice: 0 to 25 years, Department of Education and Department of Health and Social Care, 2014</p> <p>Programme specific evidence resources include:</p> <p>Cover of vaccination evaluated rapidly (COVER) programme (DHSC 2018) Public Health England Child and maternal health profiles (PHE/OHID 2021) Public Health England National Child Measurement Programme (NHSE 2022) Single Data List, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2021</p> <p>Further data and insight into Children and Young People’s health inequalities and health Equity issues are provided by the constantly evolving Berkshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Berkshire East JSNA (berkshirepublichealth.co.uk) and the core analysis sections for Maternity Services and Children and young people. Lifestages and Groups Archives - Berkshire East JSNA (berkshirepublichealth.co.uk)</p> |

Both have informed progress to date on the approach to re-procuring the service and the model that has been recommended to the Slough Borough Council Cabinet. Both of these areas will evolve over time and provide a constantly updated resource to inform the work of the Health Visiting and School Nursing Services.

A useful highlight summary from the 0 to 19 HNA is set out below:

Slough CYP – Highlights from the [Berkshire East 0 to 19 Health Needs Assessment](#)

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Population | Slough has the largest number of children and young people aged 0 to 19 in Berkshire East and these make up 31% of the total population. The proportion of Slough's population from the 0 to 14 age group is significantly higher than the rest of Berkshire East and the national picture. |
| Ethnicity and language | 73% of children and young people in Slough are from a non-White British background, which is significantly higher than the rest of Berkshire East and England. 86% of school-children in Slough do not have English as a first language. Slough has the 2nd highest proportion of births from mothers who were born outside of the UK in England at 69%. |
| Deprivation | 15% of children aged 0 to 15 in Slough are from income-deprived households and 3% of 0 to 15 year olds live in the most deprived quintile nationally. Deprivation is more wide-spread across Slough rather than being in specific neighbourhoods. |
| Housing | 13% of households in Slough are overcrowded, which is significantly worse than the rest of Berkshire East and England. The rate of households that are homeless or threatened with homelessness are significantly higher in Slough compared to England. This is the case for households with dependent children and also those headed by a young person (aged 16 to 24). |
| Employment | Slough has significantly worse employment and unemployment rates than England for people aged 16 to 64. |
| Maternal and infant health | Fertility - Slough has the highest Total Fertility Rate in England. This has decreased over the last 5 years, but still remains much higher than the rest of Berkshire East. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <p>Low birth weight – Slough has the highest proportion of babies born with a low-birth weight in the South East and this has increased over the last 5 years.</p> <p>Infant mortality – Slough has the 2nd highest infant mortality rate in the South East, although this is similar to the national figure.</p> |
| Child development at 2 – 2 ½ years | 80% of children in Slough who received the 2 to 2 ½ year ASQ-3 development review in 2020/21 were meeting the expected levels in all 5 skill areas. This proportion was significantly lower than the national figure and was the lowest level in Berkshire East. |
| Dental Health | In 2018/19, 38% of 5 year olds in Slough had visually obvious dental decay. This was the highest level in the South East and significantly worse than the national figure. |
| Healthy Weight | Data from 2015/16 to 19/20 shows an association between deprivation and obesity in Slough, particularly for the Reception aged group. The difference in obesity prevalence between ethnic groups is not as great in Slough compared to the rest of Berkshire East. Reception children and Year 6 children from a Black ethnic group do have higher prevalence than those in White and Asian groups, however this is not significantly different. |
| <p>Local performance against the Public Health Outcomes framework has and will continue to inform the initial approach to the collaborative works that will follow on from it. Key insights from this are summarised below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Injuries and ill health mostly significantly worse - Mostly at level of slightly lower levels of reported injuries/diagnoses (may be an operational issue • Behavioural Risk Factors mostly significantly worse: Apart from lower alcohol admissions for under 18s significantly worse than national averages and much lower adult activity levels • Child Health variable: Good breast feeding initiation and relatively low levels of maternal smoking - but significantly | |

| | |
|----|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> worse obesity • <u>Inequalities</u> mostly significantly worse: Significantly worse than the national average – based on indices of multiple deprivation • <u>Wider Determinants</u> mostly significantly worse: Mixed picture with significant challenges on domestic /sexual violence and employment • <u>Health Protection</u> mostly significantly worse: Significantly high TB levels – much lower STI reported levels very low execs winter deaths <p>Initial data analysis from the 2021 Census has confirmed local insights on the youthful nature of Slough’s population. 23.5% of Slough’s residents are aged under 15. This is the second highest proportion in England and Wales behind only Barking and Dagenham</p> <p>There has been an increase in population cohorts in \slough since 2011of: 19.3% in people aged 65 years and over 10.7% in people aged 15 to 64 years 17.3% in children aged under 15 years.</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>A full scale consultation exercise is planned to follow Cabinet agreement across all three Berkshire East Areas. This will be focussed largely on the “How” rather than the “What” is delivered given the national programme and substantial level of mandated service offers within the HCP and new National Framework. Consultation will follow on throughout the two year extension period and will be an ongoing element of the revised service model.</p> |
| 8. | <p>Have you considered the impact the policy might have on local community relations?</p> <p>Yes. The revised model and approach to service improvement and delivery will be tested with the community and professional stakeholders. It is hoped that the changes will be well received as they will directly impact on service improvement works for the works</p> |

| | |
|-----|---|
| | across the key age ranges for the HCP/National Framework (i.e. Parents and Carers, CYP from 0 to 19) including those with protected characteristics as identified above. |
| 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>A programme delivery Task and Finish group reporting to Cabinet portfolio leads and the executive Directors for both Public Health and Children's services will provide continual assurance of progress, issues arising and mitigations to follow</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>There will be a wider range of indicators in both the procurement/contractual development framework, service iteration, co-production and improvement mechanisms and eventual service design to ensure the re-procurement approach develops in the required way and the eventual service go live and onward operation is responsive to feedback and able to capture impact on Slough Borough Council residents and wider system partners in the NHS and community.</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 | ✓ |
| 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). | |

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.

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

Name:

Signed:Daniel Devitt.....(Person completing the EIA)

Name: Christine Ford

Signed:Approved By Email 27/09/2022.....(Policy Lead if not same as above)

Date:30/09/2022

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Appendix C Indicative Timetable of Phases Activities and Key Decisions

Supporting Health Visiting and School Nursing (0 to 19) Services in Berkshire East: A collaborative approach.

Alignment of contract timeframes for different local authorities is complex but manageable provided there is sufficient support from senior officers and the timeframes are reasonable for members to agree proposals.

Currently a further extension is being requested to allow:

- 1) Alignment of SBC services with Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) and Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM)
- 2) Sufficient time for any changes to current procurement procedures to maximise opportunities for improved service commissioning
- 3) Alignment of services with wider health and care services

Discussions with the chief executives of BFC, RBWM and Frimley Health have all assured very senior support of a collaborative approach. At this stage, Cabinet is being asked to agree a contract extension, rather than a full procurement and provider selection plan, as any plans/timelines will be dictated by the three factors above. Three key issues are important to note three interrelated elements underpinning the indicative timeframe below.

- The current request is for a further contract extension of one year in addition to that already granted
- The other two local authorities are commencing their own internal processes.
- Once all three Berks East authorities have completed their own approval processes a full procurement business case and forward plan for the whole collaborative endeavour will be presented to each authority's Cabinet for agreement

The timeline below therefore serves to be a high-level indication that the contract extension allows time for the necessary procedures to take place in the correct order.

Where timelines are dependent on SBC processes, these are outlined as fully as possible. Where timelines are dependent on processes within other organisations, then these are given at the level of detail needed to assure that the timeframes allow sufficient time for key milestones for SBC.

Most significantly, in the previous timeframes, Slough Borough Council would have been required to start an open procurement in late 2022. This would have been under current procurement procedures (rather than the incoming Provider Selection Regime) and before the other two local authorities would have gained cabinet approval for a collaborative approach. These factors would have prevented a pan-East Berkshire service being commissioned for the current contract.

An agreed extension would give the following contract start dates:

| Authority | Go Live Date for the collaboratively developed service specification | Key Outcome proposed |
|---------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Bracknell Forest Council | April 2024 | new service in place |
| RB Windsor and Maidenhead | August 2024 | new service in place |
| Slough Borough Council | October 2024 | new service in place |

Table 1 Berkshire East Collaborative service offers Go Live Dates as currently understood

Indicative timeframes, Key Actions and Decisions

It is worth noting that it could be determined that the most appropriate date for all three areas to go live would be October 2024, allowing for maximised timescales for mobilisation and communication resources across the Berkshire East region, but that this is not currently an agreed stance and the timelines here are those currently understood as being in place.

| Indicative timeframe | Key Actions/Phases and Decisions | Explanatory notes |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| From October 2023 | Establishment of Task and Finish Group to deliver the collaborative and set out an appropriate reporting and delivery schedule | As per the aamin Cabinet Paper a task and Finish Group with strategic input from all three areas will manage the delivery of the collaborative and ensure timely reporting is available to support local area decision making and progress trough democratic and commissioning structures |
| From November 2022 | Agreement By neighbouring Local authorities of collaborative working arrangements and initial approval processes NB: Slough Borough Council would – subject to the October cabinet - already have approval to consider a collaborative approach and extended timeframe when Bracknell Forest BC and RB of Windsor and Maidenhead request a decision from their own cabinet. | Provided the Slough contract extension is agreed, then the next key milestones to a collaborative service will be cabinet sign off by Bracknell Forest BC and RB Windsor and Maidenhead. |
| From December 2022 | With all required permissions across all Berkshire East local authorities the collaborative will have three initial main objectives/deliverables: 1) To work closely with BFC and RBWM to ensure contract timeframes are aligned | It is anticipated that updates to each authority senior Corporate Leadership team will be provided on a month-to-month basis and Cabinet level updates provided in a schedule to be agreed, |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| | <p>2) To agree outcomes and begin work on a joint service specification to increase stability and capacity within the Health Visiting and School Nursing workforce to enable more accessible services for residents</p> <p>3) To use the extended timeframe to continue to improve current services for children and young people</p> | <p>but no less than quarterly.</p> <p>All collaborative and quality improvement works will be supported by a comprehensive engagement workstream to ensure elements of stakeholder voice and where possible co-produced elements</p> |
| <p>Late 2022/early 2023 -</p> <p>Timescale tbc</p> <p>Early 2023</p> <p>Early to late 2023.</p> | <p>Provider Selection Approach and Agreements: The Preview of proposals for the provider selection regime state that a major change to the current regulations will be the option to identify a suitable provider without running a competitive procurement process.</p> <p>The provider selection regime is expected to be published by early 2023 and SBC will align their procedures accordingly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific options for commissioning across a pan-East Berkshire footprint will then be developed dependent on the new procedures • Procurement Business case and Provider selection approach to be shared and agreed across all three local authorities at Cabinet level • February 2023 Collaborative Progress report – Assessment of Progress to date across all system areas and decision to proceed or to pursue a local solo provider selection approach from 1st April 2023 • 1st APRIL 2023 – Deadline for continuing with the collaborative or pursuing a local solution | <p>Timescales tbc - The exact details in the upcoming statutory guidance will outline the process for this.</p> <p>Local Cabinet/system scheduling to be agreed</p> <p>Until the statutory guidance is published, the exact details and timeframes of the process for a collaborative approach cannot be predicted. Again, the current decision is the decision to extend the current contract.</p> <p>NB each areas democratic structures has a slightly different timeline hence the assessment at February and deadline for decision on next steps in April 2023</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| | <p>Following agreements, the Collaborative will develop essential commissioning and service products including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service specification development completion • Commissioning approach agreed and initiated • Contract model choice and development and sign off for use • Potential provider(s) identified and engaged • Selection of provider(s) for the collaborative and ratification at Cabinet level • Contract signage and mobilisation period <p>Key Decisions will be presented to each authority's cabinet once each local authority has interpreted and embedded the regulatory changes into their own processes.</p> | |
| <p>Late 2023 to Early 2024</p> <p>April 2024 August 2024 October 2024</p> | <p>Mobilisation of local service offers across 2023 and 2024</p> <p>Bracknell Forest Council Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Slough Borough Council</p> | <p>NB as noted above each area could choose to ouch mobilisation to October 2024 allowing a joint go live and longer "run up" to Go live.</p> |

Table 2 Indicative timeframes for the proposed Collaborative

Slough Borough Council

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Report To: | Cabinet |
| Date: | Monday 17 th October 2022 |
| Subject: | Home to School Travel Assistance and Post 16 Travel Assistance Policies – Consultation Feedback |
| Lead Member: | Councillor Hulme – Lead Member Children’s Services |
| Chief Officer: | Andrew Fraser – Executive Director of People (Children) |
| Contact Officer: | Johnny Kyriacou – Associate Director, Education & Inclusion |
| Ward(s): | <u>All</u> |
| Key Decision: | YES |
| Exempt: | NO |
| Decision Subject To Call In: | YES |
| Appendices: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Final Policy 5-16 Home to School Travel Assistance 2 Final Policy Post 16 Education Travel Assistance Policy Statement 3 Consultation Analysis 4 EqIA |

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out recommendations to Cabinet regarding the continued delivery of Home to School and College Travel Assistance. The report highlights feedback from a recent public consultation and rationale regarding the proposed changes to policy. Cabinet decision is required regarding progression of the recommendations.

Recommendations:

1.2 Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Agree the proposed policy changes for Home to School Travel (5-16) with effect from the 2023/24 academic year with transitional arrangements in place for the academic year 2022/23 (Appendix 1)
2. Agree the proposed policy changes for Home to College Travel (Post 16) (Appendix 2) with effect from the 2023/24 academic year with transitional arrangements in place for the academic year 2022/23.
3. Delegate authority to Executive Director of People (Children), in consultation with Lead Member for Children Services and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to make minor amendments to the policy, including uprating the contribution charges and bursary levels to take account of inflationary pressures, subject to any changes being within the approved budget.

Reason:

1.3.1 Slough Borough Council (SBC) is committed to ensuring the public money we spend and the resources available, are used in the most efficient and effective way to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people within our community. The proposed policy changes ensure that the Council complies with its statutory responsibilities, whilst meeting its best value duties.

Commissioner Review

1.3.2 *“The Commissioners agree with the recommendations included in this report, although they would expect the S151 Officer to sign off any changes to the policy as suggested in para 2.1.12, and there should be a requirement that any such changes can be absorbed within the approved budget.”*

2 Report

Introductory paragraph

2.1.1 The proposed policy for Home to School and Post 16 travel provides a child/individual centric approach to travel assistance. Provision will continue to support individual needs and circumstances whilst increasing alternative and independent travel options available to the Council and families.

2.1.2 The proposed policies reflect the Council’s statutory obligations. It also includes the strategic aims previously approved at cabinet, which includes:

- Social integration of children and young people whatever their needs
- Independence for children and young people with SEND
- Promotion of parental responsibility to make any necessary arrangements to ensure their children attend school
- School responsibility to collaborate with the council on SEN travel
- Environmentally sustainable travel
- Efficient use of public resources

2.1.3 This inclusion of more independent travel and alternative travel options does not mean the Council will stop meeting the needs of vulnerable children and young people by providing unsuitable travel arrangements. The policy is centred around the child/young person’s needs and considering the individual needs and circumstances of each person to identify the most appropriate form of travel.

2.1.4 A public consultation ran from Thursday 23rd June to 21st July 2022 to ask those with an interest in the service their views on the proposed policy changes, which included:

- Independent Travel Training to be offered to families as a suitable and appropriate travel provision, subject to a needs assessment.
- A new Travel Bursary option will be created and offered to families. With family consent this will enable them to make their own travel/care arrangements that enable them to facilitate their child’s attendance at School/College.

- Introduced use of collection points for transport arrangements where a needs assessment identifies that a child is able to access travel arrangements away from the home address.
- The removal of assistance with travel to faith Schools or same sex establishments where nearer establishments are identified as being able to meet educational need, unless qualification under statutory requirements.
- Introduction of a contribution charge from those in receipt of assistance where the Council does not have a statutory obligation to provide free assistance to eligible individuals, such as those in post 16 education.

- 2.1.5 A range of engagement activities was undertaken to hear from people who access these or similar services, as well as families, carers, professionals and the wider public. This included 6 face-to-face public events, including a dedicated public meeting for families of Arbour Vale School, meetings with School representatives and other professionals, engagement with voluntary groups, as well as publishing information relating to the policy proposals on the Council's consultation pages, including an online survey
- 2.1.6 General feedback from public meetings focussed on individual circumstances as a way of evidencing that the proposed independent and alternative travel options may not be suitable and would place individual children at risk where these arrangements are not appropriate. Where discussion existed that took into account all users of the service and the extreme range of needs, it was acknowledged that some children/young people may benefit from these new options if their needs were more moderate.
- 2.1.7 It is important to note that upon approval of the recommendations made above, Slough Borough Council will continue to assess each request for assistance with travel based on the merit (needs/circumstances) of each case. Therefore, it is expected that those children/young people with the greatest/most severe needs will continue to be reliant on door-to-door transport services with appropriate onboard support.
- 2.1.8 The proposed action will support the delivery of the Council's statutory obligations, ensure assistance with travel to School/College is available to those with the greatest need, and contribute towards Outcome 1 and 2 of the five-year plan: "to have happy, healthy and successful children in Slough" and "our people will be healthier and manage their own care needs".
- 2.1.9 The Council is taking steps to support the development of independence and preparation for adulthood amongst children and young people. The services identify individual needs and circumstance to decide which travel option is the most appropriate to meet short- and longer-term objectives for the individual.
- 2.1.10 The service believes that the updated policies provide the structure to effectively promote independence amongst children and young people with SEND whilst also assisting with preparing them for adulthood. The policy aims to enable effective assessment and review of individual needs and circumstances, and the introduction of more travel options will enable the service to work closely with schools and families to encourage and enable more independent travel.
- 2.1.11 The strengthening of the policy document will provide greater control and clarity for officers to effectively implement the policy in a consistent and sustainable manner, whilst providing clarity and transparency for families and schools/colleges.

Options considered

2.2.1 No Change to Existing Policies or Service Provision

The Council could choose to retain the existing policies, however this does not meet the strategic aims set out above, nor does it reflect the best practice which exists elsewhere.

Deciding to not change existing policies or provision would also restrict the services ability to make the service more efficient and assist in addressing the Council's financial challenges whilst also not effectively supporting children and young people to develop life skills for preparation for adulthood or provide a range of appropriate travel options appropriate to need/circumstances.

This option is not recommended.

Independent Travel Training

2.2.2 The option of Independent Travel Training as a suitable form of travel to be introduced. For the majority of existing users of the service this travel option will not be suitable due to the risks associated to travelling alone as a result of an individual's SEND. Where children/young person's needs are less severe, then training will be offered to those where individual needs assessments (following engagement with families and schools) have identified this as a suitable option.

2.2.3 Training will be conducted on a 1:1 basis with each training programme individually designed to reflect the specific needs and capabilities of each learner. The duration of training (number of sessions) will reflect the learner's progression with no pre-determined session numbers being set.

2.2.4 Learners will be supported to learn about how to travel safely independently on public transport and will include numerous training scenarios to reflect potential situations that the learner may experience whilst travelling.

2.2.5 Existing transport arrangements will be maintained throughout the training to ensure if a return to arranged travel was necessary then this can be facilitated quickly.

2.2.6 Out of current users of the service with an EHCP (SEN), based on the experience of other Travel Training organisations, it is only expected that a minority may be able to benefit from the training.

2.2.7 Other Council's and Travel Training organisations typically identify approximately 10-14% of existing transport users have the potential to travel independently. This would represent between 52 and 73 out of the 520 current users of the service.

2.2.8 Due to the slow nature of delivering Travel Training and the significant barriers that will exist, a conservative estimate (until January 2024) has been used when calculating financial savings. This will be validated, reviewed, and confirmed when undertaking the needs assessments of all users of the service. Where training is not appropriate/suitable for an individual then existing travel arrangements will continue, although for some children and young people there may be an opportunity to re-visit this as they get older. It is anticipated that increasing the numbers of independent travellers through the training will increase post January 2024.

2.2.9 Based against current service demand and requirement to build confidence in the programme, training up to 15 children/young people may reduce spend against the

Home to School Transport budget by £0.085m per annum by January 2024. Training will continue beyond this date, with the aim to increase the total numbers travel independently building on the early success and confidence generated from the original cohort of beneficiaries.

2.2.10 As part of the needs assessment activity that is planned to begin within the service in October 2022, individual children/young people will be identified as potential candidates for training. Through engagement with families and Schools any potential will be validated and where it is appropriate bespoke training programmes will be designed to reflect the specific needs and circumstances of the individual.

2.2.11 Training is not expected to commence in a “live” environment until February 2023. Training progression and sign off as an independent traveller will be conducted in conjunction with the family and the school. The Council will work in partnership with schools/colleges and parents/families. It is accepted that any period of change is difficult for many children, young people and their families, however this is particularly the case with children and young people with SEND. Experience in other areas has shown that well delivered independent travel training can be life changing, but also that families are very anxious about the change and how risks will be managed. It will be important to have an open dialogue with parents and carers during the process.

This option is recommended.

Travel Bursary

2.2.12 The introduction of a Travel Bursary will provide families with a more convenient option to make their own travel arrangements to reflect the needs and circumstances of the child/young person and the family.

2.2.13 In contrast to typical reimbursement arrangements an agreed budget will be paid monthly in advance to cover the costs associated with the family making appropriate travel and care arrangements to facilitate attendance at School/college. Whilst the bursary can be used to fund a variety of different travel options, this is particularly appropriate for parents or carers who have access to an adapted vehicle, which can be used to transport their child/young person.

2.2.14 Based on the feedback of the consultation and upon review of the original Travel Bursary proposal the Council is looking to introduce the following payment structure which is based on the driving distance from the child/young person’s home address and their place of education.

2.2.15 The Travel Bursary value is as follows:

| Distance Band (Home to School – Shortest Driving Route) | Travel Bursary Value (Per Annum) |
|--|---|
| Less than 5 miles | £2500 |
| 5 – 10 miles | £4000 |
| Over 10 miles | £6500 |

2.2.16 An option will exist where parent/carers can request an enhanced Travel Bursary where the value is insufficient to provide specialist travel provision. This will be reviewed and considered on a case-by-case basis. Where justifiable circumstances

are evidence, an enhanced offer may be awarded as long as any award remains financially viable for the Council.

2.2.17 The award of a Travel Bursary can only be made with the parent/carer consent, and therefore if the use of a Travel Bursary is not viable/appropriate then the parent/carer can refuse the offer at which point the Council will make alternative travel arrangements in order to meet its statutory obligations.

2.2.18 The acceptance of a Travel Bursary by 21 families (out of approximately 520) is expected to reduce spend by £0.065m, based on current demand levels.

2.2.19 The development of the Travel Bursary infrastructure, process and protocols will begin in October 2022. Once appropriate processes and controls are established that enable effective delivery of the Travel Bursary as a viable travel option it will then be communicated to families who will then have the option to consider a Travel Bursary offer for travel as a replacement for their existing travel arrangements.

2.2.20 It is expected that Travel Bursary's will begin to be awarded and used as a travel option by families from April 2023 with a targeted sign up of 21 families by September 2023.

This option is recommended.

Collection Points

2.2.21 The introduction of the use of collection points to replace some current home collection arrangements will help to encourage the development of independence and enable the streamlining of existing transport routes.

2.2.22 Based on the consultation feedback the Council is proposing to only allocate a collection point to individual children/young people where a needs assessment has identified that this is an appropriate and suitable travel arrangement. It is expected that the majority of current users of the service will not be able to use a collection point and will continue to be collected from their home address.

2.2.23 Up to 10% of the current users of the service are expected to be identified as able to use a collection point. No spend reduction targets have been identified through the implementation of this proposed option.

2.2.24 The Council intends to begin conducting needs assessments of existing users of the service from October 2022. Working with Schools/Colleges and families it is expected that individuals able to effectively use collection points can be identified allowing a phased introduction with individuals beginning to use collection points early in 2023.

2.2.25 Completion of existing user needs assessments and full implementation of collection points across the service is expected to be established for the start of the 2023/24 academic year. Use of collection points will only be for individuals where a needs assessment has clearly identified this is an appropriate option for travel.

This option is recommended.

Faith Schools & Same Sex Establishment Travel

- 2.2.26 The Council will cease to provide assistance with travel for children and young people attending Faith Schools or Same Sex Establishments where appropriate, more local provision is available.
- 2.2.27 Where a child/young person is attending a Faith School or Same Sex Establishment, and this has been identified in their Education Health and Care Plan as their named school by the local authority then assistance will continue to be provided in accordance with the statutory eligibility requirements.
- 2.2.28 The Council is looking to cease existing provision, unless statutory eligibility thresholds continue to be met, at the end of the 2022/23 academic year, providing affected families with sufficient notice to make alternative travel arrangements if necessary.
- 2.2.29 The change in travel provision is expected to effect 20 children/young people, currently costing the Council £0.020m per annum, spend reduction benefits will be realised from September 2023.

This option is recommended.

Contribution Charge for Non-Compulsory Age Travel

- 2.2.30 The Council will introduce a contribution charge for those who are not compulsory school age and not eligible (under statutory regulations) for free assistance.
- 2.2.31 Where travel assistance provision has been identified as necessary, in accordance with criteria stated within the Council's travel assistance policies then a contribution charge must be paid before any travel arrangements are established for the individual.
- 2.2.32 Where families/individuals are unable to pay the contribution charge they are expected to exhaust all options of financial support, including accessing 16-19 Bursary via the School/College they are attending. Statutory guidance confirms that the Council can receipt of 16-19 bursary funding into account when assessing an individual's need for financial help with travel/transport.
- 2.2.33 Where family/individual financial circumstances are a limiting factor restricting access to education for the young person, then applications can be made to the Council to consider the circumstances to determine if adjustments to the contribution charge is necessary. Applications of this nature will be considered on its own individual merit.
- 2.2.34 A contribution charge will be initially set at £750 per annum (13% of the current average cost for travel) for the 2023/24 academic year. The charge value will be reviewed annually and adjusted as necessary. Any change to contribution charge will be published in advance of the academic year it comes into effect, typically in alignment with the publishing of the Post 16 Travel Assistance Policy Statement which should be updated and published no later than the 31st May each year as directed by statutory guidance.
- 2.2.35 The introduction of a contribution charge is expected to generate an income and spend reduction of £0.040m from September 2023 based on current demand levels.

This option is recommended.

Background

- 2.3.1 Currently 43% (520) of all Slough children and young people with an EHCP are provided travel assistance by the Council. Approximately 30% of those children and young people with an EHCP and travel assistance live within the statutory walking distance eligibility and are therefore supported with travel due to mobility issues which impact on their ability to walk to school. The mobility issues may relate to physical or learning disability. The remaining children or young people with EHCP who are provided with travel assistance need to travel further than the statutory walking distances to get to their nearest suitable school.
- 2.3.2 The Council spent approximately £3.4m on transporting children to School and Post 16 establishments 2021/22. The Council currently provides assistance for 710 children and young persons, of which 520 have an EHCP (SEN).
- 2.3.3 To deliver the service approximately 134 routes operate daily supporting children and young people with SEND. Those routes serve 18 in borough education establishments and 43 out of borough.
- 2.3.4 The Council currently does not request a contribution for travel assistance for those aged 16-18 (and 19 if continuing their course). Other Councils require a fee to be paid, as demonstrated in the table below:

| <i>Council</i> | <i>Maximum Annual Contribution Charge</i> |
|------------------------|---|
| <i>Hertfordshire</i> | <i>£1,554</i> |
| <i>Buckinghamshire</i> | <i>£1,179</i> |
| <i>Essex</i> | <i>£900</i> |
| <i>Wiltshire</i> | <i>£850</i> |
| <i>Bexley</i> | <i>£400</i> |
| <i>Redbridge</i> | <i>£300</i> |

- 2.3.5 The Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers undertakes a survey with its member authorities across England, Scotland and Wales, benchmarking demand and spend growth in the process. Their latest survey (published late 2021) detailed that Urban Unitary Authorities (EUU) were paying £4,983 per annum for every child/young person they provided travel assistance to with SEND, this does not include any London Councils (LB). Slough is currently paying on average £5,769 per annum per passenger for SEN travel.
- 2.3.6 Within the provision provided to children and young people is a significant number who travel long distances on their own in a taxi, often well into young adulthood. This does not promote independence and preparation for adulthood, nor is it inclusive. The Council is currently delivering a service that fosters dependency and isolation for many children and young people with SEND.
- 2.3.7 Key features of the current policy, practice and culture that underpin poor outcomes for children and young people and high comparative costs are:
- Significant historic levels of travel assistance for Post 16 student without requiring a monetary contribution and for those under the Council discretionary powers, such as assistance to faith and single sex schools by comparison with other authorities

- Independent Travel Training has not been an available option for officers to make available to young people as a valid alternative travel assistance offer
- School and parental expectations of solo routes and passenger assistants rather than options that promote independence and integration of children and young people
- Practice has not been coherent and consistent in determining 'exceptional circumstances', although it has improved in recent times
- A need for more robust annual review process for children and young people as to travel provision or continued eligibility

Consultation Feedback

- 2.4.1 A detailed consultation process was undertaken between 23rd June 2022 and 21st July 2022. This included an online questionnaire, a consultation booklet, 6 public meetings, and targeted meetings with key stakeholders.
- 2.4.2 Appendix 3 provides more detail about the results of the public consultation. Headline results from the consultation are described below in paragraphs 2.4.3 to 2.5.29.
- 2.4.3 Consultation responses were as follows:
- 58 responses of online questionnaire
 - 11 attendees of public meetings
 - 14 attendees of public meeting at Arbour Vale School
 - 1600 notifications of the consultation sent to current users and pupils with EHCP's
 - 91 notifications of the consultation sent to Schools/Colleges
 - 5 enquiries received via consultation email address
- 2.4.4 Engagement activity was planned to offer a range of options to encourage participation. Morning, lunchtime, afternoon, and evening public meetings were scheduled and a targeted meeting at Arbour Vale School also took place. Notification of the consultation was sent to all children and young people with active EHCP's irrespective of whether they are currently in receipt of travel assistance or not.
- 2.4.5 In addition to the wider communication to all stakeholders about the consultation a meeting were held directly with School, Post 16 and college representatives to explain the proposals and reasonings contained within the consultation. Representatives were able to verbally feedback during the meeting or choose to respond via the online questions, or via the consultation email address. Representatives feedback during the meeting confirmed an understanding of the proposals, that the proposals were reasonable with no significant objections/issues raised. Representatives did support the continued need for cases to be assessed based on individual merit and circumstance as there are always cases that may not fulfil the stated criteria for eligibility but may still warrant support due to the specific circumstances around the individual. Any further response in relation to the consultation would have been channelled through the questionnaire.
- 2.4.6 Ward councillors were invited to attend the scheduled public meetings during the main consultation period.

Key Findings from Consultation

Independent Travel Training

- 2.5.1 22 out of 58 (38%) of respondents agreed that if a young person had potential to travel independently on public transport, then they should be expected to participate in the training. 21 out of 58 (36%) disagreed believing even if an individual had potential to travel independently then they should not be expected to participate in the training.
- 2.5.2 General feedback presented many responses raising concerns about the high support needs required for their child, detailing the safety concerns and risks associated with undertaking training on individuals where it is not suitable or appropriate. Where feedback was received in support of training it acknowledges that a few children would benefit but that this should be on a case-by-case basis in a controlled environment but for the majority of children and young people with SEND this would not be a viable option.
- 2.5.3 Council's response: The Council accepts that Independent Travel Training will not be suitable for all children and young people and that there will need to be a needs assessment process. It is the intention that through engagement with families, schools and other professionals' individual learners can be identified that would benefit from the training. This will be assessed through individual needs assessments and continually monitored and reviewed.
- 2.5.4 Feedback from other Councils, training providers and families that have benefits from training have reaffirmed that where this training is appropriate for the individual child/young person that it can significantly increase their confidence, independence, and contributes towards their preparation for adulthood. Families are often cautious when independent travel training is mentioned however where it can be demonstrated that training is detailed and comprehensive to effectively prepare the individual to travel independently, and that assessment and evaluation processes are robust and transparent, then confidence in the programme will improve amongst families and support effective delivery of this opportunity.

Travel Bursary

- 2.5.5 34 out of 58 (59%) of respondents to the online questionnaire indicated that the Council should not encourage more families/young people to use a Travel Bursary to make their own travel arrangements.
- 2.5.6 A family or young person has the right to refuse a Travel Bursary to make their own travel arrangements where they meet the statutory eligibility requirements. 15 out of 58 (26%) of respondents indicated the Council should encourage families to use a Travel Bursary, it is assumed that if the Travel Bursary offer/value enabled a family to make their own arrangements then they would consider this offer. This option is not currently available under the existing policy.
- 2.5.7 The three biggest barriers facing families and restricting acceptance of a Travel Bursary is:
- Value of Travel Bursary is too low 18% (29 out of 163 choices)
 - Public Transport links are not suitable 19% (31 out of 163 choices)
 - Family/young person unable to identify and arrange suitable travel arrangements 20% (32 out of 163 choices)

- 2.5.8 Respondents also provided feedback in relation to the mechanism for calculating the value of the Travel Bursary. 34% of respondents (25 out of 73) feel that the value should be based on a cost per mile basis (driving route), a further 34% (25 out of 73) believe the value should reflect a percentage of the cost of transport if arranged by the Council, with 25% (18 out of 73) preferring pre-set mileage bands and value.
- 2.5.9 53% of respondents (31 out of 58) indicated that the rate of 45p per mile as a potential calculation mechanism for the Travel Bursary was too low.
- 2.5.10 Only 10 (17%) of respondents agreed that the proposed mileage bands and values were appropriate, 30% (18 out of 59) were in disagreement. This indicates respondents feel the values are understated and would not make the Travel Bursary a viable option. The proposed bands and values detailed in the consultation were as follows:
- Less than 5 miles = £2000 per year
 - 5-10 miles = £3000 per year
 - Over 10 miles = £5000 per year
- 2.5.11 When asked about calculating a Travel Bursary based on the Council's cost of providing transport 72% (43 out of 60) of respondents feel that 100% of the cost should be made available to families, the current average cost of transport arranged by the Council is £5,769 per person per year.
- 2.5.12 The general feedback from respondents supports the view that Travel Bursaries are not appropriate for every family due to the child's needs, family circumstances, access to transport. Therefore, families should not be required to have a Travel Bursaries placing additional unnecessary pressure and potentially a financial burden.
- 2.5.13 It should be noted that the award of a Travel Bursary can only be made with the consent of the family, if the bursary is not appropriate then the family can refuse the offer and the Council will identify an alternative form of travel support for the child/young person.
- 2.5.14 Council Response: A travel bursary gives flexibility to some families and may provide a more convenient alternative to Council commissioned services. The cost should reflect the cost of the parent/carer, not the cost to the Council of commissioning an alternative. A flat fee is easy to administer and will be more than 45p per mile for many families but will provide a minimum of 45p per mile for the vast majority of claimants. If there is evidence that the actual cost of transport is more, for instance the cost of public transport, this can be considered as part of an exceptional circumstances case.

Collection Points

- 2.5.15 39% (23 out of 58) of respondents do not think collection points for some children and young people would be beneficial, 28% (16 out of 58) felt that it would be beneficial for some children and young people.
- 2.5.16 44% (27 out of 62) of respondents indicated that the distance to a collection point should not be pre-determined and the distance any individual is required to walk is based on the outcome of an individual needs assessment.

2.5.17 The three most popular responses for locations of collection points were:

- Bus stops 17% (19 responses)
- Local points of interest 14% (15 responses)
- Suitable roadside locations 11% (12 responses)

2.5.18 The key barriers to a child or young person accessing transport via a collection point include:

- Specific health needs would make waiting at a collection point unsuitable 17% (46 responses)
- Limited awareness of danger/unable to keep safe, even when accompanied by an adult 18% (48 responses)
- Wouldn't be able to manage situations that aren't planned/out of routine, such as late running of transport 16% (41 responses)

This supports the Council's intention of adopting a needs assessment of child or young person's individual needs/circumstances to identify if the use of a collection point is appropriate. Where it is identified that a collection is not an appropriate arrangement then an alternative arrangement will be offered, which may be retaining the existing home collection arrangements.

2.5.19 General feedback in relation to the use of Collection Points reinforces the concerns amongst the public that this option may not be suitable for certain children/young people and that each child needs to be individually assessed for suitability, where the needs and circumstances do not allow the use of a collection point then home collection should remain.

2.5.20 Council response: It should be noted that the Council accepts a collection point will not be suitable for all children and young people. It is acknowledged that due to medical conditions, anxiety, sensory impairments and a lack of awareness of danger may mean allocation of a collection point is not appropriate even if accompanied by a parent or carer, suitability is expected to be identified through individual needs assessments.

Travel to Faith Schools & Same Sex Establishments

2.5.21 Responses were equally split (36%/22 out of 61) between Strongly Agree/Agree and Strongly Disagree/Disagree when asked if provision to these establishments should cease if a closer suitable education establishment is available.

2.5.22 General feedback identified that some respondents felt that the individual needs and circumstances should be protected no matter what education establishment they attended. Other responses supported that if families have chosen to send their child to a School that isn't their closest then they should be responsible for getting them to and from School.

2.5.23 Feedback also identified potential issues with the proposal in relation to discrimination.

2.5.24 Council response: The Council intends to support and provide travel assistance to these establishments where children have additional needs and attend their nearest suitable school in accordance with the relevant eligibility criteria for their circumstances (e.g. SEND). However, where additional needs are not present and where closer education establishments are available then it is proposing that

support with travel to faith or same sex schools will no longer be available. Families will continue to be able to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

2.5.25 Families will continue to have the right to choose schools of a particular faith and the impact of this change has been considered in the equality impact assessment.

Contribution Charge for Non-compulsory School Age Travel

2.5.26 Post 16 education (Non-compulsory School age) travel is not required to be free, and the Council is allowed to request a contribution towards costs of travel from those accessing the service. Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to indicate the level of contribution that would be reasonable to request:

- £1500 per annum 16% (10 out of 61 responses)
- £1250 per annum 0% (0 out of 61 responses)
- £1000 per annum 0% (0 out of 61 responses)
- £750 per annum 7% (4 out of 61 responses)
- £500 per annum 16% (19 out of 61 responses)
- £250 per annum 61% (37 out of 61 responses)

2.5.27 When asked for feedback in relation to the expected use of a Vulnerable Person’s Bursary 39% agreed that this funding should contribute towards costs where assistance is provided by the Council. 34% (20 respondents) disagreed and felt the funding should not be used to contribute towards travel assistance costs.

2.5.28 Council response: The Council believes it is reasonable to expect a bursary that includes a proportion of the funding specifically for travel costs to be used to contribute towards travel costs. However, it also acknowledges that it would be unreasonable and fair to expect all of the Bursary to be used on travel and should be used to contribute towards other elements of their education. It has therefore concluded that a lower contribution (£750) towards travel costs than originally proposed (£1000) is more appropriate. The amount of contribution will continue to be reviewed annual and adjusted accordingly to ensure it remains fair and reasonable and reflective of actual transport costs.

2.5.29 The Council will also enable families to present evidence of exceptional circumstances and financial hardship where payment of the contribution charge may not be possible and result in non-attendance at their study programme. On a case-by-case basis the Council will be able to consider whether a reduce contribution is appropriate.

Consultation Feedback Impact on Proposals

| Pre-Consultation Proposal | Consultation Feedback | Post Consultation Alteration |
|--|---|---|
| Independent Travel Training (ITT) to be provided where individual needs assessment identifies option as an appropriate form of travel (following a needs assessment) | Majority of those attending public meetings felt that ITT would not be appropriate for their child and would not benefit many children/young people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No change to original proposal as ITT offer was planned to be dependent on individual needs assessments identifying ITT suitability. • Assessments will include consultation with families and Schools |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | before assessment outcome is finalised |
| Travel Bursary offer to be introduced with more favourable terms to encourage sign up from families | Current reimbursement rate offered to families is not sufficient to enable families to make their own travel arrangements. This offer should not be forced upon families as this may not be appropriate or viable. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed rate/calculation of Travel Bursary will be enhanced to make offer more viable for families. A Travel Bursary can only be provided to a family with their consent, as per statutory obligations. Policy to include an option for consideration of an alternative value of the Travel Bursary where travel requirements are specialist and high cost, agreed on a case-by-case basis. |
| Collection points to be introduced and replace existing home collections where individual needs assessments identify option as appropriate | Majority of those attending public meetings felt that collection points would not be appropriate for their child and would not benefit many children/young people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change to original proposal as collection point use was planned to be dependent on individual needs assessments identifying option as suitable Assessments will include consultation and input from families and Schools before assessment outcome is finalised |
| Removal of travel arrangements to Faith Schools and same sex establishments where nearer education provision is available and can meet educational needs | Responses were split between whether arrangements should continue or cease. General feedback suggest individual needs such as SEND should continue to be taken into account. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change to original proposal If access to education is dependent on travel, then an application can be submitted, and individual circumstances can be considered on a case-by-case basis under other criteria in the policy. |
| Introduction of a contribution charge for non-compulsory age (post 16) travel assistance charged at £1000 per annum | Feedback support the use of a Vulnerable Persons Bursary to contribute towards the cost of non-compulsory age travel with the majority favouring a | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed charge reduced to £750 per annum Option for applications to be submitted on exceptional circumstances grounds |

| | | |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| | £250 per annum contribution. | waiving fee to be allowed and considered on a case-by-case basis and will reflect free school meal thresholds and evidence that alternative financial support has been requested and rejected before requests will be considered |
|--|------------------------------|--|

Feedback from People Scrutiny

2.5.30 Analysis of the consultation, the options considered, and the proposed policies was presented to People Scrutiny on the 26th September 2022. The following feedback was provided:

| Feedback | Response |
|--|--|
| The Council should continue provision for children who are at a critical stage of their education (be it faith school, single sex or far away from home), if the Home to School Travel policy (5-16) changes impact them detrimentally, then according to the mitigating circumstances, the Council should allow them to continue with their current service provision and undertake a review on a 6 monthly basis | <p>Changes to existing eligibility status will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The Council will consider if the individual is at a critical stage of their education and the impact of changing their eligibility status.</p> <p>Where a change in eligibility status is identified as likely to have significant impact at a critical stage of their education then the Council will look to continue provision of travel and review this on a regular basis.</p> <p>Any changes to the form travel or how they access their provision will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Individual needs and circumstances will be taken into account through engagement with families and Schools.</p> |
| The Council should reconsider the value of travel bursary travel option based on the complexity of children's needs and undertake a review on a 4 monthly basis to make adjustments for the rising rate of inflation. | <p>The Travel Bursary for families to make their own travel arrangements is in excess of the HMRC rate for travel reimbursement and therefore has already been enhanced to reflect the complexity of need and potentially specialist travel requirements.</p> <p>Travel Bursary's are not enforceable and therefore if unaffordable then families can reject/refuse/hand back a Travel Bursary at which point the Council will be required to make alternative arrangements (if entitled). Through the agreed delegated authority, the Council intends to review the value of the Travel Bursary's every 12 months to ensure values are set at the correct level and reflect current costs of travel.</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| | The policy includes an option where families can request an enhanced bursary which will be considered on a case-by-case basis if the value of the bursary is not sufficient to make travel arrangements. |
| Due to the very low response rate of approximately 11% the consultation period is extended | Extending the consultation period will delay the application of any changes in relation to eligibility within the policy until the 2023/24 academic year. It will also mean that the existing issues identified with the current policies remain. If extended response feedback is not expected to significantly increase with responses expected to reflect the responses already received. By introducing the proposed policy, we enable the Council to be able to provide robustness, transparency and control which will assist in providing greater understanding and set realistic expectation for families in accordance to the Council's statutory obligations. The service will look to review and consult on the policy on a more regular basis than it has done historically to ensure the policy remains effective and appropriate. A review of existing needs and circumstances will be undertaken when considering if any existing travel amendments should be altered to ensure any provision reflects and specific and unique additional needs. |

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

- 3.1.1 The proposed changes to policy have the potential to contribute towards the improved cost effectiveness of the service. The overall budget for the service is approximately £3.700m
- 3.1.2 The service has an established savings plan, aiming to deliver a £0.550m reduction in spend by the end of the 2024/25 financial year. £0.490m is anticipated for delivery in 2023/24 with a further £0.060m realised in 2024/25.
- 3.1.3 The proposed policy changes contained in this paper are estimated to contribute £0.210m savings towards the overall savings programme. The remainder of the savings will be realised through route optimisation, procurement activity, and effective allocation of resources/provision. All savings forecasts are based on current demand levels for Home to School and College Travel Assistance.
- 3.1.4 The scale of such a saving will be subject to the extent to which travel assistance enables more children and young persons to transition from individual to shared travel arrangements, or where independence is increased. Travel arrangements will continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis and it is not possible at this stage to say how this might affect any one individual, hence any saving can only be estimated at this stage.

3.2 *Legal implications*

3.2.1 Under the Education Act 1996, the Council has specific duties and powers as set out below:

(a) a duty to assess school travel needs and promote sustainable modes of travel in relation to children and young people of 6th form age (s.508A);

(b) a duty to provide home to school travel arrangements as considered necessary for eligible children of compulsory school age, such arrangements to be provided free of charge (s.508B). Eligible children is defined in legislation and further details are provided within this policy;

(c) a power to make school travel arrangements for children who are not eligible under s.508B. This power can be applied to children below compulsory school age, children attending faith schools or those living within the statutory walking distance. The Council may make a charge for provision of travel arrangements under this power (s.508C);

(d) a duty to prepare a transport policy statement specifying travel arrangements provided to persons of sixth form age (s.509AA). The statement shall specify the provision of transport, provision of financial support and provision of travel concessions. A person is of sixth form age if they are receiving education or training and is over compulsory school age but (a) is under the age of 19; or (b) had begun a particular course of education or training at the establishment before attaining the age of 19 and continues to attend that course.

3.2.2 The statutory guidance for home to school travel arrangements for children of compulsory school age states:

(a) policies should be clear, easy to understand and provide full information on travel and transport arrangements, including the statutory provision and that provided on a discretionary basis;

(b) the appeal process should be set out;

(c) the sustainable modes of school travel strategies should ideally be integrated into the policy statement and published together;

(d) When changing a policy, there should be consultation for at least 28 working days during term time. This period should be extended to take account of any school holidays.

(e) Any changes should be phased in so that children who start under one set of transport arrangements can continue to benefit from them until they conclude their education at that school or move to another school.

The statutory guidance for Post 16 travel arrangements requires the Council to have regard to the following in assessing what transport arrangements of financial support may be required:

(a) The needs of those for whom it would not be reasonably practicable to access education or training provision if no arrangements were made;

- (b) The need to ensure that young people have reasonable opportunities to choose between different establishments at which education and training is provided;
- (c) The distance from the learner's home to establishments of education and training;
- (d) The journey time to access different establishments;
- (e) The cost of transport to the establishments in question;
- (f) Alternative means of facilitating attendance at establishments;
- (g) Preferences based on religion;
- (h) Non-transport solutions to facilitate learner access

3.2.3 For young people with special educational needs and disabilities, consideration should be given to additional factors, including that it may take longer to complete a programme of learning or training and that the availability of an independent travel training scheme should be included in the policy statement.

3.2.4 When making public law decisions, the decision-maker should take account of all relevant information and disregard any irrelevant information. Relevant information includes the consultation feedback, equality implications and financial implications. The Council should balance the need to deliver financial savings and best value, with its other overarching duties. When considering consultation responses in relation to a change and in particular a reduction in or charge for services, it is not uncommon for the majority of respondents to raise concerns and disagree with the proposal. These views must be taken into account and balanced with the other policy reasons for the proposal.

3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 The service is seeking approval to implement the proposed policies for travel assistance. A public consultation has been undertaken and interested parties have had opportunity to provide feedback.

3.3.2 Analysis of the public consultation engagement feedback has been undertaken to consider the impact of the proposed policies

3.3.3 The public consultation was conducted in accordance with DfE guidance and legislative requirements.

3.3.4 Proposed policies reflect current DfE guidance in relation to Home to School Travel and Post 16 Education transport.

3.3.5 Current request to consult is in line with statutory obligations and best practice as outlined by the DfE to avoid risk of legal challenge

3.4 Environmental implications

- 3.4.1 Promoting environmental sustainability is one of the strategic aims for the home to school and post 16 travel assistance policies and aligns with the objectives of the Councils Climate Change Strategy.
- 3.4.2 The proposed policies aim to encourage and support greater uptake and use of public transport to access education settings. Increasing numbers using this form of travel will reduce the use of smaller, dedicated transport services.
- 3.4.3 The promotion of Independent Travel Training, and use of collection points will support changes in behaviour outside of School, with expected increase in individuals/families using public transport at weekends, evenings and holidays to access services and activities.

3.5 Equality implications

- 3.5.1 The statutory duty assigned to councils in relation to Home to School travel ensures groups with protected characteristics, including age and disability will continue to have access to support with travel and access to their education place where it is necessary and Council support is required.
- 3.5.2 Requirements are established to support children of compulsory school age and ensure assistance is available if necessary for those attending Post 16 education establishments.
- 3.5.3 Families who are identified as low income are also supported through the statutory duty and this support will continue to be available.
- 3.5.4 Children/young persons with disabilities are also supported within the statutory duty with assistance being required where necessary to facilitate attendance, this is assessed on a case-by-case basis and will continue to be available.
- 3.5.5 Those families or individuals who may be disproportionately impacted by the proposal include those of a particular faith or sex who are or whose parents are expressing a preference for a faith school or a single sex school and will no longer be entitled to transport as it is outside the statutory eligibility. Proposed changes may impact on what travel support is available to these groups, however it will not impact on their right to choose an education establishment of a specific religion/faith or same sex establishment if that is their preference of the family. Under the proposed changes families would be expected to make their own travel arrangements where the establishment is not the nearest available that can meet their educational needs.
- 3.5.6 Within the proposed policies, the Council will continue to retain its right to award assistance if there are exceptional circumstances to justify this and the Council will consider the circumstances on a case-by-case basis.
- 3.5.7 The strategic aims to underpin proposals to refresh the Council's home to school and post 16 travel assistance policies are intended to foster the social integration, independence, and preparation for adulthood of children and young people with

special educational needs and disabilities. The EqIA has identified some neutral, positive and negative impacts for groups with protected characteristics.

3.5.8 Positive impacts see the promotion of the equality of opportunities and improved relationships between children with SEND and those without.

3.5.9 Negative impacts relate to the impact of the contribution charge for families with financial difficulty and potential access to education. This is mitigated through the use of the 16-19 Bursary's that are available, and the Council retaining the right to handle cases of financial hardship on a case-by-case basis as detailed within the proposed policy.

3.5.10 A negative impact also exists for those impacted by the change in entitlement when attending Faith or same sex education establishments. The proposals is in accordance with statutory requirements and reflects DfE guidance. The Council also retains the right to review circumstances of each case on an individual basis where exceptional circumstances exist.

3.5.11 Where changes to provision and entitlement exist, these will be transitioned between Autumn term 2022 and the start of the 2023/24 academic year. Notification of changes of entitlement and communication of changes in advance of the new academic year will be undertaken to ensure all parties are aware. Proposed changes to provision affecting individuals will be communicated with affected families with the Council engaging and working closely with families, schools and other linked professionals to ensure any change is appropriate, reasonable and transition supports the individual.

3.6 Procurement implications

3.6.1 No procurement implications have been identified at this stage. Current contracts have been procured on the basis that demand will fluctuate. Mechanisms exist within current terms and conditions to enable changes to the service being provided to reflect demand requirements.

3.7 Workforce implications

3.7.1 No workforce implications have been identified at this stage.

3.8 Property implications

3.8.1 No property implications have been identified at this stage.

4. Background Papers

None

Slough Borough Council Home to School (5-16) Travel Assistance Policy

Travel Assistance policy for children of compulsory school age (5-16)

Department Responsible: xxxxx Contact details: xxxxx Document first release: October 2022

Introduction

This document sets out Slough Borough Council's Home to School/College Travel Assistance Policy and describes how the Council fulfils its duties and exercises its discretionary powers under the Education Act 1996. The policy explains the criteria for eligibility for travel assistance for pupils to their school for children of compulsory school age (5-16 years old) and for young people aged 16 to 19 and 19 to 25. It describes how parents and carers can apply for travel assistance and how decisions are made. It sets out how parents and carers may appeal against decisions that they believe do not comply with this policy.

Policy Statement

Slough Borough Council (the Council) is committed to ensuring that all pupils have a great start to life, are safe and healthy and have access to high quality education so that they are able to achieve their full potential. The Children and Families Act 2014 commits partners to work together to develop services which strengthen the abilities and resilience of children and their families to be independent.

The Council is also committed to meeting the educational needs of as many children and young people as possible within local schools. In many cases, this will mean that pupils can walk or cycle to school with their parents or carers. This policy sets out how we will help the small number of pupils who find it difficult to travel to school without some assistance.

The Council will continue to deliver our statutory responsibilities to meet the travel needs of children and young people, enabling them to access their place of education. This support will be targeted at those children and young people who have significant additional needs or are deemed extremely vulnerable.

We want to support parents and carers to fulfil their responsibility to ensure their school-aged children attend school regularly and to make any necessary arrangements to ensure that they attend school. Those children and young people not in receipt of travel assistance from the Council can use a wide range of forms of travel in Slough, accompanied as necessary, including bus, train, concessionary fares, walking and cycling. We also want to support schools to promote safe routes to school and safe travel skills through their regular curriculum.

The Council has a duty under s.508A of the Education Act 1996 to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport. This requires the Council to have a strategy to develop sustainable travel and transport infrastructure and to promote these modes of travel.

Aims and Objectives

The council has the following aims and objectives when assessing transport / travel support:

- Social integration of children and young people whatever their needs
- Support and develop Independence and resilience for children and young people with SEND and their families
- Environmentally sustainable travel
- Efficient use of public resources

Eligibility

All pupils

Parents and carers have a legal duty to ensure that their statutory school-aged children (age 5-16) attend school regularly and to make any necessary arrangements to ensure that they attend school.

A child is of compulsory school age from the start of term after their fifth birthday up until the last day of the academic year in which they are in year 11. This applies to both children with and without an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

There are four core categories of eligible children:

- statutory walking distances
- unsafe walking routes
- extended rights
- special educational needs, disability and mobility problems

Children below the age of 5 will not be eligible for free travel assistance between their home and school.

For pupils in year 12 and above (post-16 year olds), there is a separate policy (Linked to be added).

Statutory walking distances

The Council will provide free home to school travel assistance for children of compulsory school age to the nearest suitable school from their home address who meet the 'qualifying distance' criteria which is:

- 2 miles or more for children below the age of eight, measured by the shortest walking distance between the home and the school
- 3 miles or more for children aged 8 and above, measured by the shortest walking distance between the home and the school

Children who live between 2 and 3 miles from their school will cease to be entitled to free travel from the start of the term following their eighth birthday.

If the child/family qualify for free school meals or they are in receipt of maximum Working Tax Credit then please refer to the Extended Rights section below.

Further detail on eligibility is dealt with in the application section below.

Unsafe walking routes

The Council will provide travel assistance if it determines that a child cannot reasonably be expected to walk to the nearest suitable school because the nature of the route is deemed unsafe

to walk. The Council regularly assesses walking routes using the “Road Safety GB Guidelines on Assessment of Walked Routes to School.” Routes that have been determined to be unsafe will be kept under review and support will be withdrawn when the walking route is no longer deemed to be unsafe. The Council will expect a parent or carer to accompany the child along a route which would otherwise be classified as being unsafe and will not provide travel assistance if this accompaniment will make the route safe.

Extended rights

Children from low-income families are entitled to additional support in certain circumstances. This applies to pupils who are entitled to free school meals, or those families who are in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit (WTC).

Children above the age of 8, but under the age of 11, from low-income families will be entitled to travel assistance to their nearest suitable school if the shortest walking distance between their home and the school is more than two miles.

Children aged 11 and over (years 7 – 11) from low-income families will be entitled to travel assistance if they attend one of their three nearest suitable schools where they live between two miles (measured by the shortest walking distance) and 6 miles (measured by the shortest road route) from their school.

Children aged 11 and over (years 7 - 11) from low-income families who are attending their nearest designated faith school preferred on the grounds of religion or belief will also be entitled to travel assistance if their school is more than two miles (measured by the shortest walking distance) but not more than 15 miles (measured by the shortest road route) from their home.

Application Process

How to Apply

All requests for travel assistance for children without an EHCP must be made via the Council portal.

For children and young people with an EHCP families can contact the Travel Assistance Team on 01753 875708.

The Council will look to complete the assessment of applications in a timely fashion, aiming to put in place travel arrangements for those entitled at the earliest opportunity. However, it may take up to 6 weeks to process and families should be prepared to make their own interim travel arrangements if necessary.

During periods of high demand, such as the build-up to the new academic year, timescales for processing applications may be extended. Families are advised to apply for assistance with travel at the earliest opportunity to ensure arrangements are in place when they are required.

Assessing travel assistance entitlement for compulsory school age children

In all cases, a child/young person must be attending the nearest suitable school (or one of the three nearest suitable schools under the extended rights eligibility). This is defined as a school that has spaces available that provides education appropriate to the age, gender, ability and aptitude of the child, and appropriate to the child's EHCP where one exists.

Types of suitable schools considered under this policy are:

- community, foundation, trust, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- academies or alternative provision academies
- free schools
- community or foundation special schools
- non-maintained special schools
- pupil referral units
- maintained nursery schools
- city technology colleges, city colleges for the technology of the arts and university technical colleges
- Independent schools where this is named on a child's EHCP or is the nearest of two schools named.

For mainstream applications processed during the normal school admissions round, a school will be determined as having a vacancy if a place would have been offered according to the allocations made on the national offer day, assuming the parent either made or could reasonably have made an application. For applications made after the normal admissions round and those made during the school year, a school will be determined as having a vacancy if, at the point of processing the child's school application, a place could have been allocated to the child.

When a child cannot be offered a place at the nearest school to the home address, the Council will, subject to the criteria set within this policy and the qualifying distance being met, provide assistance with travel to the next nearest school with space to admit. For travel arrangements to be provided in this instance the parent must provide evidence that they have applied for and been refused a place at the school which is the nearest school for their home address and any other schools closer than the school offering admission.

Where a school operates on multiple or split sites, the assessment of nearest qualifying school will take account of the sites used to prioritise admissions (as defined in each school's admission arrangements), regardless of which year groups are educated at which site or which site a child might attend.

How walking distance is measured

Walking distances are calculated using the shortest available walking route from the home address to school. If families believe that the walking route measured is not available to walk they should request a review of the route.

The legal definition of an 'available walking route' is a route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, can walk with reasonable safety to school.

Where a school operates on a temporary site and that school's permanent/current site is deemed to be a child's nearest qualifying school, the home to school walking distance will be measured to the school's temporary site to determine if the child lives over the statutory walking distance and is eligible for travel assistance. Eligibility will be reassessed at the point a child ceases to be educated at the temporary site.

Distances will be measured using the Council's CapitaOne System (and supported by other Council GIS systems) from the address point of the pupil's house to the nearest school gate available for pupils to use when measuring to a school, as set by Ordnance Survey.

Route safety assessment

Where a parent/carer believes the assessed walking route to be unsafe, they should write to the Travel Assistance Team outlining the aspect of the route they believe to be unsafe. The identified aspects of the route will then be reviewed by the team. Review of the routes will use the 'Road Safety GB Guidelines on Assessment of Walked Routes to School' to assess suitability.

Extended Rights

Parents who believe they meet the Extended Rights criteria and are therefore eligible for assistance with travel to school must include with their application evidence of the child's entitlement to free school meals or the family's receipt of maximum level of Working Tax Credit (WTC) with their application form.

A child who has been assessed as eligible for travel assistance by meeting the Extended Rights criteria will have their entitlement reviewed each academic year to ensure that the child continues to meet the necessary criteria.

If a child ceases to be eligible for free school meals or a family ceases to be entitled to the maximum level of Working Tax Credit during the academic year for which travel assistance has been awarded, travel assistance will continue until the end of that academic year.

If the child is applying for travel assistance to a school of faith under Extended Rights eligibility, then the parents must also provide supporting evidence regarding their genuine adherence to their religion or belief and this will normally be confirmed by asking their religious leader to sign the application form.

Special educational needs, disability and mobility problems

Where a child with special education needs, a disability and/or mobility problems does not meet the other three eligibility criteria but has identified specific needs/circumstances that may mean it is unreasonable to expect the child to walk to school (accompanied by an adult as necessary), then an assessment based on their individual needs and circumstances will be undertaken.

In determining whether a child cannot reasonably be expected to walk between home and school, the Council will consider whether the child could reasonably be expected to walk if accompanied and, if so, whether the child's parent or carer can reasonably be expected to accompany their child. The expectation is that a child will be accompanied by a parent or carer.

When assessing entitlement for travel assistance for a child with SEND or mobility problems, the Council will consider the individual needs of each child. This may include taking professional advice from educational psychologists, medical officers and teachers and consulting with parents and carers before arriving at a final decision.

Consideration will also be given to the child's physical and medical requirements including any disabilities they may have. The findings and decision will be recorded on a travel assistance assessment form.

The following factors will be taken into consideration when assessing travel assistance entitlement:

- the age of the child
- the distance of the child from school to home
- whether the child is physically able to walk the journey to school
- whether the walking route is appropriate for the pupil and their specific needs and allows them to arrive in a fit state to be educated
- whether a child's emotional and behavioural difficulties will create a clear health and safety hazard to themselves or others on the journey to school
- the SEND of the child
- the efficient utilisation of resources
- any other individual circumstance

This is not an exhaustive list. It is not presented in any particular order and is for guidance only. Meeting one or more of the criteria does not automatically entitle a child with SEND to travel assistance.

The fact that a child has an EHCP or attends a special school does not automatically entitle him or her to travel assistance.

Eligibility for travel assistance is related to the child's needs. Assessment may take into account the need for travel assistance due to some family circumstances. Factors identified in an application will be considered when determining eligibility for home to school travel assistance and deciding on the type of travel assistance to be provided.

Other family circumstances, such as parents and carers attending work or looking after other children cannot be considered when determining eligibility.

Extenuating circumstances

Recognising that the Council's discretionary powers should not be unreasonably fettered by its general policy, the Council will consider and may agree requests for home to school travel assistance where there are considered to be extenuating circumstances that prevent a child accessing their school unless travel assistance is put in place. If the parent believes extenuating circumstances exist and assistance with travel is necessary, then information and evidence must be provided when applying for assistance in order for this to be considered.

The overriding expectation is that parents should undertake their legal responsibility to get their child(ren) to and from school and as such the Council will need to be satisfied that the parent has demonstrated why they, for social, medical, financial or personal reasons cannot undertake this duty.

The determination will be based on evidence received to support the case whether travel assistance is necessary in order for the child to receive an education. Consideration will be given as to whether the circumstances could have reasonably been foreseen by the parent/carer. For example, moving to temporary accommodation owing to flood damage cannot be foreseen, whereas choosing a school other than a child's nearest school and realising following this decision that assistance with travel is not available could be foreseen.

Where it is decided that a child does not qualify for assistance with travel based on the presented needs/circumstances then it remains the parent/ carer's responsibility to ensure school attendance or consider transferring the child to a more local school.

In all cases the decision whether to exercise discretion will be taken on a case by case basis.

Special consideration and appeals

Parents/carers of children who live in Slough and who wish to appeal a decision about one of the following, may apply for their case to be considered at a travel assistance case review:

- the travel arrangements offered
- their child's eligibility
- the distance measurement in relation to statutory walking distances
- the safety of the route

During an appeal about an application for travel assistance, travel arrangements will not be provided to the child/young person. Where the appeal concerns a change to existing travel arrangements, then the previously agreed travel arrangements will continue until the review is complete.

The Council operates a two-stage appeal process as detailed below:

Stage one: Review by a senior officer

- A parent has 20 working days from receipt of the local authority's home to school travel assistance decision to make a written request asking for a review of the decision.
- The written request should detail why the parent believes the decision should be reviewed and give details of any personal and/or family circumstances the parent believes should be considered when the decision is reviewed.
- Where this is possible, within 20 working days of receipt of the parent's written request a senior officer reviews the original decision and sends the parent a detailed written notification of the outcome of their review

Stage two: Review by an independent appeal panel

- A parent has 20 working days from receipt of the local authority's stage one written decision notification to make a written request to escalate the matter to stage two.
- Within 40 working days of receipt of the parents request an independent appeal panel considers written and verbal representations from both the parent and officers involved in the case and gives a detailed written notification of the outcome (within 5 working days).

Withdrawal of assistance provided in error

Where a child has been awarded in error, Slough Council has the right to withdraw this after first considering the circumstances of each case to determine whether there are exceptional reasons for provision to continue.

Consideration cannot be given to those who simply cannot meet their parental responsibility to get their own child to school following the removal of assistance. This would have been expected to have been taken into account at the time of admitting the child into school, as would have been the case had the error not been made. Where it is decided to withdraw transport, one term's notice is given.

Provision of false or inaccurate information

When submitting an application, the parent will sign a declaration confirming the accuracy of the information. The parent is also under a duty to notify the Council of any changes in circumstances. If it later transpires that the information is incorrect or updating information has not been provided, then notice will be given and the travel assistance will cease immediately. The Council will also take steps to recover the cost of travel assistance provided as a result of this inaccurate information. If the information has been provided fraudulently, the Council's corporate anti-fraud team will investigate to determine whether a criminal prosecution should be commenced.

Discretionary Travel Requirements

Children below the age of 5

Children attending Reception classes

Ordinarily and in accordance with the Council's statutory duty, children under the age of 5 will not be entitled to travel assistance between their home and school. However, the Council will consider travel assistance applications for children below statutory school age in extenuating circumstances. Where a parent/carer believes that there are extenuating circumstances that warrant a child being provided with assistance with travel before they turn five years of age, they should complete the appropriate application form and provide supporting evidence of the case.

A child becomes of compulsory school age at the start of term after their fifth birthday.

Pre-school children with SEND

Local authorities do not have a duty to provide or arrange free travel for children who have not yet reached compulsory school age and who are attending a pre-school setting. However, the Council will consider travel assistance applications for children below statutory school age in extenuating circumstances.

Where a parent/carer believes that there are extenuating circumstances that warrant a child being provided with assistance to support their travel to School (before they turn five years of age), they should complete the appropriate application form and provide supporting evidence of the case.

If the Council agrees to provide travel assistance it may request a contribution towards costs with travel arrangements subsidised by the Council.

Children attending schools on grounds of religion or belief

Ordinarily assistance with travel to a faith school will only be provided if it is the nearest suitable school and the child comes within the eligibility criteria above.

Travel Assistance Provision Options

Forms of Travel Assistance

The Council will review the travel needs of all eligible children and decide the most appropriate form of assistance that will be provided. In accordance with the Council's strategic aims, the form of travel offered will reflect the most appropriate use of public funds to ensure cost effective provision is in place, will seek to promote independence and to be environmentally sustainable, whilst also meeting the needs of the child.

In accordance with national guidance, a journey to school for eligible children should be suitable, safe and reasonably stress free to enable the children to arrive at school ready for a day of study. To this end it is considered reasonable that journey times each way for children are as follows:

- 45 minutes for primary aged pupils
- 75 minutes for secondary aged pupils

However, it is recognised that adhering to journey times may not always be possible particularly in rural areas. It may be deemed acceptable for a trip to exceed these journey times if it is considered that the additional time does not place undue stress, strain or difficulty on the pupil, which would prevent them from benefitting from the education.

Where children with special educational needs, disability or mobility problems are present, then journey times may sometimes need to be longer and more complex, although the Council will ensure that it does not extend routes for such children unnecessarily with appropriate measures in place to address any implications for doing so.

Subject to meeting the eligibility criteria of this policy, the following assistance will be considered (in the following order):

1. provision of a travel pass for the pupil;
2. provision of independent travel training;
3. provision of a travel bursary;
4. payment of car mileage/travel reimbursement for the pupil's parent(s) (with parental consent);
5. Provision of a cycling allowance (with parental consent)
6. Provision of a suitable escort to enable a pupil to walk a short distance (with parental consent)
7. provision of a travel pass for pupil and parent;
8. provision of a shared vehicle without escort (using collection point if appropriate);
9. provision of a shared vehicle with escort (using collection point if appropriate);
10. provision of an individual vehicle without escort;
11. provision of an individual vehicle with escort.

The provision of an individual vehicle with or without escort should be exceptional and only where it has been demonstrated that other modes of assistance are not suitable.

Other bespoke travel options may be considered and offered where individual needs enable travel, and the development of travel skills and independence, e.g. Travel Buddy.

All travel assistance will be reviewed as part of the annual review of needs and if appropriate as part of an early review. Travel assistance may be withdrawn or amended if circumstances have changed, or the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Panel considers the withdrawal appropriate as an encouragement to independence or the offer is no longer the most economical mode of travel.

Provision of Passenger Assistants

A passenger assistant will only be provided following the outcome of an assessment of the child's Special Educational Needs and/or medical needs in order to meet the needs of the children travelling to and from school. This determination will be made by the Travel Assistance Team taking into account:

- A child's medical needs, particularly where rescue medication is required.
- Where an individual child's needs create a clear danger or health and safety risk to themselves and other passengers on the vehicle.
- Where an assessment of the children on the vehicle and the journey to be undertaken highlight a clear danger or health and safety risk to all passengers on the vehicle.

The consideration for passenger assistants will be made based on evidence received from all relevant parties and will be reviewed regularly, where appropriate and whenever a contract is re-tendered.

Travel training

Local authorities have a duty to encourage, enable and assist the participation of young people with learning difficulties or disabilities up to the age of 25 in education and training. Independent travel training aims to achieve this.

Independent travel is a valuable skill for preparing for adulthood, an essential employability skill, and provides greater opportunities for young people, not least increasing confidence in their abilities and reducing their sense of reliance on family members.

In line with the Council's aims and objectives to support independence and prepare young people for adulthood, and where appropriate employment.

The Council will work in partnership with education establishments and other individuals to identify young people who could benefit from ITT and contact their families to invite them to take part in ITT.

The Council will also contact young people and their families who will be transitioning from statutory education into post-16 and above to invite them to take part in ITT.

An ITT assessment will be carried out in the home, with the support of the family, to confirm the suitability of the young person for the ITT programme, taking into account the following criteria:

- existing level of independent travel skills
- the likelihood of the pupil being eligible for SEN travel assistance under the 16 to 19 & 19-25 policy
- the age of the pupil
- the distance between home and school
- the SEND of the pupil
- the route which the young person would need to undertake
- journey times using public transport and the complexity of the journey
- the frequency of the journeys required

This assessment would take place before the pupil undertakes the ITT programme, which would last for approximately four to six weeks. During the programme, the pupil will travel to and from their education or training provision each day with their dedicated one to one ITT trainer.

During the period when a pupil is taking part in the ITT, this will be their travel assistance offer. At the end of the ITT programme, the Council will review the pupil's progress with the family to decide if it is appropriate for the pupil to continue to travel independently. If it is not appropriate for the pupil to travel independently, their previous travel assistance offer will be reinstated. Although it is expected that the majority of young people would benefit from ITT, it is acknowledged that for some young people, due to the nature of their SEND, ITT will not be appropriate.

Travel Bursary

This is an allowance that can be provided by Slough Council to parents of children who are eligible for travel assistance.

A parent may choose to consent to the acceptance of a travel bursary in lieu of arranged travel assistance by the Council. This enables families to make their own arrangements to facilitate travel and access to education. A travel allowance will only be offered where it is less expensive than any alternative form of travel assistance.

Any arrangements made by the parent using the travel allowance are the responsibility of the parent.

The travel bursary is calculated on shortest driving route distance between the home and the school. The value of the bursary awarded based on the banding listed below:

| Distance Banding (Home to School – Shortest Driving Route) | Travel Bursary Value (Per Annum) |
|---|---|
| Less than 5 miles | £2500 |
| 5 – 10 miles | £4000 |
| Over 10 miles | £6500 |

Where there are two or more children living at the same address and attending the same school and the travel bursary has been agreed for one child, additional bursary payments will not be provided for the other children as all children would be expected to travel together.

If the parent transports siblings to different schools the bursary due would be based on the shortest walking route between home, school A and school B, and return.

The travel bursary is paid over 10 months (October to July) if the child is entitled from the start of the school year. Parents will need to nominate a bank account before any payments are made.

Parents/carers are able to request an enhanced Travel Bursary if the standard values (above) are not sufficient to provide suitable travel arrangements. Each request will be considered on a case by case basis after review of the evidence provided. If the Council agrees then an enhanced Travel Bursary may be awarded, subject to the award being financially viable for the Council.

The travel bursary is based on the child's attendance being over 80% for the full year. Attendance records will be requested from the school at the end of each term. If the child shows poor attendance in the Autumn or Spring terms then the parent may be transferred to the standard travel reimbursement option. Alternatively, if the child's attendance is below 80% then the final month's payment will be reduced.

If a parent is in receipt of the travel bursary but is temporarily unable to transport their child to school due to a short-term illness or medical condition, temporary assistance may be provided. However, this may take up to 6 weeks to put in place.

Car Mileage/Travel Reimbursement

Where a child is entitled to travel assistance, the Council can provide a fuel allowance for parents to take their children to and from school, where it is more cost effective than providing contracted or arranged transport.

The Council would pay parents (where their child attends/travels daily) two return journeys at 45p per mile.

For example, where a family reside 5 miles from the school, each return journey is 10 miles:

2 return journeys = 20 miles x 45p = £9 per day.

A typical term would be 65 school days = £585 per term.

Where a Car Mileage/Travel Reimbursement is provided, parents are required to submit claims for payment on a monthly basis, confirming journeys made and attendance.

Upon receipt of the completed claim, the Council will then review and check the details. If details are correct, then payment will be made.

Car Mileage/Travel Reimbursement, based on the above, are paid where the parent agrees to receive such an allowance. Where the amount paid is at 45p per mile, this is considered to cover the full cost to the parent of transporting their child in their own vehicle.

Collection points

Collection points are like bus stops, where the Council identifies designated pick-up and drop-off locations for the pupil to meet the bus or taxi rather than offering a door-to-door service. This reduces the time needed for the route to pick up the pupils and supports children and young people to become more independent and better prepares them for adulthood.

Using a collection point will not be possible for some children and young people with the most complex SEND needs, and in some cases parents' own mobility or disability may impact on them being able to accompany their child to a collection point. A Needs assessments will be conducted to determine if the use of a collection point is a reasonable expectation, including the identification of the maximum walking distance (where this is shorter than one-mile).

The ambition for the service is to improve the range of options available for families to take responsibility for their own children's transport where this is desired and appropriate. In such circumstances, the Council will carefully consider and assess the individual child's needs/circumstances as well as the mobility and or disability of their parents.

Where a collection point is allocated, it is the parent's or carer's responsibility to make sure that their child travels to and from the collection point and transfers to and from the vehicle safely.

For parents who are temporarily unable to take their child to a collection point, no temporary assistance will be provided in those circumstances. This is because the child's special educational need or disability has not changed and the transport service from the collection point is still available.

All collection points will be within a one-mile walking distance of the home and will reflect the specific needs of the individual, each collection point will be assessed in advanced for their suitability.

- wherever a bus stop can be legally used as a collection point, it will be

- minibuses can stop to collect and drop off on yellow and double yellow lines; vehicles cannot stop on red routes, white zig zags (near a zebra crossing) or school keep-clear hatchings
- the driver always plans not to cause obstructions to other road users while making a drop off or collection and will try to stop in parking areas or bays
- collections or drop-off are always made kerb side
- each collection point is physically assessed before being used in service; a driver will go out and access to see if the location is safe (for example, a well-lit public location, not too close to a junction or on the brow of a hill)
- the drivers complete dynamic risk assessments at the time of collections or / drop offs in the eventuality of any changes (new road layouts, another road user in the stopping space) and will slightly adjust the collection point if it is unsafe to stop

Weekly/Fortnightly boarding placements

Transport will be provided to take children to school on a Sunday evening, or Monday morning, as directed by the school and to collect children to take them home at the end of the designated school week, or earlier as directed by the school for planned or unplanned early closures.

Termly residential placements

12 single journeys from home to school and school to home will be provided each academic year. This will consist of trips required at the start and end of each term, and at other school closure times, i.e. half term breaks.

Permanent (52 week) residential placements

12 single journeys from home to school and school to home will be provided each academic year. These are at the discretion of the parents, school and child and need to be booked at least 10 days in advance through our Travel Assistance Team.

Any additional trips will be the responsibility of the parent. Where there is a risk of a placement breakdown the Travel Assistance Team may consider providing reimbursement of fuel or public transport costs in order to support additional trips on a short term basis so that the child can be supported back into full time boarding.

Slough Borough Council Post-16 Travel Assistance Policy Statement

Academic Year 2022 – 2023

Travel Assistance policy statement for young people aged 16-18 in further education, continuing learners aged 19 and those young people aged 19 – 24 (inclusive) with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Department Responsible: xxxxx Contact details: xxxxx Document first release: October 2022

Contents

Introduction

Aims and Objectives

Transport and travel support

Concessionary tickets for young people 16 – 25 from public transport providers

Travel support from schools and colleges

The 16-19 Bursary Fund

Young parents / Care to Learn

LA support

LA support for young people without special educational needs or a disability

LA support for Learners with special educational needs or a disability

Refunds

Travel training

Those not in education, employment or training (NEET)

LA support in other circumstances

Additional eligibility criteria Applying for LA transport support Appeals

Introduction

Local authorities do not have to provide free or subsidised post 16 travel support but do have a duty to prepare and publish an annual travel assistance policy statement specifying the arrangements for the provision of transport or other support that the authority considers it necessary to make to facilitate the attendance of all persons of sixth form age receiving education or training.

Most young people in Slough will be able to access their education without the support of the Council. It is expected that public transport and other travel options (including financial support) are explored in the first instance and utilised wherever possible.

All young people carrying on their education post 16 must reapply for travel support.

'Sixth form age' refers to those young people who are over 16 years of age but under 19 or continuing learners who started their programme of learning before their 19th birthday (years 12,13,14).

Local authorities also have a duty to encourage, enable and assist young people with learning difficulties / disabilities to participate in education and training, up to the age of 25.

This policy uses the term 'Post 16' to include both learners of sixth form age and those with learning difficulties / disabilities up to the age of 25.

This policy document specifies the support that Slough Borough Council (the council) considers necessary to facilitate the attendance of Post 16 learners receiving education or training.

Education or training refers to learning or training at a school, further education institution, a council maintained or assisted institution providing higher or further education, an establishment funded directly by the Education Skills Funding Agency, learning providers delivering accredited programmes of learning which lead to positive outcomes and are funded by the council, for example, colleges, charities and private learning providers.

Aims and Objectives

The council has the following aims and objectives when assessing transport / travel support:

- Social integration of children and young people whatever their needs
- Support and develop Independence and resilience for children and young people with SEND and their families
- Environmentally sustainable travel
- Efficient use of public resources
- To support students from low-income families access education

Transport and travel assistance

Low Income Support - Student reduced fare card

The Student reduced fare card supports those students from low-income families to encourage and enable participation in Post 16 education.

A Student reduced fare card is available for those meeting the necessary low-income eligibility criteria detailed in the how to apply section.

There is no charge for the Student Reduced Fare Card.

This enables students to travel on either First Buses (that either begin or end in the borough of Slough) or train services (specific routes only) at a reduced fare.

The Student Reduced Fare Card will enable some students to travel to a number of FE colleges outside the Slough area also. Some of these are listed below.

| College |
|--|
| East Berkshire College (Langley) |
| Bracknell & Wokingham College (Bracknell Centre) |
| Berkshire College of Agriculture |
| Strodes College |
| Uxbridge College |
| Amersham & Wycombe College (High Wycombe Campus) |
| Kensington & Chelsea College (Holland Park Centre) |
| Westminster Kingsway College (Victoria Centre) |

Cardholders using the train will be able to use their card on the following specific journeys:

- Slough to Langley/Maidenhead/Henley-on- Thames/Windsor& Eton Central and Reading (and vice versa)
- Langley to Slough/Maidenhead/Henley-on- Thames/Windsor & Eton Central and Reading (and vice versa)
- Burnham to Slough/Langley/Maidenhead/ Henley-on-Thames/Windsor & Eton Central and Reading (and vice versa)

Who is the Student Reduced Fare Card for?

The card is available for students aged 16-18 and those who reach 19 whilst continuing a course in the 2022-21 academic year.

Cardholders will be able to purchase daily, weekly, and monthly tickets at under 16 rates.

There are no time restrictions on the use of the Student Reduced Fare Card. Card holders are able to travel all day, all evening and during weekends or holidays.

Lost or stolen cards will be replaced once in the academic year and students will not be charged for this. Both cards will require three passport photographs.

How to apply

Students are required to complete an application form, and must include three passport photos, and copies of documentary evidence of meeting low income thresholds as follows:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Universal Credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods)
- Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual income of £16,190 or less
- Working Tax Credit 'run-on' - the payment someone may receive for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

Applications can be downloaded from the Slough Borough Council's Website.

Concessionary tickets for young people 16 – 25 from public transport providers

National 16 – 17 Saver (Train)

In January 2019, the Department for Transport announced the launch of a new national Railcard scheme which benefits 16 - 17 year olds. This Railcard offers 16 - 17 year olds a 50% discount on rail travel, and is available from September 2019. More information is available on the Railcard website.

The Saver offers 16 - 17 year olds:

- a 50% discount off standard anytime, off- peak, PlusBus, advance and season tickets
- can be used on South Western Railways, Southern and Great Western Railway network and
 - across the National Rail network (except on ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper services)
- the card costs £30 and is valid for one year or until your 18th birthday

- a season ticket purchased before your 18th birthday can run up to 4 months after you turn 18. For example if you turn 18 in February 2020 then you can purchase a season ticket which will still give you 50% discount for travel up until June 2020

Concessionary Bus Travel

The Slough concessionary bus pass (national scheme) entitles holders to travel free of charge on off-peak local bus services anywhere in England. Off-peak hours are 9:30am until 11pm on weekdays and all day at weekends and bank holidays.

To be eligible for a concessionary bus pass you must be:

- of State Pension age; or
- have a permanent disability – where the disability has lasted at least 12 months, or be likely to last at least 12 months and has a substantial effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities

If you are disabled, you will automatically qualify if you:

- are in receipt of higher rate of the mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance or,
- are in receipt of war pensioner's mobility supplement or,
- have the disability registration card
- are blind or partially sighted
- are profoundly or severely deaf
- are without speech
- have a disability or have suffered an injury which has substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to walk
- do not have arms or have long-term loss of the use of both arms
- have a learning disability
- have been refused a driving licence because of physical incapacity
- suffer from severe mental illness
- have 8 points or more in the moving around component for the Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Further details can be found on the Council's website: www.slough.gov.uk/transport-travel/concessionary-bus-passes

Travel support from schools and colleges

Students may also purchase seats on vehicles run by individual schools, colleges or by third party commercial operators on the school's or college's behalf. For information on available routes please check individual school/college websites.

The 16-19 Bursary Fund

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund provides financial support to help young people overcome specific barriers to participation so they can remain in education.

There are 2 types of 16 to 19 bursaries:

1. A vulnerable bursary of up to £1,200 a year for young people in one of the defined vulnerable groups below:

- in care
- care leavers
- in receipt of Income Support, or Universal Credit in place of Income Support, in their own right
- in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit and Disability Living or Personal Independence Payments in their own right

2. Discretionary bursaries which institutions award to meet individual needs, for example, help with the cost of transport, meals, books and equipment

To be eligible for the discretionary bursary young people must:

- be aged 16 or over but under 19 at 31 August 2022 or
- be aged 19 or over at 31 August 2022 and have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
- be aged 19 or over at 31 August 2022 and continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 ('19+ continuers')
- be studying a programme that is subject to inspection by a public body which assures quality (such as Ofsted), the provision must also be funded by either a Government funding agency or the local authority

Schools and colleges are responsible for managing both types of bursary. Young people who want to apply for support from the bursary fund should contact their chosen school or college to make an application.

Further information can be found at www.gov.uk search for post 16 bursaries.

Young parents / Care to Learn

If you are a young parent under 20, Care to Learn can help pay for your childcare and related travel costs, up to £160 per child per week, while you're learning. Care to Learn can help with the cost of:

- childcare, including deposit and registration fees
- a childcare 'taster' session (up to 5 days)
- keeping your childcare place over the summer holidays
- taking your child to the childcare provider

Types of child care

The childcare provider must be Ofsted registered and can be a:

- childminder
- pre-school playgroup
- day nursery
- out of school club

If your child needs specialist childcare, the provider must also be on the Care Quality Commission's register for specialist provision.

If you want a relative to get Care to Learn for looking after your child they need to be both:

- providing registered childcare for children they're not related to
- living apart from you and your child

Payments

Childcare payments go directly to your childcare provider. Before your childcare provider can be paid:

- your childcare provider needs to confirm your child's attendance
- your school or college needs to confirm that you're attending your course

Payments for travel costs go to your school or college - they'll either pay you or arrange travel for you.

Attendance

Payments will stop if:

- you stop attending your course
- you finish your course
- your child stops attending childcare

Eligibility

You can get Care to Learn if:

- you're a parent under 20 at the start of your course
- you're the main carer for your child
- you live in England
- you're either a British citizen or a national of a [European Economic Area \(EEA\) country](#)
- your course is publicly funded (check with your school or college)
- your childcare provider is registered with Ofsted or the Care Quality Commission

Type of course

Care to Learn is only available for courses in England that have some public funding. This includes courses that take place in:

- schools
- school sixth forms
- sixth form colleges
- other colleges and learning providers, including Foundation Learning
- your community at Children's Centres

Young parents are also entitled to apply for an Under 19 Bus Only Ticket or for those aged 19 and over can apply for the 19 – 25 card.

For more information please visit <https://www.gov.uk/care-to-learn/how-to-claim>

Further Discretionary Support for Students aged 16-19 attending post 16 education

The Council will exercise its discretion to provide travel assistance for students aged 16 to 19 (when continuing a course commenced before their 19th birthday) where it considers that travel assistance is necessary to enable the young person to reasonably access their education or training provision.

The Council is clear that as young people with SEND approach adulthood, where appropriate, travel assistance will be provided to support independence.

In assessing eligibility for students entering post- 16 education and training for travel assistance, particular attention will be paid to the following criteria.

- whether the student is currently in receipt (or has applied for) of any funding from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund and to what value
- the location of the sixth form unit or college the student would like to attend (if this is not a local provision, the local authority would need to know that the course being taken is not available locally).
- whether the sixth form unit is an extension to the school previously attended by the student and named in their EHCP
- the distance from the student's home to their education or training establishment and the journey time
- whether the young person has SEND and/or mobility difficulties which would impede their access to their educational placement, either independently or otherwise, for example, a wheelchair user
- whether the young person has SEND which would make it unsafe for them to travel independently
- whether the public transport journey to the nearest suitable placement is too complex for the young person to be expected to travel independently

Applicants must also evidence why it is necessary for the Council and not the student/family to make suitable travel arrangements. To assess this and understand the individual circumstances the Council will need to know:

- what other arrangements have been considered or tried and why they are not suitable
- if there is a family member or carer who is willing and able to transport the student

- whether the student is in receipt of higher rate mobility component of the Personal Independence Payment or Disability Living Allowance, the purpose of which is to assist those who have mobility problems, with severe difficulty walking or who need help getting around outside. We would normally expect this benefit to be fully utilised and if there are any factors limiting its use details should be provided
- whether there is a 'Motability' vehicle for which the student may or may not be the driver
- any other needs or circumstances that might need to be taken into account

Each request will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Where an individual has been awarded assistance with travel this will be subject to payment of the appropriate contribution payment.

Contribution Payment for Students aged 16-19 attending post 16 education

Contribution payments for travel assistance will only apply to those aged 16-18, and those continuing their course when turning 19 years of age.

Contribution details for student types are as follows:

Low income families

Where travel assistance is provided to qualifying low income families, this will be subject to a contribution from the student/parent of £750 per annum. The option will be available to pay this in termly instalments over the academic year. Children from low income groups are defined as those who are entitled to free school meals, or those families whose annual taxable household income is less than £16,190* and are in receipt of their maximum level of Working Tax Credit (WTC).

If the financial circumstances of the family/individual are impacting the young person's ability to attend their study programme, then a request for the contribution to be waived can be submitted to the Council. It is expected that all avenues for financial support have been explored before that Council will consider any contribution waiver.

Students with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Where a post 16 student has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and is attending the school named within their EHCP as the nearest appropriate school for their post 16 education – public transport will be promoted for this group and travel training referrals will be made for all students with the expectation that they will be assessed for suitability for training by the end of the first term of post 16 education. A charge for travel assistance will be based on the income of the family at the time of application. Low income families, as defined in above will be required to contribute £750 towards the cost of support provided. All other applicants will be required to make a contribution of £750 towards the cost of travel support.

Students with SEN who no longer have an EHCP

Those students who had an EHCP in year 11 who will be attending a school or college to continue their education and require additional support to do so. Low income families, as defined above will be required to contribute £750 towards the cost of travel assistance. All other applicants will be required to make a contribution of £750 towards the cost of travel support.

All applications will be considered based on the evidence provided to support the claim at the time of application.

Other Students

Bespoke transport or individual taxis will not be provided. The cost of travel assistance for this group will be £750 per year, per student.

Reimbursement of the Charge

If travel assistance is no longer required part way through a term, a partial reimbursement of the charge may apply, provided all tickets/passes have been returned and are received within the timescales stated in the table below. When calculating a reimbursement for tickets/passes received after the first day of a term an administrative charge of £60 will apply. The following levels of refund will be payable after the administration charge has been taken:

| Length of time ticket/pass has been used | Refund Due |
|---|-------------------|
| Up to 4 weeks | 75% |
| 4 to 8 weeks | 50% |
| Over 8 weeks | 0% |

No reimbursement will be paid during the summer term.

Support for Students aged 19-25 attending post 16 education

The post-19 (19 to 25) travel assistance powers held by the Council apply to students with special educational needs and disabilities aged between 19 and 25 inclusive who have an EHCP.

The Council recognises that young people are, in many cases, more capable of achieving independent travel than pupils of statutory school age. As such the policy for post-19 (19-25) students is focused upon a needs-led approach in which the individual needs of each young adult are assessed to inform the appropriate form of travel assistance.

'Post-19' will include learners aged 19 to 25 (starting from the academic year after they turn 19).

The Council will consider whether assistance with travel is necessary to enable young adults with EHCPs to maintain attendance at their education placement. If it is identified that assistance is necessary, then there would be no charge/ financial contribution expected from the young adult.

For post-19 students starting a new course, they must also evidence why it is necessary for the Council and not the student to make travel arrangements. The same assessment and considerations that were applied to students aged 16-19 will be applied to those 19-25 based on the evidence provided and, on a case,-by-case basis to determine if assistance from the Council with travel and access to their education placement is necessary.

Where it is identified that assistance with travel is necessary for a learner aged 19-25 then no contribution charge will be required.

Council provided Travel Assistance

Where students are identified as only able to access their post 16 education with assistance from the Council, after exhausting all other travel options, then the Council may

allocate a travel option from the categories below.

The Council will aim to use the highest appropriate category on the list, taking into account the needs of the pupil, and how the council can enable them to develop skills for independent travel:

1. provision of a travel pass for the pupil;
2. provision of independent travel training;
3. provision of a travel bursary;
4. payment of car mileage/travel reimbursement for the pupil/pupil's parent(s) (with consent);
5. provision of a travel pass for pupil and parent;
6. provision of a shared vehicle without escort;
7. provision of a shared vehicle with escort;
8. provision of an individual vehicle without escort;
9. provision of an individual vehicle with escort.

All travel provision will be reviewed as part of the annual review of needs and if appropriate as part of an early review. Travel assistance provision may be withdrawn or amended if circumstances have changed or the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Panel considers the withdrawal appropriate as an encouragement to independence.

Travel training

Local authorities have a duty to encourage, enable and assist the participation of young people with learning difficulties or disabilities up to the age of 25 in education and training. Independent travel training aims to achieve this.

Independent travel is a valuable skill for preparing for adulthood, an essential employability skill, and provides greater opportunities for young people, not least increasing confidence in their abilities and reducing their sense of reliance on family members.

In line with the Council's aims and objectives to support independence and prepare young people for adulthood, and where appropriate employment.

The Council will work in partnership with education establishments and other individuals to identify young people who could benefit from ITT and contact their families to invite them to take part in ITT.

The Council will also contact young people and their families who will be transitioning from statutory education into post-16 and above to invite them to take part in ITT.

An ITT assessment will be carried out in the home, with the support of the family, to confirm the suitability of the young person for the ITT programme, taking into account the following criteria:

- existing level of independent travel skills
- the likelihood of the pupil being eligible for SEN travel assistance under the 16 to 19 & 19-25 policy
- the age of the pupil
- the distance between home and school
- the SEND of the pupil
- the route which the young person would need to undertake
- journey times using public transport and the complexity of the journey
- the frequency of the journeys required

This assessment would take place before the pupil undertakes the ITT programme, which would last for approximately four to six weeks. During the programme, the pupil will travel to and from their education or training provision each day with their dedicated one to one ITT trainer.

During the period when a pupil is taking part in the ITT, this will be their travel assistance offer. At the end of the ITT programme, the Council will review the pupil's progress with the family to decide if it is appropriate for the pupil to continue to travel independently. If it is not appropriate for the pupil to travel independently, their previous travel assistance offer will be reinstated. Although it is expected that the majority of young people would benefit from ITT, it is acknowledged that for some young people, due to the nature of their SEND, ITT will not be appropriate.

Those not in education, employment or training (NEET)

To support the provision of suitable education or training for young people who are 16 and 17 years old and not in education, employment or training (NEET), Slough Council may offer fixed term (up to one month) travel cards at subsidised rates to facilitate travel to interviews, work experience and other activities necessary to secure appropriate provision. To be eligible, young people must be registered and receiving support through Early Help and Preventative Services.

Available support in other circumstances

Recognising that the Council's discretionary powers should not be unreasonably fettered by its general policy, the Council will consider and may agree requests for

assistance with travel to Post 16 education placements where there are considered to be extenuating circumstances that prevent a young person accessing their further education placement unless travel assistance is available. If the parent/carer or young person believes extenuating circumstances exist and assistance with travel is necessary, then they should provide additional information and evidence when submitting their application for consideration.

The overriding expectation is that parents/carers and young persons will have exhausted all other available options to support and enable travel to and from their education placement. The Council will need to be satisfied it has been demonstrated that, for social, medical, financial or personal reasons access to their education placement cannot be facilitated without assistance with towards travel arrangements.

The determination will be based on evidence received to support the case whether travel assistance is necessary in order for the child to access their education.

In all cases the decision whether to exercise discretion will be taken on a case-by-case basis.

Applying for travel assistance/support

All requests for travel assistance for children and young people with an EHCP must have a completed application form. To access a copy families can contact the Travel Assistance Team on 01753 875708.

Deadline for applications

For Post 16 Travel Assistance Applications an application window will operate between 1 March until 30 September each year for new starters which then reopens for 1 January to close again on 31 January in each academic year. We will consider circumstances of applications made outside of this window where someone's circumstances changed unexpectedly (eg a house move or drop in income).

Appeals

There is a two-stage process for parents who wish to challenge a decision about:

- the travel assistance arrangements offered;
- their child/young person's eligibility;

Stage one: Review by a senior officer

- A parent/pupil has 20 working days from receipt of the local authority's home to school travel assistance decision to make a written request asking for a review of the decision.
- The written request should detail why the parent believes the decision should be reviewed and give details of any personal and/or family circumstances the parent believes should be considered when the decision is reviewed.

- Where this is possible, within 20 working days of receipt of the parent/pupil's written request a senior officer reviews the original decision and sends the parent a detailed written notification of the outcome of their review

Stage two: Review by an independent appeal panel

A parent has 20 working days from receipt of the local authority's stage one written decision notification to make a written request to escalate the matter to stage two.

Within 40 working days of receipt of the parents request an independent appeal panel considers written and verbal representations from both the parent and officers involved in the case and gives a detailed written notification of the outcome (within 5 working days).

Home to School Travel Assistance and Post 16 Travel Assistance Policy Consultation Survey Results

Notification of Consultation:

- Letters/communication sent to current children/young persons with EHCP's issued by Slough (including current users of transport): 1600
- Direct communication with Slough Schools (including those where transport is not currently provided): 48
- Direct communication with Schools outside of Slough where travel is currently provided: 43

Consultation Responses

- Responses to this survey: **58**
- Attendance at public meetings: **25**
- Enquiries via consultation email address: **5**

Discussion and feedback at public meetings reflected the responses received via the online questionnaire.

Meeting with Schools provided a supportive response. Understanding the rationale behind the proposals with a couple of key considerations being identified which reflected the questionnaire responses.

Email enquires during the consultation included (2) enquires about current travel support available to their child, two enquires about accessing the online questionnaire (including losing the original letter re the consultation), and feedback (1) regarding inability to make the dates/times of the public meetings.

Travel Independence

Question 1.1: Being independent is different for everyone. In terms of travel and preparing for adulthood, what is your/your child's aspiration in terms of how you/they will travel in the future?

| Option | Total | Percent |
|--|-------|---------|
| Be able to carry own bags and board and alight a vehicle on their own | 21 | 11% |
| Be able to access transport from a collection point | 20 | 11% |
| Be able to share school transport with other children or young people | 40 | 21% |
| Being able to travel without a parent or carer in attendance | 20 | 11% |
| Be able to undertake a single journey/route independently using public transport | 14 | 8% |

| | | |
|---|----|----|
| Be able to undertake a single journey/route independently walking/cycling | 10 | 5% |
| Be able to plan and undertake any journey independently using public transport | 12 | 6% |
| Be able to undertake any journey when they want using any form of transport | 11 | 6% |
| Be able to undertake any journey by driving a car or motorcycle | 6 | 3% |
| Be able to undertake any journey by cycling or walking | 8 | 4% |
| Be able to travel on public transport with an accompanying adult (e.g. parent/carer) | 13 | 7% |
| Other (Please specify) | 7 | 4% |
| Not Applicable | 6 | 3% |
| Not Answered | 0 | 0% |

“Other” (7) responses confirmed the severity of need of their children and the high level of support that is required to transport them to and from School.

Question 1.2: What are the three biggest benefits for a young person who is successfully supported to travel independently on public transport, which allows them to access services and activities in the community?

| Option | Total | Percent |
|---|--------------|----------------|
| Improved job opportunities | 1 | 1% |
| Development of life skills/independence | 19 | 30% |
| Improve self-esteem/confidence | 13 | 21% |
| No benefit | 6 | 10% |
| Independent travel not possible for my child | 15 | 24% |
| No applicable | 4 | 6% |
| Improved access to services and activities | 5 | 8% |

Question 1.3: What are the three biggest benefits for the family of a young person who is successfully supported to travel independently on public transport?

| Option | Total | Percent |
|---|--------------|----------------|
| Family members have more time to do their own thing e.g. study or employment | 22 | 20% |
| Increased numbers of travel options available for family travel | 9 | 8% |
| Reduced dependency on family or friends financially | 15 | 14% |
| Less need for adults to accompany young person to and from places | 17 | 15% |

| | | |
|--|----|-----|
| Opportunities to access community services and activities that were previously not accessible | 12 | 11% |
| Positive changes in family relationships and interactions | 10 | 9% |
| Other | 13 | 12% |
| Not Answered | 12 | 11% |

“Other” (12) responses confirmed the significant needs of their children and inability to travel independently.

Question 1.4: What are the three biggest barriers that stop children and young people using public transport independently to access services and activities in the community?

| Option | Total | Percent |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| Specific health needs cannot be supported on public transport | 42 | 11% |
| Likelihood of bullying or being attacked | 34 | 9% |
| Unable to access services and activities due to poor public transport links | 22 | 6% |
| Limited awareness of danger or unable to keep safe | 49 | 13% |
| Specific needs may place child/young person or member of the public at risk | 40 | 11% |
| Wouldn't be able to manage situations that aren't planned or are out of routine | 44 | 12% |
| Risk of getting lost or missing stop | 39 | 10% |
| Unable to communicate with public transport staff or members of the public | 40 | 11% |
| Has never used public transport before, even with an accompanying adult | 13 | 3% |
| Unable to handle money | 27 | 7% |
| Not being able to access opportunities to learn the necessary skills to use public transport | 11 | 3% |
| Family concern for the young person's safety and not allowing them the opportunity to try to travel on public transport independently | 16 | 4% |
| Other | 3 | 1% |

“Other” (3) responses identified general safety in the town and specific individuals needs that would put them at risk if traveling independently.

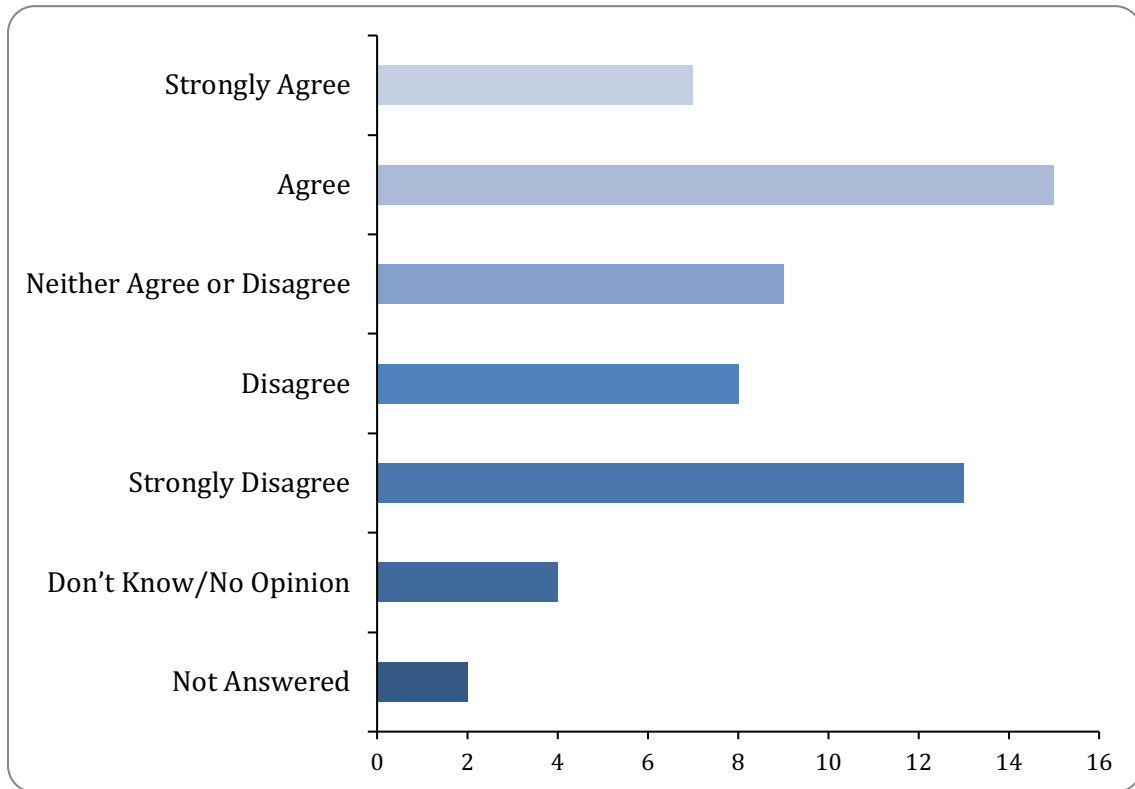
The Council will consider these aspects when assessing individual suitability and during design/delivery of any training to ensure risks are mitigated and appropriate controls and monitoring are in place to support passenger safety.

Question 1.5: What should the Council do to encourage more children and young persons with SEND to travel on public transport to school or college?

| Option | Total | Percent |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| Promote/Market Travel Training better | 4 | 8% |
| Train specific journeys/scenarios | 2 | 4% |
| Provide adult support to accompany young person | 3 | 5% |
| Travel Training not suitable for young person | 20 | 38% |
| Improve safety within the wider community | 4 | 8% |
| Save money elsewhere | 3 | 5% |
| Conduct individual needs assessment to confirm suitability for training | 11 | 21% |
| Provide free bus passes for young people and/or carers | 3 | 5% |
| Improve bus reliability, accessibility, and driver training | 3 | 5% |

The Council will continue to explore suggested options to improve public transport travel based on the responses provided.

Question 1.6: To what extent do you agree with the statement below: If a child or young person has the potential to become an independent traveller and would benefit from Independent Travel Training then they should be expected to undertake the training



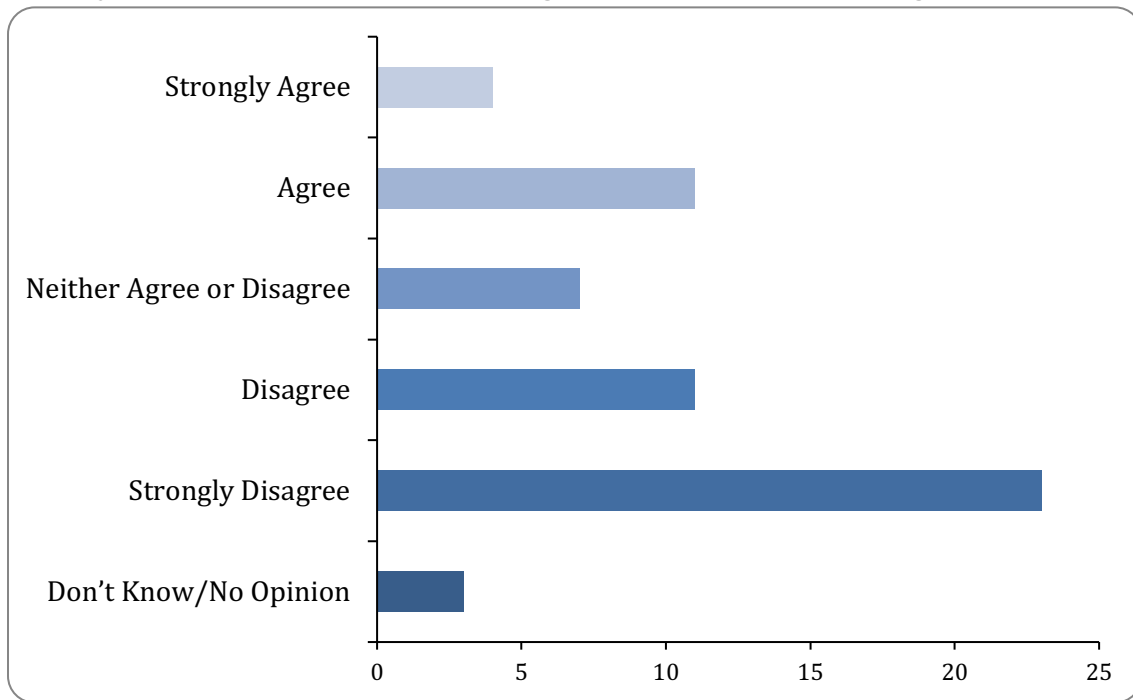
Question 1.7: Please provide any further thoughts, comments and suggestions in relation to Independent Travel Training.

The majority of responses either stated that Independent Travel Training would not be suitable for their child, or that it was essential that each child is individually assessed to identify if this is a suitable option for them.

Other responses included: the need to ensure travel arrangements keep children safe, and that training should focus on older children and should be part of long term planning/support for the individual.

Travel Bursary

**Question 1.8: To what extent do you agree with the statement:
The Council should encourage more young people and families to use a travel bursary to make their own travel arrangements to school or college.**



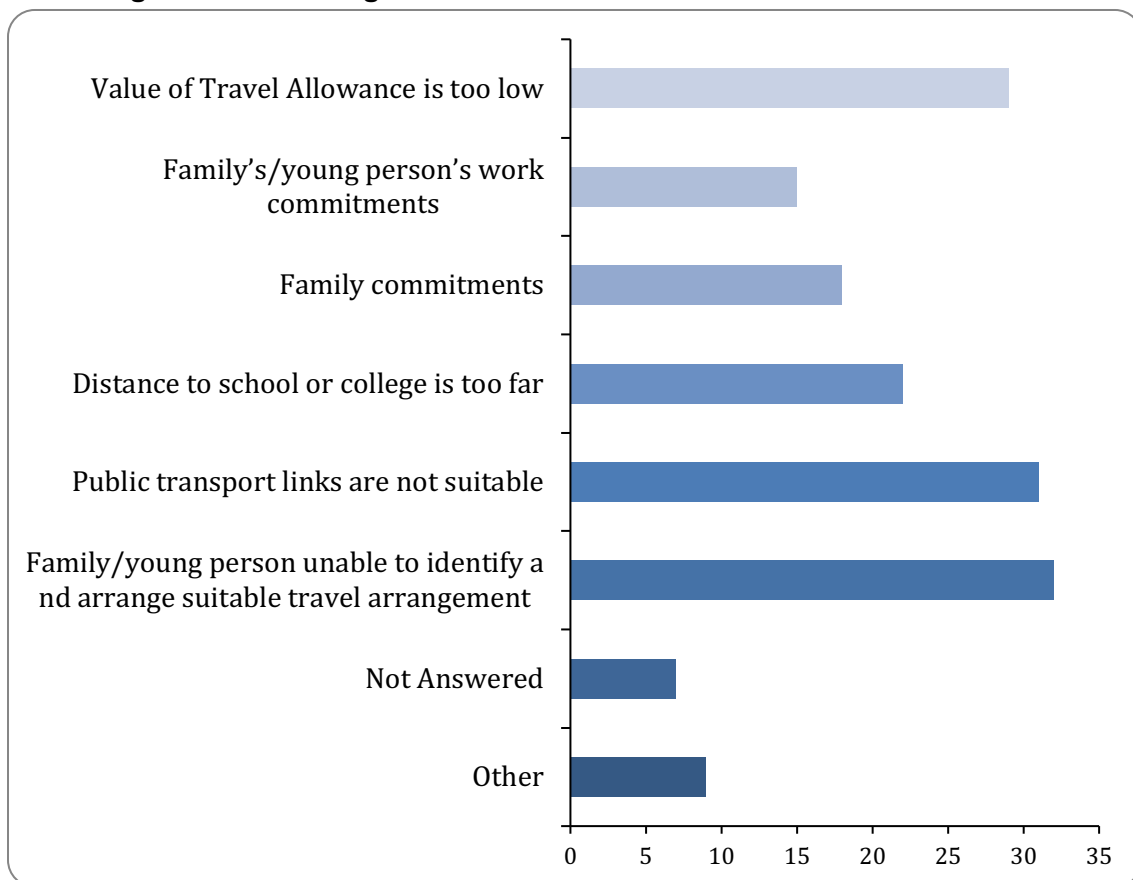
Question 1.9: Based on what you currently know about the proposed Travel Bursary travel option, what do you think are the three biggest benefits for families using a Travel Bursary to make their own travel arrangements?

| Option | Total | Percent |
|---|-------|---------|
| Able to arrange travel around work commitments | 8 | 7% |
| Able to arrange travel around family/caring responsibilities | 11 | 10% |
| Flexibility to allow access to after school activities/services outside of school/college | 14 | 13% |
| Greater control over travel arrangements | 15 | 13% |
| Ability to provide additional funding for bespoke travel needs if necessary | 9 | 8% |
| Less likelihood of changes in travel arrangements resulting from other passengers | 9 | 8% |
| Shorter journey times for child or young person to school or college | 13 | 12% |
| Not Answered | 21 | 19% |
| Other | 10 | 9% |
| Not Answered | 2 | 1% |

Those who responded “other” generally felt that the Council should be providing the travel, not the parent, and that there was no benefit to the Travel Bursary option. It was also mentioned within the feedback that this may put more cars on the road.

The Council acknowledges that car use could be increased if individual cars/journeys are undertaken in place of share travel arrangements. However, it is expected that the use of the Bursary is likely to be more beneficial for all parties where journeys are not currently shared and therefore if a family decides to drive their own child to school then this will replace the existing vehicle on the road (that is used), rather than increase vehicle numbers on the road. Vehicles already on the road transporting parents/carers to work may also be able to be utilized to transport their child to school and travel to work, therefore vehicle numbers will not increase in this scenario. The Council will continue to monitor and observe vehicle numbers on the road.

Question 1.10: What do you think are the top three barriers stopping a young person or their family using a Travel Bursary to make their travel arrangements for accessing school or college?

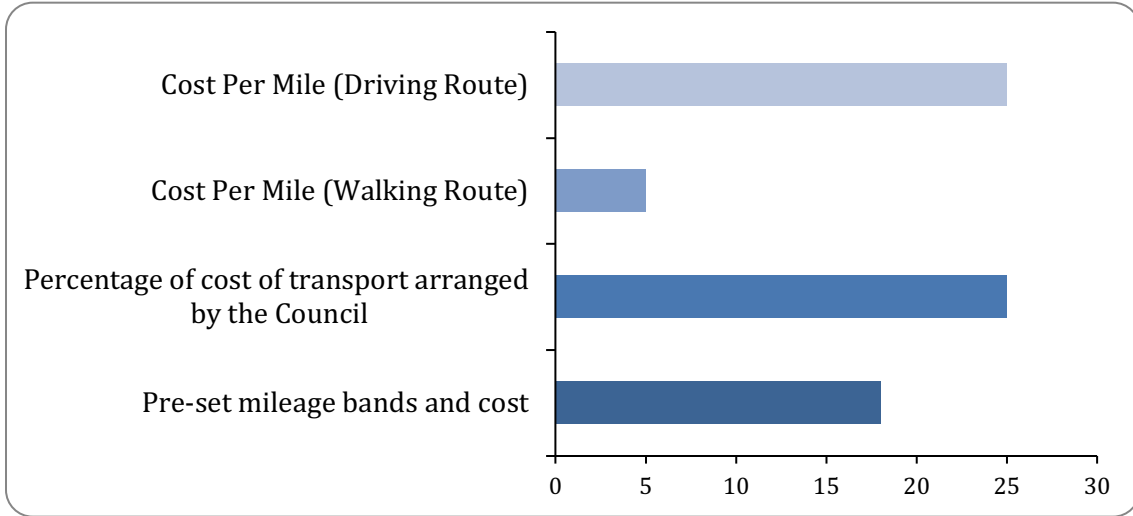


“Other” feedback regarding barriers to the use of a Travel Bursary included: that it may not be suitable due to other family members own ill health, the increase congestion on the roads would cause problems, it may not be suitable for their child due to their needs,

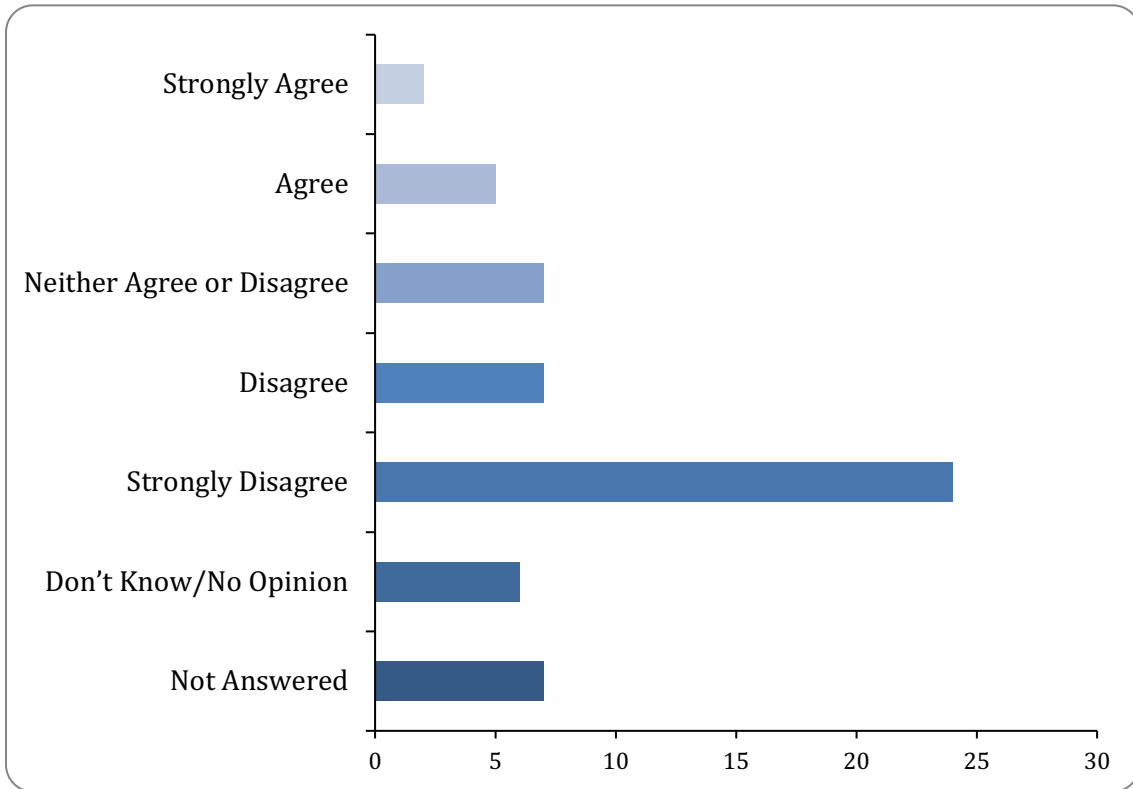
families may miss use the Travel Bursary and spend on other things for the family, and it may not be an affordable option for some families.

For eligible children/young people the use of a Travel Bursary can only be with the parent/carer's consent. Therefore, if circumstances do not allow a Travel Bursary to be used the family can reject this offer with the Council making an alternative offer of provision. The Council will continue to work with families to reduce the impact of identified barriers to encourage uptake of the Travel Bursary.

Question 1.11: How should the value of the Travel Bursary be calculated?



Question 1.12: If a cost per mile calculation was used to establish the value of the Travel Bursary, to what extent do you agree that 45p per mile for a return journey is an appropriate value?

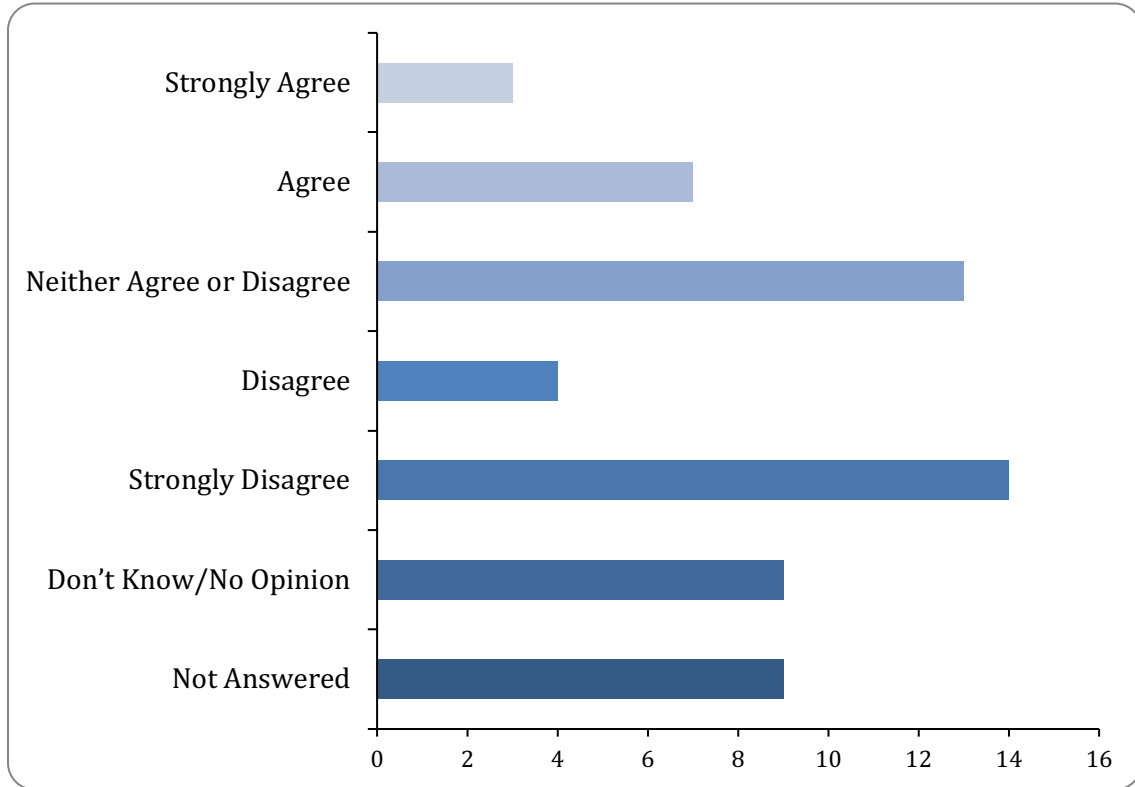


Question 1.13: If a pre-set mileage band and cost was used to establish the value of a Travel Bursary, to what extent do you agree with the following Bursary values?

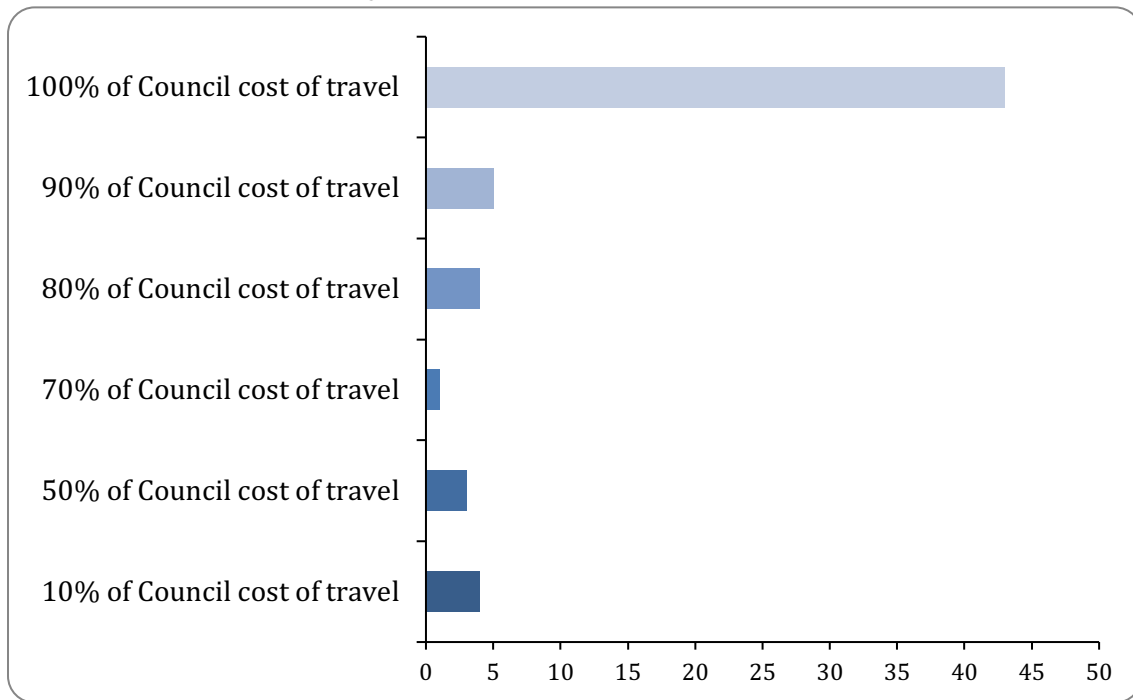
Less than 5 miles = £2000 per year

5-10 miles = £3000 per year

Over 10 miles = £5000 per year



Question 1.14: Based on the current average cost of travel assistance of £5,769 per person, what percentage of a child/young person’s travel cost should be offered as a Travel Bursary?

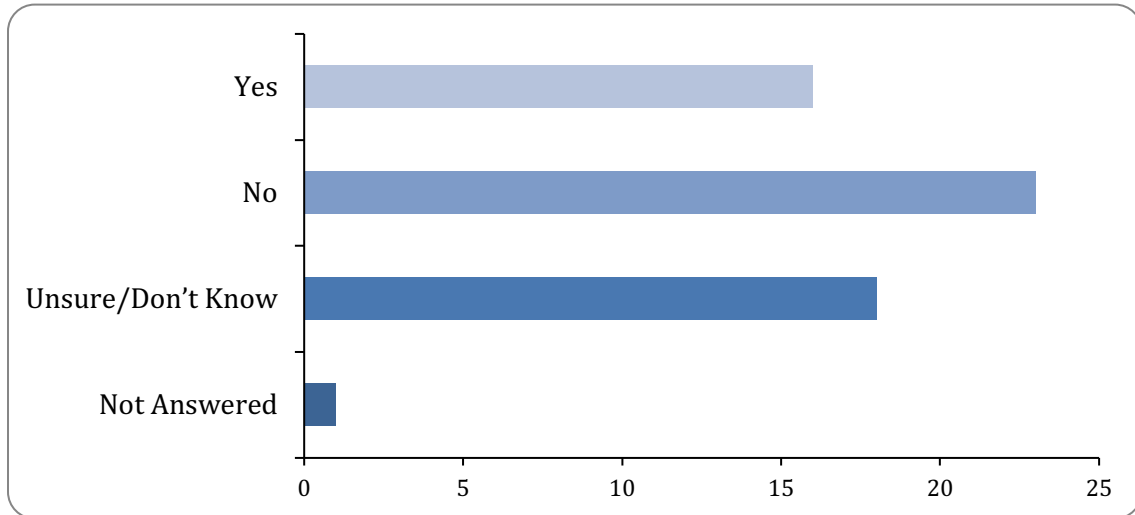


Question 1.15: Please provide any further thoughts, comments and suggestions in relation to Travel Bursaries.

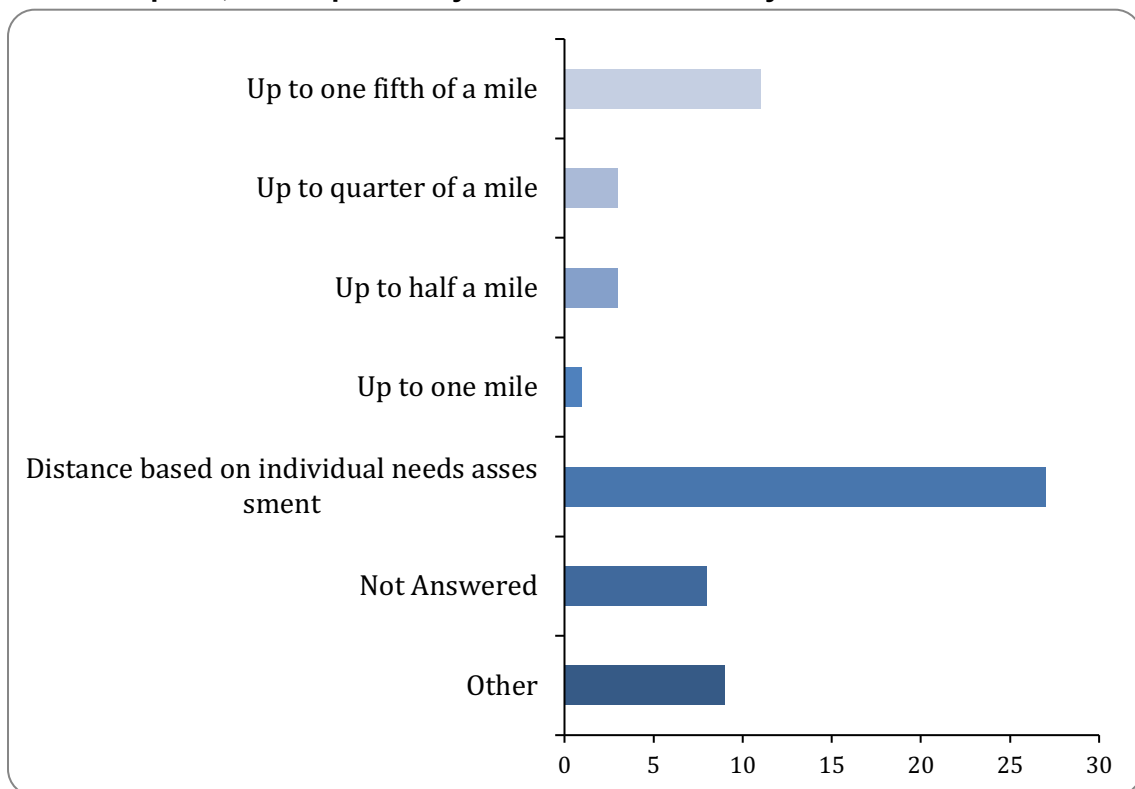
As per earlier responses to Travel Bursary questions many responses indicate that this travel option would not be suitable for their child, and that the Council should be arranging any transport if it is necessary to do so. The other prominent response was that the Travel Bursary may not be financially viable families and therefore unsuitable. Other responses suggest the Travel Bursary offer should be kept simple, cover the cost of return journeys for accompanying adults, there is a need to increase the availability of buses, and that the Council should support the development of travel skills to better support them in the future.

Collection Points

Question 1.16: Do you think that the use of collection points for some children and young people would be beneficial?



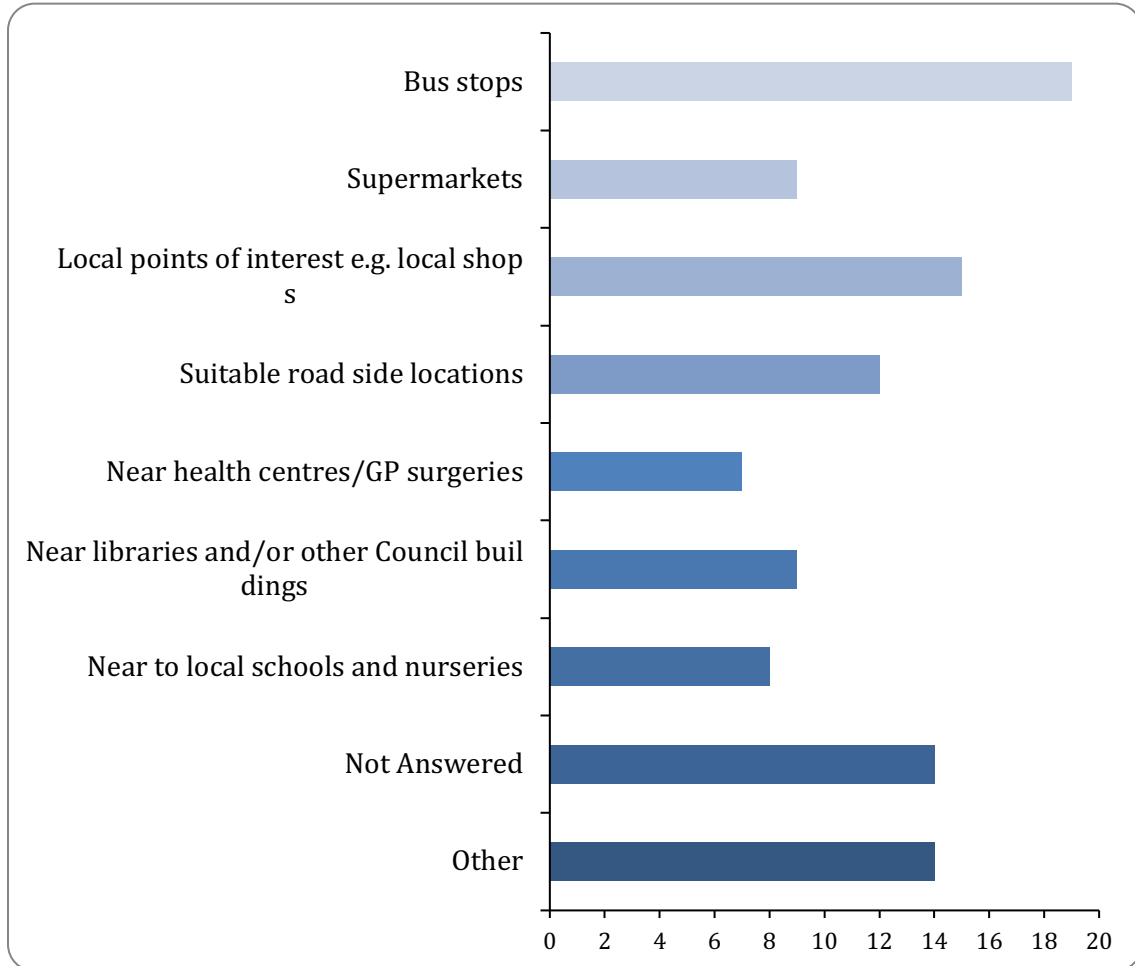
Question 1.17: If collection points were used for some children and young people, how far do you think is reasonable to ask a child or young person to travel to a collection point, accompanied by an adult as necessary?



Respondents (“other”) felt either that this would not be a suitable option for their child or that the distance a child should walk should be assessed on a case-by-case basis to reflect their specific needs and capabilities. Other responses stated that children should

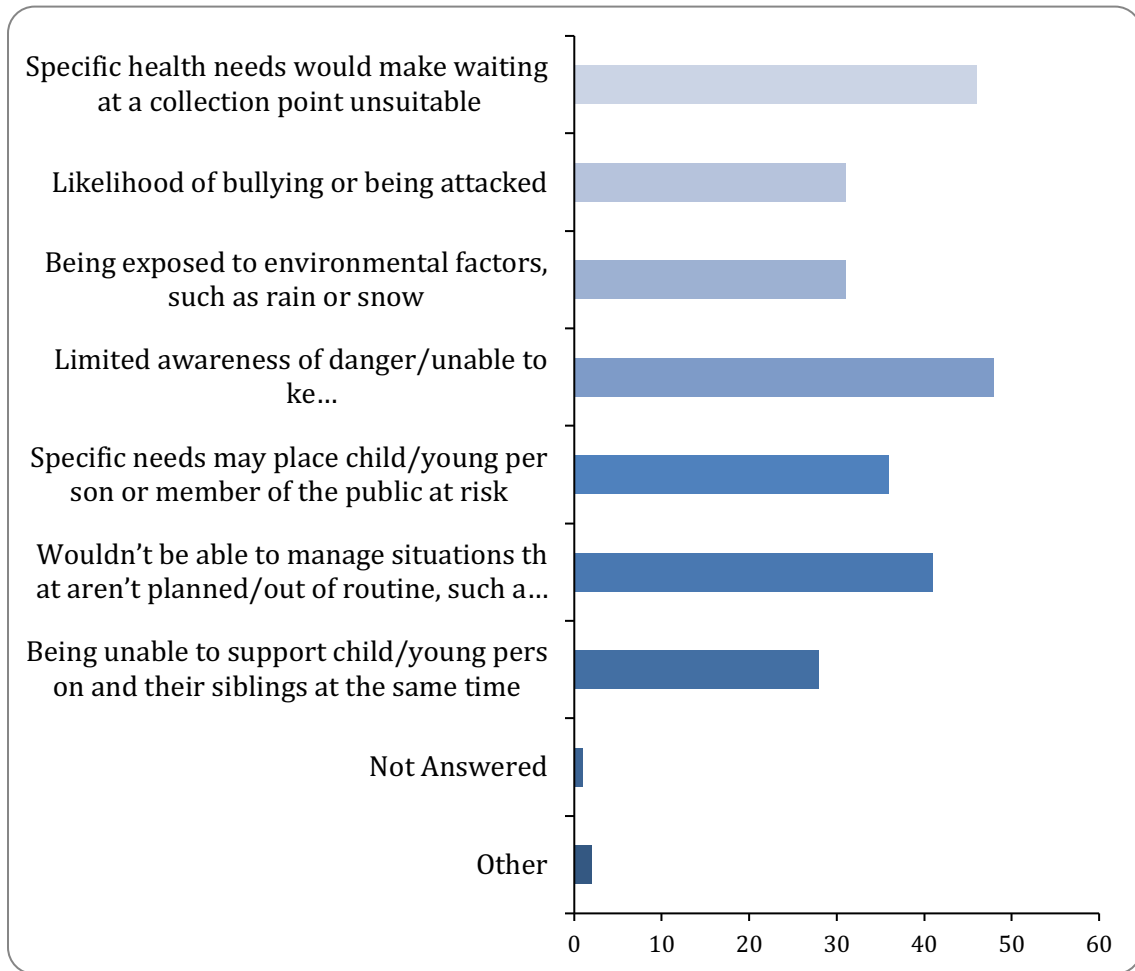
only be collected from the home address because it was the safest option, and it may impact family work arrangements.

Question 1.18: When planning routes with collection points which three locations would be most suitable for a collection point, subject to a location being identified as having suitable facilities for boarding, alighting and waiting?



Respondents also continued to indicate that they felt home collection was the only option for their child (11), there was also feedback suggesting that locations chosen should be individually assessed to reflect the needs/circumstances of the individual.

Question 1.19: What are the three biggest barriers to a child or young person accessing their school or college transport from a collection point?



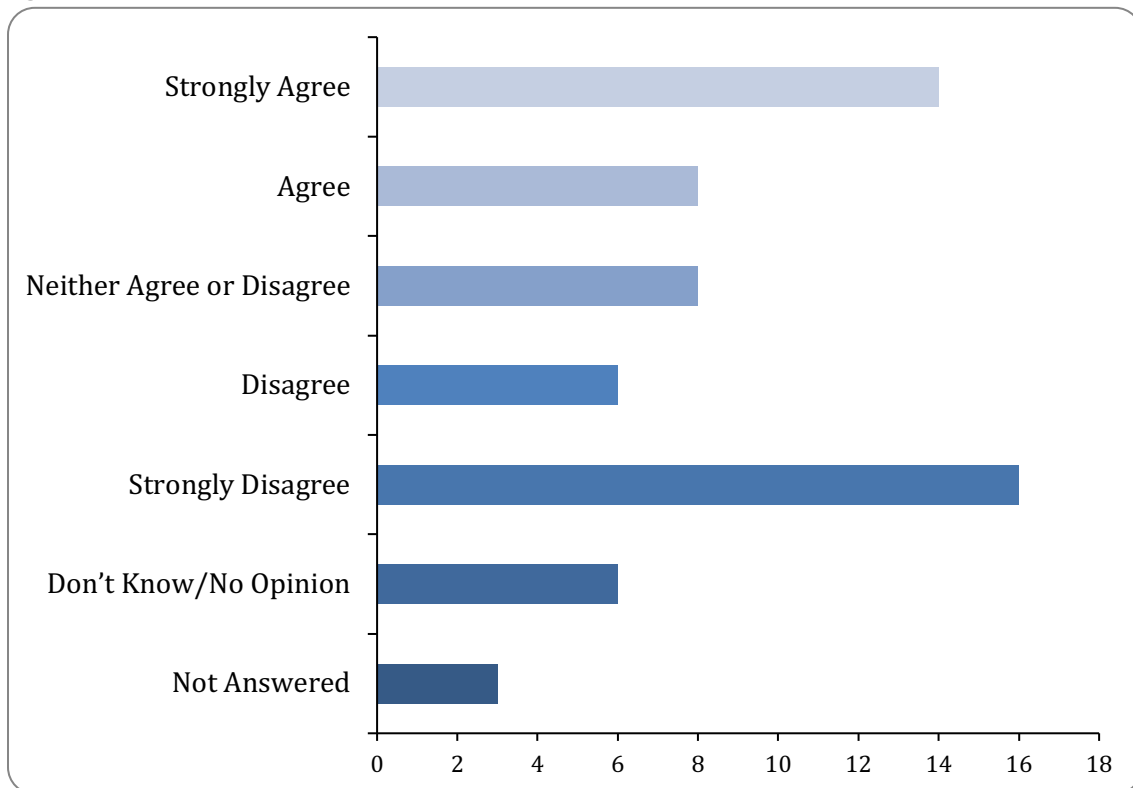
Further responses reinforced that the use of collections points would not be suitable for their child or if the child has specific additional needs.

Question 1.20: Please provide any further thoughts, comments and suggestions in relation to the use of collection points

Comments, thoughts and suggestions provided reflect the responses to previous questions. Generally those responding felt their child would be unable to access a collection point due to their needs, it would be necessary that location and allocation of children is individually assessed, and any location used must have space/cover/supervision available.

Faith School & Same Sex Establishments

Question 2.1: Slough Council is proposing to cease travel assistance for children/young people attending faith or same sex establishments that are not the nearest educational establishment to their home address. To what extent do you agree with this proposal?



Question 2.2: Please provide any further thoughts, comments and suggestions in relation to proposed ceasing of travel assistance to faith or same sex establishments

As per 2.1 the responses were evenly balanced between respondents believing that if parental choice results in attendance at a School that is not the nearest then families should be responsible for making travel arrangements in the same was as children attending nonfaith or same sex schools/establishments. It was also recognised by

respondents that some children may have additional needs, and these should continue to be taken into account and assessed on a case by case basis. Other respondents felt that provision to these Schools should continue.

Contribution Charge – Non Compulsory School Age

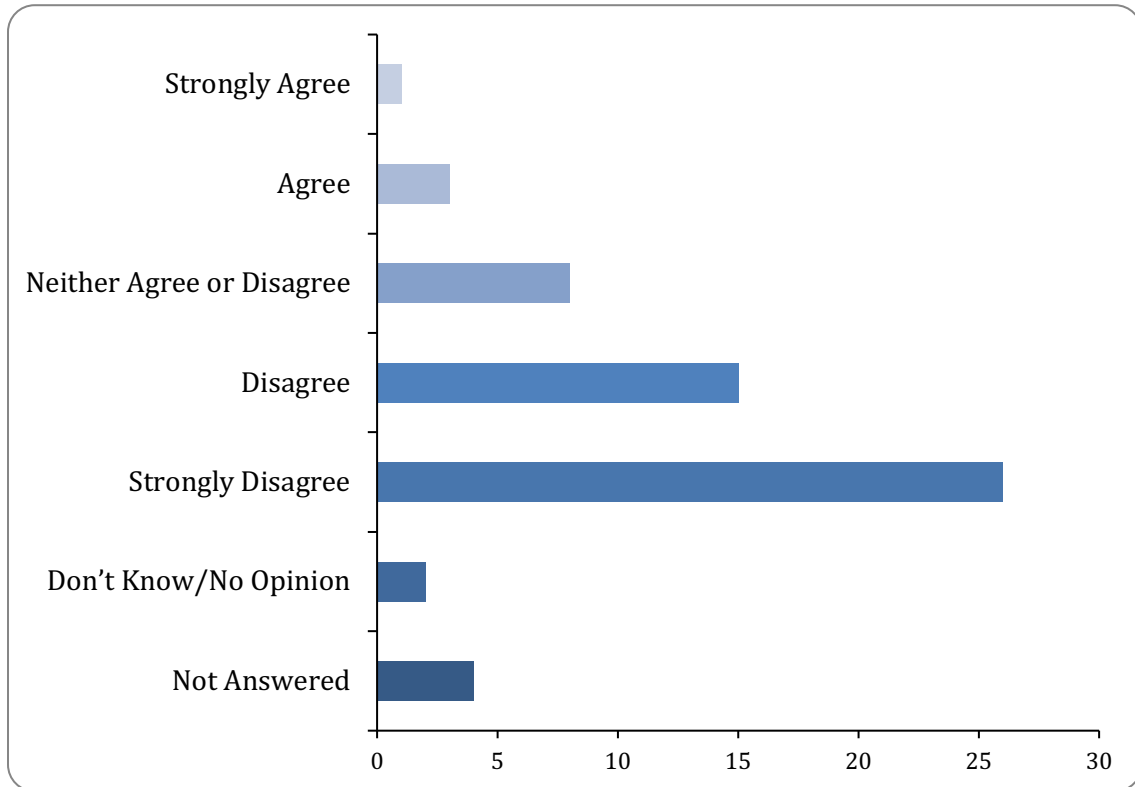
Question 2.3: Slough Council is proposing to introduce a contribution charge for children/young persons who are not of compulsory school age. The range of contribution charges amongst other Council’s ranges from £300 to over £1,500 per year. What contribution charge do you think is reasonable for non-compulsory school age young persons to make towards their travel costs?

| Option | Total | Percent |
|------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| £1500 per annum | 10 | 16% |
| £1250 per annum | 0 | 0% |
| £1000 per annum | 0 | 0% |
| £750 per annum | 4 | 7% |
| £500 per annum | 10 | 16% |
| £250 per annum | 37 | 61% |
| Not Answered | 0 | 0.00% |

Alternative Saving Opportunities/Efficiencies

Question 3.1: Slough Council's expenditure on home to school or college transport for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities is £3.7 million this year.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council should take reasonable steps to limit spend on this service.



Question 3.2: If you have any suggestions on how the Council could reduce its expenditure on home to school or college travel assistance, please provide these.

The majority of responses indicate that children/young people with SEND and their families should not be targeted for spend reductions. Instead, this should be targeted from other departments, officer salaries/pay and addressing miss-spending.

Suggestions were put forward that include requesting donations, target contract reductions with transport providers, optimise/replan the routes that are in place. More local specialist provision may also reduce Council transport spend.

Other Considerations

Question 3.3: Children and young people may be receiving Disability Living Allowance, a Personal Independence Payment or another form of travel benefit or concession. Ordinarily the purpose of this benefit is to provide support with travel and access to services and activities. With this in mind, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:

Existing travel benefits or support should be one of the factors taken into consideration when assessing if a young person over the age of 16 needs additional support with travel to their education placement.

| Option | Total | Percent |
|----------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree | 8 | % |
| Agree | 11 | % |
| Neither Agree or Disagree | 5 | % |
| Disagree | 8 | % |
| Strongly Disagree | 22 | % |
| Don't Know/No Opinion | 2 | % |
| Not Answered | 4 | % |

Question 3.4: Some young people between the ages of 16-19 will be able to access a Vulnerable Person's Bursary from their college to support with the costs of continuing their education, including costs associated with travel. With this in mind, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:

It is reasonable to expect young people in receipt of a Vulnerable Person's Bursary to use this funding to contribute towards the costs of any travel assistance provided by the Council.

Please specify

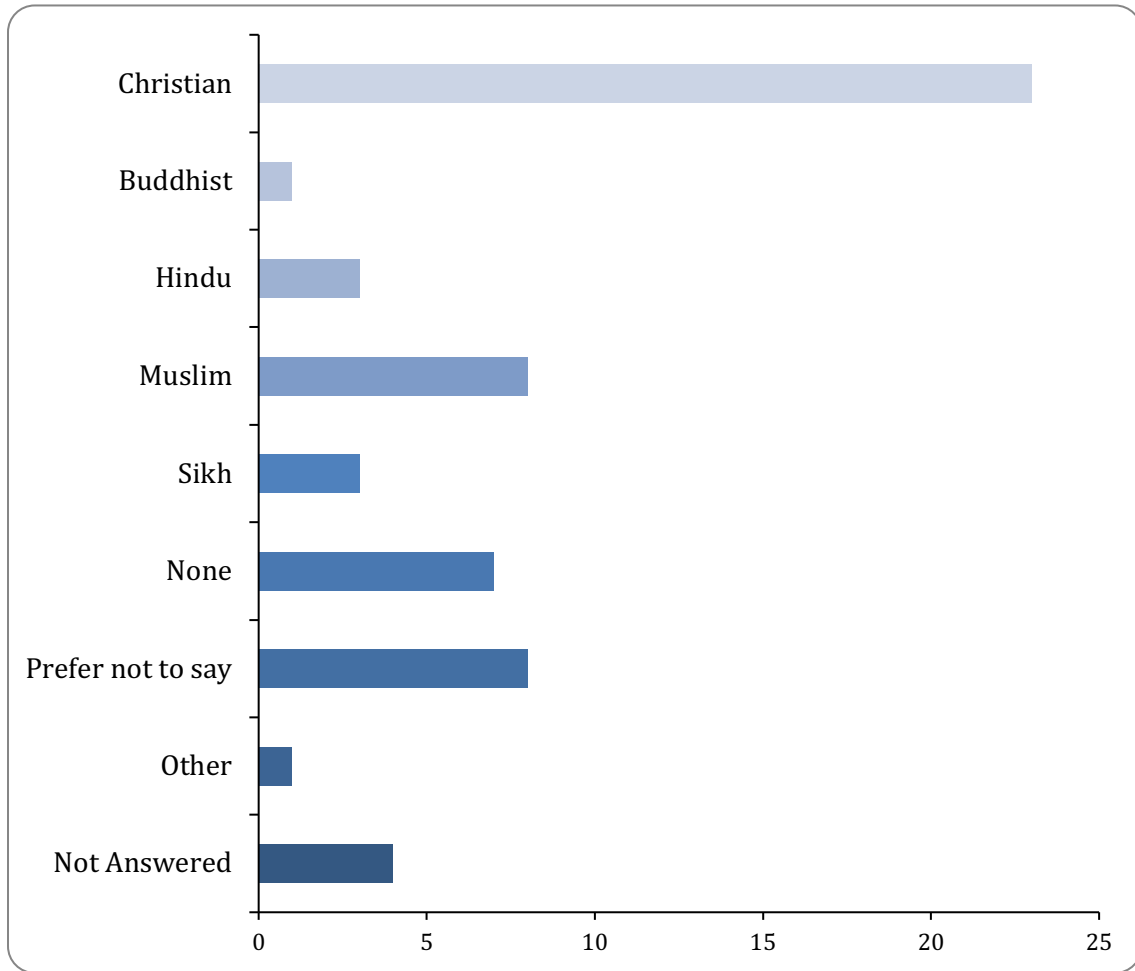
| Option | Total | Percent |
|----------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree | 7 | % |
| Agree | 16 | % |
| Neither Agree or Disagree | 5 | % |
| Disagree | 4 | % |
| Strongly Disagree | 16 | % |
| Don't Know/No Opinion | 5 | % |
| Not Answered | 6 | % |

Demographic/Background Section

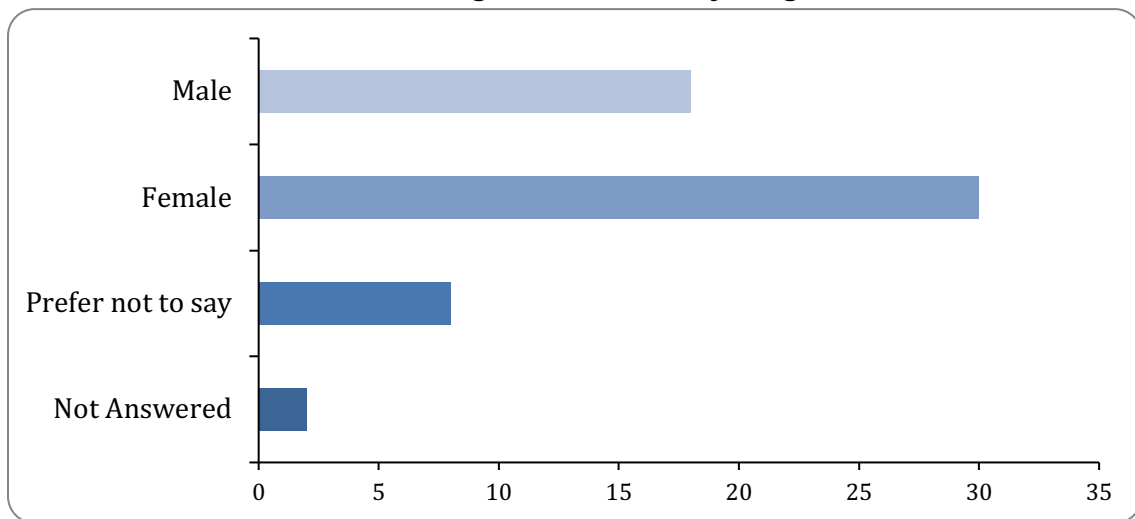
Question 1: What is your Ethnic Group?

| Option | Total | Percent |
|---|-------|---------|
| A. White | 23 | 39.66% |
| British | 16 | 27.59% |
| Irish | 1 | 1.72% |
| Any other White background, please state: | 2 | 3.45% |
| B. Mixed | 0 | 0.00% |
| White and Black Caribbean | 1 | 1.72% |
| White and Black African | 0 | 0.00% |
| White and Asian | 0 | 0.00% |
| Any other Mixed background, please state: | 1 | 1.72% |
| C. Asian or Asian British | 5 | 8.62% |
| Indian | 3 | 5.17% |
| Pakistani | 6 | 10.34% |
| Bangladeshi | 0 | 0.00% |
| Sikh | 1 | 1.72% |
| Kashmiri | 0 | 0.00% |
| Any other Asian background, please state: | 0 | 0.00% |
| D. Black or Black British | 1 | 1.72% |
| Caribbean | 0 | 0.00% |
| African | 0 | 0.00% |
| Any other Black background, please state: | 1 | 1.72% |
| E. Chinese or other ethnic group | 0 | 0.00% |
| Chinese | 0 | 0.00% |
| F. I do not wish to provide this information | 8 | 13.79% |
| Other | 1 | 1.72% |
| Not Answered | 3 | 5.17% |

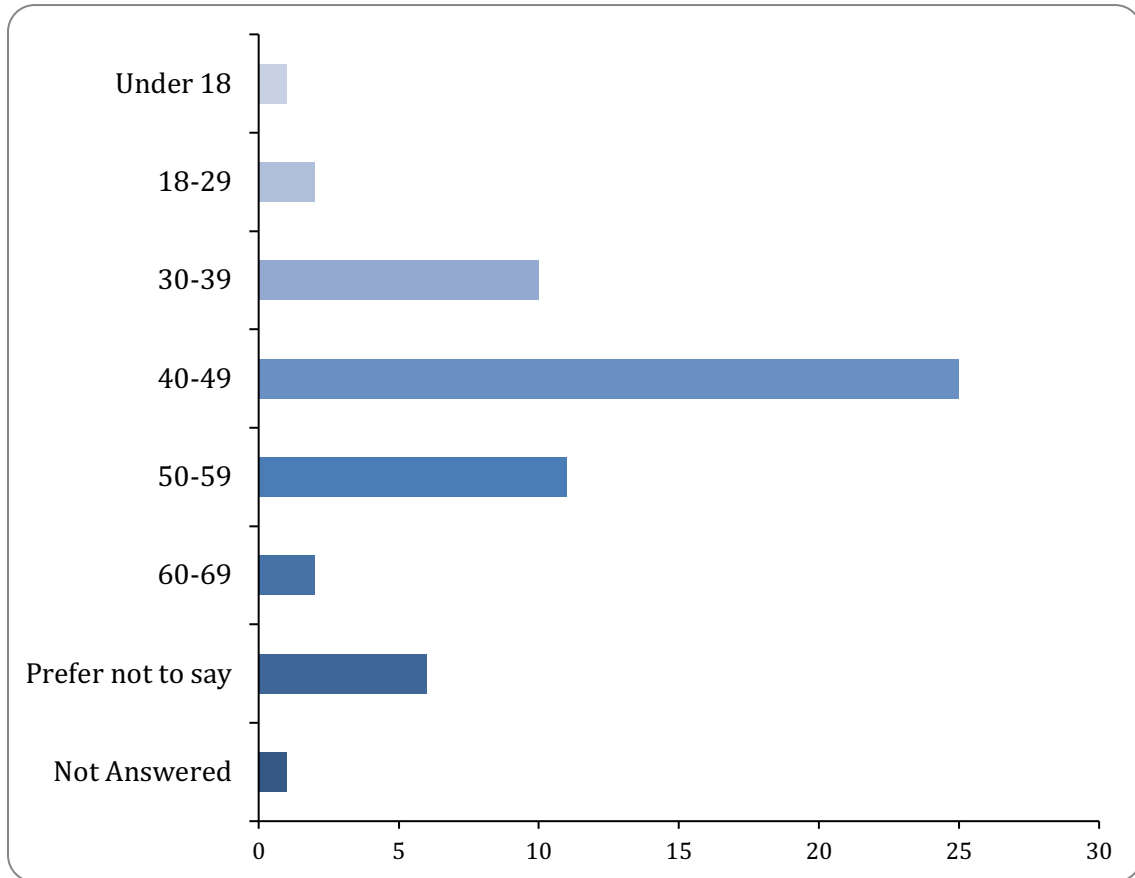
Question 2: What is your religion/faith/belief?



Question 3: Which of the following best describes your gender?



Question 4: Which of the following best describes your age?



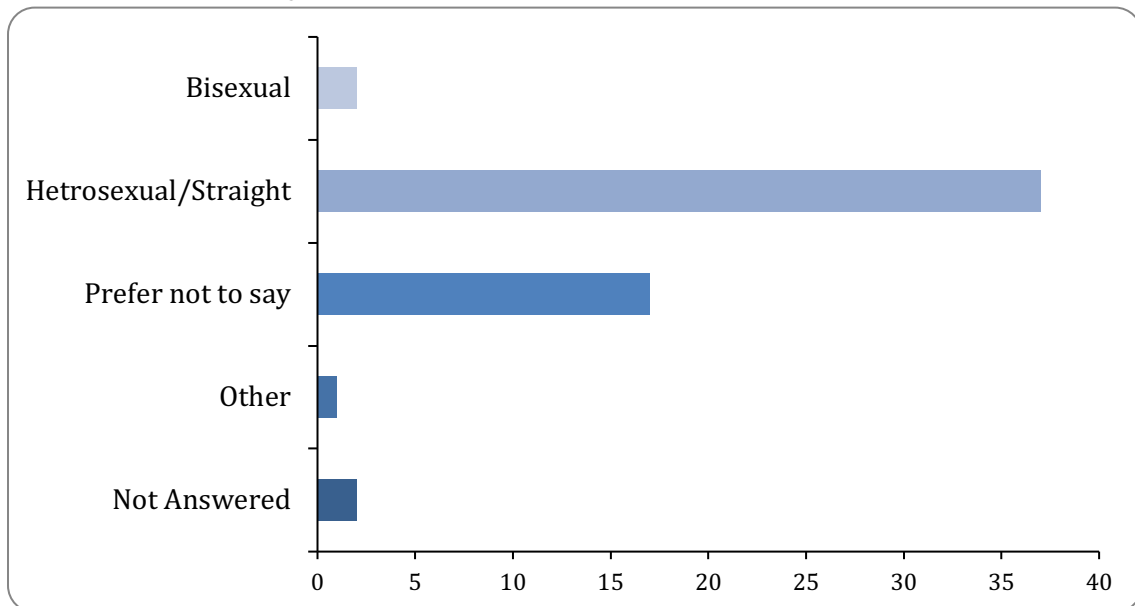
**Question 5: Do you have a disability?
What do we mean by a disability?**

The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as a physical or mental impairment with substantial and long-term, adverse effects on ability to perform day to day activities.

| Option | Total | Percent |
|---|-------|---------|
| 00 None | 36 | 62.07% |
| 01 You have a specific learning difficulty (for example dyslexia) | 1 | 1.72% |
| 02 You are blind or partially sighted | 1 | 1.72% |
| 03 You are deaf or hard of hearing | 1 | 1.72% |
| 04 You use a wheelchair or have mobility difficulties | 2 | 3.45% |

| | | |
|---|----|--------|
| 05 You have Autistic Spectrum Disorder or Asperger Syndrome | 1 | 1.72% |
| 06 You have mental health difficulties | 4 | 6.90% |
| 07 You have a disability that cannot be seen eg. Diabetes, epilepsy or a heart condition | 5 | 8.62% |
| 08 You have two or more of the above | 1 | 1.72% |
| 09 You have a disability, special need or medication that is not listed above | 1 | 1.72% |
| 10 I do not wish to provide this information | 11 | 18.97% |
| Not Answered | 0 | 0.00% |

Question 6: What is your sexual orientation?



EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE

PLEASE ENSURE YOU READ THE GUIDANCE NOTES BEFORE COMPLETING THIS TEMPLATE

Completing an EIA is the simplest way to demonstrate that the Council has considered the equality impacts of its decisions and it reduces the risk of legal challenge. EIAs should be carried out at the earliest stages of policy development or a service review, and then updated as the policy or review develops. EIAs must be undertaken when it is possible for the findings to inform the final decision.

SECTION 1:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Title</p> | <p>Draft Home to School Travel Assistance and Post 16 Travel Assistance Policies for Consultation</p> |
| <p>What are you analysing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the policy/project/activity/strategy looking to achieve? • Who is it intended to benefit? Are any specific groups targeted by this decision? • What results are intended? | <p>The Council have undertaken a review of the way SBC delivers its Home to School and Post 16 Travel Assistance to a) ensure it is fit for purpose and continues to be compliant with statutory obligations b) to explore the advantages and disadvantages of offering alternative travel options (where appropriate) that support the development of independence c) deliver value for money by offering assistance based on individual need (in line with statutory obligations), with any offer aligning to the individuals ability to travel as independently as possible.</p> <p>The review of the Home to School and Post 16 Travel assistance policies was necessary to ensure officers can rigorously apply the appropriate entitlement thresholds and also provide transparency and consistency to families and Schools in relation to the decision-making process and understanding of any potential travel offer.</p> <p>The Council consulted on proposed updated policies as well as a range of options it was considering. The Consultation ran for 28 days between 23rd June and 21st July 2022. Engagement included: an online survey, direct communication to all current users of the services, direct communication to non-users of the service with an EHCP, all Slough Schools and Post 16 Establishments, all non-Slough Schools and Post 16 Establishments where travel is provided, and recognised partners & organisations.</p> <p>Face-to-face engagement with users and stakeholders took place through public engagement events discussing the draft policies and proposed changes.</p> <p>This EIA will be reviewed and updated post consultation process reflecting the final proposed policies and the feedback received through the consultation process.</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>Under the Education Act 1996, the Council has specific duties and powers as set out below:</p> <p>a) a duty to assess school travel needs and promote sustainable modes of travel in relation to children and young people of 6th form age (s.508A);</p> <p>(b) a duty to provide home to school travel arrangements as considered necessary for eligible children of compulsory school age, such arrangements to be provided free of charge (s.508B). Eligible children is defined in legislation and further details are provided within this policy;</p> <p>(c) a power to make school travel arrangements for children who are not eligible under s.508B. This power can be applied to children below compulsory school age, children attending faith schools or those living within the statutory walking distance. The Council may make a charge for provision of travel arrangements under this power (s.508C);</p> <p>(d) a duty to prepare a transport policy statement specifying travel arrangements provided to persons of sixth form age (s.509AA). The statement shall specify the provision of transport, provision of financial support and provision of travel concessions. A person is of sixth form age if they are receiving education or training and is over compulsory school age but (a) is under the age of 19; or (b) had begun a particular course of education or training at the establishment before attaining the age of 19 and continues to attend that course.</p> |
| <p>Details of the lead person completing the screening/EIA</p> | <p>(i) Full Name: Johnny Kyriacou (ii) Position: AD – Education & Inclusion (iii) Unit: People (Children) (iv) Contact Details: Johnny.kyriacou@slough.gov.uk</p> |
| <p>Date sent to Finance</p> | |
| <p>Version number and date of update</p> | <p>V2 27th July 2022</p> |

SECTION 2: Do you need to complete a full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)?

Not all proposals will require a full EIA, the assessment of impacts should be proportionate to the nature of the project/policy in question and its likely impact. To decide on the level of detail of the assessment required consider the potential impact on persons with protected characteristics.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>2.1</p> | <p>Please provide an overview of who uses/will use your service or facility and identify who are likely to be impacted by the proposal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>If you do not formally collect data about a particular group then use the results of local surveys or consultations, census data, national trends or anecdotal evidence (indicate where this is the case). Please attempt to complete all boxes.</i> <i>Consider whether there is a need to consult stakeholders and the public, including members of protected groups, in order to gather information on potential impacts of the proposal</i> |
| <p>The Home to School service is mainly used by SEN children although there are a number of mainstream children who are entitled to free transport and in general receive bus passes. Going forward the key driver in children receiving home to school transport will depend on rigorous application of the policy so that just those with a statutory entitlement will receive it. There may be some identified who currently have incorrectly received transport so they will be negatively impacted but this will not be because of any particular group characteristic. On the positive side there will be children supported to become more independent and attain travel skills at an earlier age.</p> <p>There are currently 1,695 people aged 0-25 on an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Of the 1,695 there are 520 who current use travel arrangements organised and funded by the Council. 190 users of the service do not have an EHCP, 20 of which attend a faith or same sex school which may not be the nearest School to their home address which can provide the appropriate level of education.</p> | |
| <p>2.2 Are there any groups with protected characteristic that are overrepresented in the monitoring information relative to their size of the population? <i>If so, this could indicate that the proposal may have a disproportionate impact on this group even if it is a universal service.</i></p> | <p>The statutory requirements on Council’s in relation to Home to School/College travel includes support for children and young people with disabilities, low income families. Therefore, the proposed policies affect outcomes of those protected characteristics groups.</p> <p>The primary principle of the statutory requirements, guidance and the policy is to ensure children and young people can access their education placements, where statutory eligibility thresholds are met or it is identified as necessary (in order to facilitate attendance) then assistance with travel must be provided. Assistance will continue to be available to these groups, with the type of assistance reflecting individual needs/circumstances.</p> |
| <p>2.3 Are there any groups with protected characteristics that are underrepresented in the monitoring information relative to their size of the population? <i>If so, this could indicate that the service may not be accessible to all groups or</i></p> | <p>N/A</p> |

there may be some form of direct or indirect discrimination occurring.

2.4 Does the project, policy or proposal have the potential to disproportionately impact on people with a protected characteristic? If so, is the impact positive or negative?

| | None | Positive | Negative | Not sure |
|---|------|---|---|--------------------------|
| Men or women | N/A | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| People of a particular race or ethnicity (including refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and gypsies and travellers) | N/A | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disabled ¹ people (consider different types of physical, learning or mental disabilities) | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> More options to support development of travel independence, previously not available | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| People of particular sexual orientation/s | N/A | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| People in particular age groups (consider in particular children, under 21s and over 65s) | | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Changes include contribution charge for Post 16 learners | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| People who are intending to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone a process or part of a process of gender reassignment | N/A | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Impact due to pregnancy/ maternity | N/A | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| People of particular faiths and beliefs | | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20 users of the service are currently in receipt of support which exceeds the Council statutory obligations. This provision will cease except in | <input type="checkbox"/> |

¹ Disability discrimination is different from other types of discrimination since it includes the duty to make reasonable adjustments.

| | | | exceptional circumstances | |
|---|--|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| People on low incomes | <p>✓ Families on low incomes are currently supported through the Councils statutory obligations therefore no change proposed for compulsory school age assistance. Introduction of contribution charge for Post 16 assistance is unlikely to impact as financial support is available whilst Council retains right to waive contribution fee if necessary for attendance</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>If any of the answers to the questions above is, “negative” or “unclear” you will need to undertake a detailed impact assessment.</p> | | | | |

2.5 Based on your responses, should a full, detailed EIA be carried out on the project, policy or proposal

| | |
|------------|--|
| | Yes No X |
| 2.6 | Provide brief reasons on how have you come to this decision? |
| | Children will be assessed for school transport using criteria set out in policy. The policy will not allow children to be excluded on grounds of race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender or faith. The requirement will be for the policy to be applied equally for all groups and having an increased staffing resource will decrease the likelihood of cases not being fully or properly assessed. |

SECTION 3: ASSESSING THE IMPACT

In order to be able to identify ways to mitigate any potential impact it is essential that we know what those potential impacts might be. Using the evidence gathered in section 2, explain what the potential impact of your proposal might be on the groups you have identified. You may wish to further supplement the evidence you have gathered using the table below in order to properly consider the impact.

| Protected Group | | Positive impact? | | | Negative impact? If so, please specify the nature and extent of that impact | No specific impact | If the impact is negative how can it be mitigated? Please specify any mitigation measures and how and when they will be implemented | What , if any, are the cumulative effects of this decision when viewed in the context of other Council decisions and their equality impacts |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|---|--------------------|---|--|
| | | Eliminate discrimination | Advance equality | Good relations | | | | |
| Gender | Men | | | | | ✓ | N/A | N/A |
| | Women | | | | | ✓ | N/A | N/A |
| Race | White | | | | | ✓ | N/A | N/A |
| | Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups | | | | | ✓ | N/A | N/A |
| | Asian/Asian British | | | | | ✓ | N/A | N/A |
| | Black/African/Caribbean/Black British | | | | | ✓ | N/A | N/A |
| | Gypsies / travellers | | | | | ✓ | N/A | N/A |
| | Other ethnic group | | | | | ✓ | N/A | N/A |
| Disability | Physical | | ✓ | | | | N/A | Those with disability but have potential to travel more independently now have options to develop their independence. Those unable to travel independently continue to receive appropriate support based on their individual needs/circumstances |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--|---|--|--|--|-----|--|
| | Sensory | | ✓ | | | | N/A | Those with disability but have potential to travel more independently now have options to develop their independence. Those unable to travel independently continue to receive appropriate support based on their individual needs/circumstances |
| | Learning Difficulties | | ✓ | | | | N/A | Those with disability but have potential to travel more independently now have options to develop their independence. Those unable to travel independently continue to receive appropriate support based on their individual needs/circumstances |
| | Learning Disabilities | | ✓ | | | | N/A | Those with disability but have potential to travel more independently now have options to develop their independence. Those unable to travel independently continue to receive appropriate support based on their individual needs/circumstances |
| | Mental Health | | ✓ | | | | N/A | Those with disability but have potential to travel more independently now have options to develop their independence. Those |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | | | unable to travel independently continue to receive appropriate support based on their individual needs/circumstances |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|

| Protected Group | | Positive impact? | | | Negative impact? | No specific impact | What will the impact be? If the impact is negative how can it be mitigated? (action) | What are the cumulative of effects |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------------|---|---|
| | | Eliminate discrimination | Advance equality | Good relations | | | | |
| Sexual Orientation | Lesbian, gay men, bisexual | | | | | ✓ | N/A | |
| Age | Older people (50+) | | | | | N/A | N/A | |
| | Younger people (16 - 25) | | | | ✓ | | Families will be required to pay a contribution towards travel costs if the learner is attending Post 16 education, currently there is no requirement to pay a contribution. The contribution charge has been deemed reasonable based on financial support that is available and the typical cost of traveling to college if Council travel is not available. | Young learners who require support with travel from the Council will need to pay a contribution charge. This may increase financial pressures on families to attend their study programme which may create an attendance barrier. Most current service users qualify for a 16-19 bursary which is provided to contribute towards education costs, including travel. If financial hardship can be evidenced, then the Council retains the option to waive contribution charge. |
| Gender Reassignment | | | | | | ✓ | N/A | |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|---|---|--|---|
| Impact due to pregnancy/maternity | | | | | ✓ | N/A | |
| Groups with particular faiths and beliefs | | | | ✓ | | 20 learners currently benefit from travel assistance to a School of faith or same sex establishment that isn't the nearest School that can meet the individuals' educational needs. Removing this provision will align eligibility with other learners and in line with the Council's statutory obligations. | Affected learners will be expected to access their chosen education placement (not nearest) with no travel support from the Council using existing family resources, public transport or walking. If extenuating circumstances that exist prevent or restrict attendance then the Council retains the power to provide discretionary assistance on a case-by-case basis. |
| People on low incomes | | | | | ✓ | N/A | |

SECTION 4: ACTION PLAN

| | |
|------------|--|
| 4.1 | <p>Complete the action plan if you need to reduce or remove the negative impacts you have identified, take steps to foster good relations or fill data gaps.</p> <p><i>Please include the action required by your team/unit, groups affected, the intended outcome of your action, resources needed, a lead person responsible for undertaking the action (inc. their department and contact details), the completion date for the action, and the relevant RAG rating: R(ed) – action not initiated, A(mber) – action initiated and in progress, G(reen) – action complete.</i></p> <p>NB. Add any additional rows, if required.</p> |
|------------|--|

| Action Required | Equality Groups Targeted | Intended outcome | Resources Needed | Name of Lead, Unit & Contact Details | Completion Date (DD/MM/YY) | RAG |
|--|--------------------------|--|------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----|
| Create guidance information for families & schools to explain Home to School and Post 16 Travel Policies, to include available financial support and how to apply if extenuating circumstances exist | All | To provide useful information to families and schools that accurately and easily explain the policies with appropriate signposting to other available support or application channels/options. | TBC | Johnny Kyriacou, (People Children) | 31/12/22 | |
| Provide feedback from the consultation to partner organisations and Schools | All | To provide transparency of the consultation process and insight into the responses that have been considered as part of the decision making process | TBC | Johnny Kyriacou, (People Children) | 30/11/22 | |
| Engage with SENDIAS and other organisations to explain the transition of the changes, the implications and options available to | All | To ensure support organisations are aware of the policy changes, the continued support that is available and empower | TBC | Johnny Kyriacou, (People Children) | 30/11/22 | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | families in accordance with the new policies | | them to effectively support those individuals they work with | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |

THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY THE RELEVANT SERVICE MANAGER

SIGNATURE:

FULL NAME: Johnny Kyriacou

UNIT: People - Children (Education & Inclusion)

EMAIL & TELEPHONE EXT: johnny.kyriacou@slough.gov.uk

DATE (DD/MM/YYYY): 27/07/2022

WHAT NEXT?

It is the responsibility of the service to complete an EIA to the required standard and the quality and completeness of EIAs will be monitored by Strategic Finance Board.

All EIAs for proposed changes to levels of service arising from budget proposals must be completed by (insert date).

All completed EIAs should be sent to

Slough Borough Council

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| REPORT TO: | Cabinet |
| DATE: | 17 th October 2022 |
| SUBJECT: | Intelligent Traffic Systems Maintenance Contract |
| PORTFOLIO: | Cllr Nazir - Transport & The Local Environment |
| CHIEF OFFICER: | Richard West, Executive Director of Place and Community |
| CONTACT OFFICER: | Chris Weedon/Savio DeCruz |
| WARD(S): | All |
| KEY DECISION: | YES |
| EXEMPT: | NO |
| DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN: | YES |
| APPENDICES: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Pre-Market Engagement II. Prior Information Notice- Maintenance of Traffic Signals and Other ITS Equipment Within the Berkshire Area published 12 April 2022. |

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report seeks approval for Slough Borough Council to participate in the procurement exercise for the Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) Maintenance Contract from May 2023 to April 2033 via a joint procurement exercise led by Reading Borough Council and including Bracknell Forest Borough Council, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council. The ITS Maintenance contract will include maintenance of the following:

- Traffic signals
- Automatic Traffic Counters
- Bluetooth Journey Time devices
- CCTV Cameras
- Variable Message Signs
- Vehicle Activated Speed Signs
- ITS associated minor civil engineering works

The contract value is expected to be £25,000,000 for 10 years split across all authorities (according to their asset database) equating to a potential estimated annual spend of up to £500,000 per authority.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- I. Agree that Reading Borough Council will lead a joint procurement on behalf of other Berkshire authorities, including Slough Borough Council.
- II. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place and Community, in consultation with the Lead Member for Transport & The Local Environment, to approve the award of the ITS Maintenance Contract to the successful tenderer and to enter into the contract documentation.

Reason:

The ITS Maintenance Contract via the joint procurement exercise by the five local authorities is a cost-effective procurement option that will reduce costs and deliver ongoing efficiencies for the procured services. An approved supplier will have up to 10 years to improve the existing infrastructure and have the opportunity to introduce innovation when new technology becomes available.

Commissioner Review

The recommendations are supported.

2. Report

Introductory paragraph

- 2.1 ITS covers a range of services to enable the Council to carry out its function as a Highway Authority. The main element of this contract is to provide a contractor to carry out maintenance on our traffic signals but in addition to support information gathering for traffic monitoring and updates to commuters using the Councils Variable Message Signs (VMS).
- 2.2 The ITS Maintenance contract will enable the Council to obtain a single Supplier for the maintenance and supply of ITS equipment. The full extent of the contract will cover: the supply and installation of traffic signals, Automatic Traffic Counters, Journey Time devices/Bluetooth detectors, CCTV Cameras, Variable Message Signs and Vehicle Activated Speed Signs.
- 2.3 The incorporation of the social return on investment (SRoI) into ITS Framework Agreement tender and contract will significantly help the Council to deliver on its strategic corporate objectives and deliver added value for the borough.

As part of the tender exercise, the Invitation to Tender (ITT) will state how tenderers will be able to deliver social value relevant to the ITS Framework Agreement to the Community and the Council. An evaluation weighting will be allocated to each social value and assessed on how they benefit the community. These values will include but are not limited to the following:

- Work experience and support for young people - young offenders - care leavers - children with SEND - children with complex health needs.
- Apprenticeships for Slough residents.
- Engaging with schools both primary and secondary;
- Provide initiatives which retain, protect or enhance the character of Slough.

- Secure suppliers from sustainable sources.
- Introducing diversity programmes that include education, upskilling and re-skilling with particular focus on women in the Slough Community.

All Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) identified will be reported by the appointed contractor on a quarterly basis using the agreed reporting tool. Contract managers will be responsible for reporting the KPI's of their Local Authority for the entire contract duration. The report this will be a mix of quantitative and qualitative data of the performance of the selected contractor.

The monitoring of the KPIs will be built into the contract management of the tender, and where appropriate financial or commercial penalties can be associated with these.

2.4 The social value benefit of the ITS Contract to the residents is that the provision of good transport infrastructure will result in improved access to socio-economic opportunities (jobs, training, access to leisure activities) by improving accessibility to key destinations and land uses. By utilising new technology to tackle high congestion levels and by optimising traffic flow, improvements to the ITS systems will:

- Reduce everyday congestion, smooth traffic flows and prioritise traffic in response to demand in real time, which will lead to improved productivity for local businesses, through the reduction in staff lateness, delivery delays etc.
- Help to reduce pollution throughout the town: stop-start driving is inefficient and polluting.
- Give priority to sustainable modes including buses approaching junctions, phasing lights to give traffic flowing with buses a 'green wave' through the town.
- Allow for a response to traffic incidents, especially on the A4.
- Help manage traffic-related injuries.
- On strategic routes, will ensure motorists remain on these roads and reduce rat running.

In addition, the Council is able to maximise on:

- The opportunity to share expertise and engineering knowledge across the five Local Authorities (LA).
- Potential suppliers will be more amenable to test and/or price new products in one LA if they believe this could be rolled out into the other LA's. An example is the new Smart Radar unit which is capable of vehicle classification, counting and speed across multiple lanes. The unit was first tested in Reading and based on this trial there are now test units in Slough, Bracknell Forest and West Berkshire.

By delivering broader social outcomes, not just scheme outputs, infrastructure projects can create additional social value. For the Council this includes:

Economic

- Deliver innovation, efficiency and costs savings
- Quick response times by supplier due to the supplier dedicating staff to the contract.

- The partnership will save the Council substantial time costs and cost of repeat tendering of maintenance works.
- The preparation of the contract will involve technical expertise to write the tender documents including the specification. By partnering with the 4 Berkshire Authorities, Slough will benefit from shared knowledge of other officers thereby reducing the costs of seeking costly consultancy services to prepare the specification.
- The partnership will result in lower administrative and legal costs to prepare the tender documents and contract.
- Increased opportunity for innovation and value engineering by advocating sharing visions and resources from the partnership that can create mechanisms for efficient and effective service delivery.
- Shared risk by the participating local authorities.

Environmental

The partnership will look in reducing the carbon footprint of the awarded contractor by maximising the efficient planning of machinery across the sites and having a centralised compound that serves the participating local authorities.

Social

The partnership will:

- Improve the community's perceptions of the council and raise the council's profile across a wider area by demonstrating that the Council is willing to engage and foster relationships with neighbouring local authorities to achieve a positive impact on the lives of residents.
- Present the Council as a body that is receptive to innovative and creative partnerships.

The Pre-Market Engagement session currently being undertaken has revealed that procurement of individual ITS Equipment by the Local Authorities will not be attractive enough for a supplier to offer a competitive price or even bid. However, the combination of over 500 sites from the five Berkshire Local Authorities will be an attractive package for suppliers and will result in a competitive price.

2.5 The introduction of the ITS Maintenance Contract will assist with the delivery of projects/schemes that help fulfil the objectives of the Recovery Plan and Corporate Plan through:

- A council that lives within our means, balances the budget and delivers best value for taxpayers and service users by ensuring that the procurement process and social return on investment for the new and existing ITS equipment will deliver best value for money, contribute to the support, delivery and monitoring of transport infrastructure that provides reliable transport links.
- An environment that helps residents live more independent, healthier and safer lives by reducing congestion on the network and providing reliable ITS monitoring equipment that will help the Council to continue to improve the transport system and assist with measuring the success of sustainable modes of transport.

- A borough for children and young people to thrive by implementing and maintaining ITS infrastructure that delivers safer signalised crossing points and monitoring of traffic related data.
- Infrastructure that reflects the uniqueness of Slough's places and a new vision for the town centre by ensuring that the contract makes provision of ITS infrastructure that continues to support the monitoring and development of the town centre.

2.6 Options considered

Option 1. Recruit additional in-house resources to manage the ITS

infrastructure: The option to recruit staff to undertake the maintenance of the ITS infrastructure is not economically viable due to its short-term projects and the range of expertise required to maintain the infrastructure. This option would create additional permanent employee costs to the Council for what is a fluctuating resource requirement. **This option is not recommended.**

Option 2. Procure an ITS maintenance agreement on a project-by-project

basis: This option provides limited agility in terms of responding to requirements and procurement. This would result in delays to response times when faults are raised by staff and increase the likelihood of endangering road users due to delays in addressing any identified faults with ITS infrastructure. **This option is not recommended.**

Option 3. Use of established external Framework Agreements from other Local Authorities, Government departments and National Contract such as ESPO or the Crown Contract Services:

This approach is currently being used for other services but there are fee implications for Slough to access the agreements and additional administration fees from Local Authorities. The existing Framework Agreements do not offer the opportunity to use Slough's own terms or develop our social value contributions with the suppliers/contractors. The short timeframe for a Framework would also not allow suppliers to be as price competitive compared to a longer-term contract. Whilst offering some capacity, this option has limited flexibility and is likely to be expensive compared to other options due to fee arrangements. **This option is not recommended.**

Option 4. Slough Borough Council to undertake a joint procurement exercise with Reading Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Borough Council, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough to develop a bespoke ITS Maintenance contract that will enable the Council to obtain a single supplier for the maintenance and supply of ITS equipment:

The ITS maintenance contract will provide a long term, innovative and compliant service appointment, with the ability to demonstrate social value for residents and value for money for the Council. This option will allow the Council to reduce delays when undertaking the maintenance of ITS equipment. The ITS Maintenance contract will set out the scope and specification of the equipment to ensure that a capable contractor is selected to supply and maintain the ITS equipment. The ITS contract duration will be for 10 years set out as 5 years and subject to meeting performance indicators optional extensions of not more than 5 years in aggregate.

This is the recommended option.

Option 5. Do nothing. Not to undertake any procurement activity for the ITS equipment. This option will result in increased delays on the highway with more infrastructure not being replaced expediently and potentially resulting in more

collisions on the road network, congestion and pollution due to communication failure of the ITS Infrastructure.

2.7 Background

The five local authorities including Slough have jointly procured maintenance for ITS equipment (mainly traffic signals) in partnership since 2010. The last contract was from 1 April 2006 to 31 April 2010 with further extensions from 1 April 2010 to 31 April 2013 and 11 April 2013 to 1 April 2016.

Over the past six years, the five local governments in charge of preparing the ITS procurement documents have had staffing challenges and this has delayed the procurement exercise. To enable the local authorities to continue maintenance of the ITS infrastructure and prepare the tender documents, Reading Council extended the contract from April 2016 to date with 6-month extensions on a rolling basis.

In addition to the Traffic Signal maintenance contract, the Council currently has several ITS related equipment contracts with different suppliers which have also lapsed. Instead of multiple maintenance contractors, officers are seeking to obtain one contractor who maintains all the ITS equipment. This can be achieved through combining all the ITS equipment into a Traffic Signals maintenance contract.

The ITS Berkshire partnership group representing all participating boroughs meet regularly to discuss the progress of existing contracts, current trends and innovations whilst also providing valuable technical support to group members. The proposed joint procurement exercise will enable local authorities to obtain offers that are more attractive from suppliers, less administrative costs for the group preparing the tender exercise and the pooling of a wide range of skills and expertise from the five local authorities.

Reading Borough as the lead council, is currently undertaking a pre-market engagement exercise and has published a Prior Information Notice (PIN) on the Find a Tender portal.

The draft outline programme for the procurement of the ITS Maintenance contract is:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Publish tender documents | Dec 2022 |
| Tender Returns | Jan 2023 |
| Intention to Award | Jan 2023 |
| Standstill period 10 days to | Jan 2023 |
| Award of Contract | Feb 2023 |
| 4-month mobilisation period commences | Feb 2023 |
| Start of contract | May 2023 |

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

Reading Borough Council have estimated £25,000 costs to run the procurement of the new contract shared equally between the five participating authorities, hence a cost of £5,000 to Slough BC.

Once the contract is in place expenditure will be in the region of up to £0.500m per authority per annum which will be drawn down from the ITS Maintenance Budget (£0.298m) and the following programmed Capital projects which will require ITS support: A4 Cycle Lane (£10.4m), Twinches Lane /Eden School (£0.308m) and A4 Safer Roads (grant funding of £1.4m). It is challenging to project longer-term future schemes as funding streams are subject to competitive bidding with government funding focused on short- term delivery. While funding announcements do not provide long-term certainty, SBC officers will continue to seek funding opportunities.

Currently, the Council spends approximately £242k on maintenance for all traffic signals and other ITS equipment using five contractors who are currently on 6 month rolling extensions which will enable transition of services to the new provider as these expire. Further cost savings are anticipated with one first line maintenance provider and one communications contract. The contract will be set up to cover each council's existing annual maintenance bill of between £200,000 and £300,000. There is no requirement to exceed this annual figure per Local Authority, but the £25m total over the ten years is divided across all participating councils based on their asset base and thereby enabling Slough to potentially spend up to their estimated £500,000 share if projects come online that require additional ITS support. **Thus, there is no obligation or commitment to spend in excess of the current level of spend incurred by SBC.**

Any projected underspend by one council could enable another to exceed their allocated allowance if the cumulative total does not exceed the contract value over the 10 years. Local authorities will also have an option to carry over their yearly allocation to the next financial year to undertake any ITS maintenance work.

The Finance Team will be engaged throughout the development of the contract to ensure costs are monitored.

3.2 Legal implications

- The Traffic Management Act 2004 (Section 16(1)) imposes a Network Management Duty to ensure that the Council secures the expeditious movement of traffic on the authority's road network and facilitates the expeditious movement of traffic on road networks for which another authority is the traffic authority.
- The Council has an obligation to ensure procurement activity is carried out in accordance with (a) the Council's Constitution; (b) the Contract Procedure Rules; and (c) the Public Contract Regulations (PCR) 2015. In accordance with the Procurement Application and Authorisation Table set out in the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, any contract over £500,000 is a significant decision and must be approved by Cabinet prior to procurement and prior to any contract award. As this is a joint procurement, specific delegated authority is sought for award of contract. Full business cases should be reviewed by the Council's internal procurement review board.
- The ITS Contract will be developed by Reading Council with the support of the Legal Team (HB Public Law) and the rest of the Berkshire Authorities' Legal teams.

- The contract documentation will be reviewed by HB Public Law and be entered into under seal.

3.3 Risk management implications

| <i>Description of risk</i> | <i>Risk/Threats/Opportunities</i> | <i>Current Controls</i> | <i>Proposed future controls</i> |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|
| Legal | Use of unskilled workmen or lack of maintenance of the ITS infrastructure could result in legal implications to the Council. | Continued use of historic ITS Maintenance contract with 6-month extensions to maintain the infrastructure. | Procurement exercise with clearly set out specification will enable the Councils to procure experienced supplier. |
| Procurement | The termination of the existing contract such as Mobius and the UTC hosted services would result in disconnection of the SIMs and less efficient traffic signals with no coordination between the major site corridors resulting in congestion on the network. | Continued use of the existing contracts with 6 month notice requirements. | Undertake a procurement exercise with the Berkshire Local Authorities to procure an ITS Maintenance contract and handover maintenance to the winning supplier. |
| Finance | The joint procurement exercise with the Berkshire Local authorities will help minimise costs associated with preparing the tender documents and achieve value for money. | Existing contracts have been renewed every 6 month by the Local Authorities to ensure service continuity. | To test the Market and progress the ITS Maintenance Contract, a Pre- Market Engagement exercise is being undertaken by Reading Council. |
| Contract Management | Poor contract management due to Reading leading on the contract. | Joint meetings are currently being undertaken by the Local Authorities | Contract Officers undertake KPI's including joint meetings with officers and delegated SBC Officer to manage the contract. Officers will work with the Head of Commercial to apply best practice to this contract. |

3.4 Environmental implications

Efficient ITS equipment will result in the improved operation of the network, facilitate movement of pedestrians, cyclists, buses and deliver transport improvements that will reduce the requirement for costly infrastructure schemes. The use of ITS based traffic monitoring equipment will assist in monitoring the network and assist Officers with data to target congested areas. The above can reduce environmental impacts of transport, enhance safety and improve operational efficiency. In addition, the contract will enable energy efficiency improvements and encourage innovation.

3.5 Equality implications

As part of the tender exercise, the ITT will be advertised on the tender portals to allow equal access for all registered suppliers. In terms of the evaluation, officers will ensure that the evaluation is fair and consistent and is clearly set out in the procurement documentation.

An equalities impact assessment will be undertaken as part of the procurement exercise.

3.6 Procurement implications

Option appraisals have been discussed in section 2.6. The Officer recommendation is for the Council to undertake a joint procurement exercise with Reading Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Borough Council, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council and to develop a bespoke ITS Maintenance contract for the maintenance and supply of ITS equipment. The ITS maintenance contract will provide a long term, innovative and compliant service appointment, with the ability to demonstrate value for money and improve social value for the Council. This option will allow the Council to reduce delays when undertaking the maintenance of ITS equipment. The ITS Maintenance contract will set out the scope and specification of the equipment to ensure that a capable contractor is selected to supply and maintain the ITS equipment. Reading Borough Council published the Prior Information notice on the 12th April 2022 and Pre-Market Engagement is underway.

The draft outline programme for the procurement exercise is:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Publish tender documents | Dec 2022 |
| Tender Returns | Jan 2023 |
| Intention to Award | Jan 2023 |
| Standstill period 10 days to | Jan 2023 |
| Award of Contract | Feb 2023 |
| 4-month mobilisation period commences | Feb 2023 |
| Start of contract | May 2023 |

3.7 Workforce implications

Reading Borough Council are the lead council taking forward the procurement activity which will result in improved efficiencies for the Council and reduce officer time procuring a supplier independently.

3.8 Property implications

None

4. **Background Papers**

None

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Procurement for the provision of MAINTENANCE OF TRAFFIC SIGNALS AND OTHER INTELLIGENT TRAFFIC SYSTEMS EQUIPMENT WITHIN THE BERKSHIRE AREA

PRE-MARKET ENGAGEMENT INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Reference:

Date: April 2022

Reading Borough Council

Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| 1. Introduction..... | 2 |
| 2. The opportunity | 2 |
| 3. Our ambitions..... | 2 |
| Ambition 1 – Encourage and facilitate innovation | 3 |
| Ambition 2 – Partnership | 3 |
| Ambition 3 – Addressing Climate Change | 3 |
| Ambition 4 – Social return | 3 |
| Ambition 5 – A sensible and fair procurement process | 3 |
| 4. The procurement process | 3 |
| 5. Proposed contract term..... | 4 |
| 6. Form of contract | 4 |
| 7. What we ask of you.... | 4 |
| Activity 1 – Publication of pre-market engagement documentation | 4 |
| Activity 2 – Questionnaire responses | 4 |
| Activity 3 – Respondent engagement | 5 |
| 8. Enquiries | 5 |
| 9. Annex 1 – Questionnaire | 6 |

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading Borough Council ('the Council') is seeking to re-procure the contract for Maintenance of Traffic Signals and Other ITS Equipment Within the Berkshire Area ('the Contract'), on behalf of the following participant authorities; Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Reading Borough Council, Slough Borough Council, West Berkshire Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council. Thank you for taking the time to engage with us in respect of this forthcoming opportunity. We welcome your participation in this pre-market engagement exercise.

2. THE OPPORTUNITY

At present, the supply, installation, commissioning, inspection, and maintenance of intelligent traffic systems are delivered through our existing Traffic Control Systems Contract, which has been in place for over 10 years. Given the length of time since the contract has had a significant review, we recognise that there is an opportunity to build upon the service delivery provided to date and take steps to maximise the opportunities available to both the Council and the appointed supplier.

In terms of what the future may look like, the general objectives of the requirement are as follows:

To support the Authority in operating, maintaining, inspecting, and refurbishing our intelligent transport systems.

The five Berkshire Authorities operate and maintain approximately 525 intelligent transport assets, comprising of signal-controlled junctions, signal-controlled crossings, Fire Station Wig-wags, car park equipment, variable message signs, rising bollards and C.C.T.V. cameras.

The Council operates a whole life asset management programme and is currently expecting to spend approximately £2,500,000.00 per annum on refurbishment of its intelligent transport systems.

We recognise that in order to maximise the success of this contract, the Council will need to put in place a contract which provides the appointed supplier with further opportunities to deliver innovative services which may change the way in which the contract is delivered in the future. We therefore plan to encourage the successful bidder to work together with the Council and its partner organisations to innovate and enable the results to be implemented.

For example, the Council are currently considering how greater use of technology may improve service delivery, how other services can be delivered in an innovative way via the appointed supplier and putting in place a mechanism which encourages the supplier to approach the Council with new ideas which can actually be implemented. We are keen to hear your views on this.

3. OUR AMBITIONS

We recognise the challenges involved in delivering highways services and appreciate that there are many approaches to this as well as a significant number of "lessons learned" which we are keen to take into account in developing our own strategy and aiming to maximise the success of the next iteration of this contract. In summary, our ambition is to achieve the following:

Ambition 1 – Encourage and facilitate innovation

We aim to work with a supplier who is innovative in terms of how our core and continuing requirements are realised, in addition to discussing new ideas and ways of maximising the relationship. We recognise that for this to be possible, the contract must have the flexibility for a supplier to bring forward new projects which could lead to mutual benefits, both financial and social/environmental.

Ambition 2 – Partnership

We aim to establish a partnership approach with the appointed supplier, which embodies trust in service delivery, pricing and facilitates innovation as discussed above, which would potentially take the relationship to a different level. We want to understand how we can do things better to facilitate this, including how we involve other parts of our supply chain to achieve success for all.

Ambition 3 – Addressing Climate Change

As with a number of authorities across the country, the participating Authorities have declared a climate emergency and will want to ensure we can appropriately support required changes through our new contract, both cover the way in which the contractor operates, i.e., vehicles, offsetting etc but also that the service delivered will support our joint climate change ambitions by reducing congestion, improving air quality and promoting sustainable travel options.

Ambition 4 – Social return

We understand that there is greater pressure to demonstrate the wider social benefits which can be realised from significant public contracts. We fully support this and have achieved a number of successes in previous iterations of this contract with our incumbent supplier. However, we also recognise that our ambitions in respect of the social returns from this contract should be aligned with our appointed supplier. This means jointly agreeing how this will work and how this can be realistically achieved without adding excessive cost. This element of the contract should not be a mere "box ticking" exercise and we would hope to secure a positive and strong set of social outcomes as a result of this contract, resulting in success stories and leaving a lasting legacy.

Ambition 5 – A sensible and fair procurement process

As a local authority, we are obliged to comply with the public procurement regime. While we hope that this offers assurance that a fair and transparent process will be undertaken, our ambition is to also undertake a procurement which is not overly burdensome and arrives at the right decision.

4. THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS

In order to ensure that this forthcoming contract is as successful as we would all hope, for both the Council and the appointed supplier, we believe it is important to design a procurement process which facilitates the best possible result supported by a contract model which enables innovation, flexibility and encourages true partnership. We welcome your participation in this pre-market engagement exercise.

The Council's proposed route to market is to utilise an Open process in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

Key procurement milestones will be confirmed following the outcome of this pre-market engagement; however, it is envisaged that a contract will be awarded in mid-2022 with a view to mobilisation for an October 2022 contract start date.

5. PROPOSED CONTRACT TERM

Historically the contract has been delivered over a 5-year term, although the Council is currently assessing the merits of a longer or shorter contract duration. We would be very interested in any feedback from suppliers and would be keen to know the potential bidders' preferred contract duration.

6. FORM OF CONTRACT

The Council are planning to utilise the New Engineering Contract ('NEC4') Term Services Contract ('TSC') amended to reflect our intended approach.

Our ambition is to propose a form of contract which we would hope is broadly acceptable to suppliers and therefore requires minimal discussion/amendment.

7. WHAT WE ASK OF YOU....

We are conscious that identifying the right supplier to deliver the above contract will be critical to the successful delivery of essential Council services and will maximise the opportunity to turn this into an exciting project. As such, the Council is undertaking a pre-market engagement exercise to engage with potential suppliers.

The purpose of the pre-market engagement is to assist the Council with refining our understanding of market experience/capability. An overview of the pre-market engagement exercise is set out below.

Activity 1 – Publication of pre-market engagement documentation

This stage of the pre-market engagement exercise was initiated by publication of this document, which sets out further background to the procurement and includes a short questionnaire for completion.

Activity 2 – Questionnaire responses

We are very keen to hear the views of interested parties on a number of further issues which are referenced in the questionnaire set out in the Annex to this document. The views of interested parties on these questions will help us to finalise our approach to the subsequent procurement process.

We would ask that, if you are able and interested in completing the questionnaire, then your response should be returned no later than **12:00 (midday) on Tuesday 3rd May 2022**. Please submit your response through the Proactis Supplier Network.

Activity 3 – Respondent engagement

It is possible that the Council may wish to contact respondents to discuss or clarify particular elements of responses. If so, the Council will contact you via the Proactis Supplier Network in order to arrange an appropriate date and time for a meeting. Due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak these meetings will be conducted via Microsoft Teams.

8. ENQUIRIES

If you have any questions or require any additional information relating to this pre-market engagement document, please submit these through the Proactis Supplier Network using the dialogue function.

ANNEX 1 – QUESTIONNAIRE

We would be grateful if you could complete the following brief questionnaire and return it to us.

Please submit your response through the Proactis Supplier Network no later than **12:00 (midday) on Tuesday 3rd May 2022**. Responses received after this date may not be considered as we finalise our procurement approach and documentation.

| Organisation details | |
|------------------------------|----------|
| Question | Response |
| Name: | |
| Organisation: | |
| Organisation postal address: | |
| Contact email address: | |
| Contact telephone number: | |

| Q1 | Social, Economic and Environmental Benefits |
|---|---|
| <p>The Council is ambitious for its Contracts to deliver meaningful Social, Economic and Environmental ('SE&E') benefits for the people and place of Berkshire, through the way in which contracts are delivered and through additional activities and resource commitments on the part of the Bidder.</p> <p>The Invitation to Tender will include a specific SE&E benefits question, but prospective bidders should be aware that many quality questions will contain elements of SE&E deliverables, and bidders who can demonstrate a tangible commitment to the delivery of SE&E will likely score higher for these questions.</p> <p>We would welcome your initial thoughts and comments on our proposed approach, as well as your opinion on what you believe would be a proportionate SE&E commitment for a contract of this type and scope.</p> | |
| Response | |
| Empty response area | |

| Q2 | Pricing Models |
|--|----------------|
| <p>Please let us know of any pricing models you feel have restricted your ability to work efficiently in previous contracts, in order that we can account for this in our approach to the forthcoming procurement.</p> | |

| Response |
|----------|
| |

| Q3 | Contract Duration |
|--|-------------------|
| What would be your preferred contract duration? | |
| Please provide context and your rationale for your preference so that the Council may make an informed decision. | |
| Response | |
| | |

| Q4 | Innovation |
|--|------------|
| What do you see as the areas most likely to be subject to innovation over the life of the upcoming contract? | |
| Response | |
| | |

| Q5 | Contract Price Adjustment for Inflation |
|---|---|
| We intend to use the BCIS Price Adjustment Formulae Indices as our chosen method of price adjustment for inflation throughout the term of this contract. We would welcome your thoughts and comments on our chosen methodology of indexation. | |
| Response | |
| | |

| Q6 | Halogen Bulb Obsolescence |
|----|---------------------------|
|----|---------------------------|

We are aware of the potential for future halogen bulb obsolescence and are interested in your suggestions on how impacts arising from this could be mitigated during the life of the proposed contract.

Response

Q7 **Works Management System**

We will have our own asset management / works ordering system front-end to then connect to the contractor's Works Management System through API connections. How will this impact on your appetite to tender for this contract?

Response

Q8 **Engineer Repairs**

The council in most cases will expect your engineers to attend and repair, if a first-time fix is not possible then to diagnose and manage the fault of, non-core item equipment possibly installed and configured by a third party; how will you manage this situation to ensure the fix will not adversely affect the SLA?

Response

Q9 **Contract Management**

Given the proposed use of the NEC4 contract and therefore the approach to contract management that the model requires, it is intended that Reading Borough Council act as the lead authority for all contract management matters. The other Berkshire Authorities will be keen to ensure that they still maintain an appropriate direct relationship with the supplier. We would welcome your thoughts and comments on the best way to achieve this without reverting to individual contract management for each Authority.

Response

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

| Q10 | Contract Scope |
|--|----------------|
| <p>The Berkshire Authorities currently have some contracts separate to the main Traffic Control Systems contract, namely CCTV and private wires. The Authorities are interested in understanding if there is merit in adding such requirements to the contract scope, which may be a variation taken up over the initial contract term pending end date of the relevant local arrangement. We would like to understand if this addition to contract scope would change your interest in the contract or intent to bid and/or any other comments you would make on the benefits or otherwise of extending the contract scope in this way.</p> | |
| Response | |
| | |

| Q11 | Contract attractiveness |
|--|-------------------------|
| <p>Would your organisation be likely to bid for this contract?</p> <p>If not, please indicate why you would be unlikely to bid for this opportunity.</p> | |
| Response | |
| | |

| Q12 | Mobilisation |
|--|--------------|
| <p>Please provide an indication of the amount of time you would anticipate will be required for contract mobilisation. Please include critical factors and a high-level timeline in your response.</p> | |
| Response | |
| | |

| | |
|------------|---|
| Q13 | General comments |
| | We would be pleased to hear any further comments you have in relation to our proposed procurement approach, proposed contract scope and/or any other observations in respect of this opportunity. |
| | Response |
| | |

Pre-market engagement information document

Disclaimer

The Council is conducting this pre-market engagement exercise in accordance with the principles of equal treatment, non-discrimination and transparency as required under Public Contracts Regulations 2015. To that end, it is important to stress that the specification for the appointed supplier will not be designed to give direct or indirect advantage to any potential supplier, and all information concerning the procurement will be disseminated to all interested parties - it is the intention that no one organisation will be in receipt of information which will not be available to all (save for any information which is commercially sensitive to that party).

Organisations should request clarification of any issues within this pre-market engagement document which are not clear, or any errors, omissions or concerns which they may believe may impact on the success of this exercise. If we consider that a query may have a material effect on the pre-market engagement process, all interested parties will be notified.

By participating in this pre-market engagement exercise, interested parties:

- acknowledge that information shared with us may potentially be disclosed to third parties. Organisations are therefore asked to clearly state where information is considered to be commercially sensitive;
- confirm that they have not and they will not: (i) canvass any staff member of, or adviser to, the Council; (ii) discuss their engagement in the exercise with the media; (iii) attempt to fix or fix with any other person, the amount (including rates and prices to be quoted) of any prospective tender; (iv) enter into any agreement or arrangement with any other person that a person shall refrain from participating in the pre-market engagement and/or any subsequent procurement process; and/or; (v) offer, give or agree to give any inducement or reward in respect of this prospective procurement.

For the avoidance of doubt, the above provisions shall not restrict any organisation in discussing its position with its professional advisers or prospective consortium partners.

This pre-market engagement document does not constitute a call for competition. For the avoidance of doubt, this document has been produced solely for the purpose of conducting a pre-market engagement exercise and will not formally commence any procurement process or constitute any commitment by the Council to undertake any subsequent procurement exercise.

All costs and expenses incurred by or on behalf of suppliers in respect of this pre-market engagement document, including preparing, submitting and presenting the response are wholly the responsibility of the supplier. The Council accepts no liability for these costs, including costs that may arise out of, or result from, any variation or amendment of the terms and conditions of the pre-market engagement document or termination of the request process.

The document is not intended to be exhaustive and the Council reserves the right to add to or amend the document, as more information becomes known. The Council shall be free to withdraw this pre-market engagement document at any time prior to executing contractually binding agreements with any supplier, without incurring any liability.

This is a published notice on the Find a Tender service: <https://www.find-tender.service.gov.uk/Notice/009810-2022>

Future opportunity

Maintenance of Traffic Signals and Other ITS Equipment Within the Berkshire Area

Reading Borough Council

F01: Prior information notice

Prior information only

Notice reference: 2022/S 000-009810

Published: 12 April 2022, 5:34pm

Section I: Contracting authority

I.1) Name and addresses

Reading Borough Council

Civic Offices, Bridge Street

Reading

RG1 2LU

Contact

Robert Davis

Email

robert.davis@surreycc.gov.uk

Telephone

+44 7973896474

Country

United Kingdom

NUTS code

UKJ11 - Berkshire

Internet address(es)

Main address

<https://www.reading.gov.uk/>

Buyer's address

<https://supplierlive.proactisp2p.com/Account/Login#>

I.3) Communication

Additional information can be obtained from the above-mentioned address

I.4) Type of the contracting authority

Regional or local authority

I.5) Main activity

General public services

Section II: Object

II.1) Scope of the procurement

II.1.1) Title

Maintenance of Traffic Signals and Other ITS Equipment Within the Berkshire Area

II.1.2) Main CPV code

- 63712700 - Traffic control services

II.1.3) Type of contract

Services

II.1.4) Short description

Reading Borough Council ('the Council') is seeking to re-procure the contract for Maintenance of Traffic Signals and Other ITS Equipment Within the Berkshire Area ('the Contract'), on behalf of the following participant authorities; Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Reading Borough Council, Slough Borough Council, West Berkshire Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council. The Council therefore wishes to commence a pre-market engagement exercise with potential suppliers as more fully described in Section II.2.4) below.

II.1.5) Estimated total value

Value excluding VAT: £25,000,000

II.1.6) Information about lots

This contract is divided into lots: No

II.2) Description

II.2.2) Additional CPV code(s)

- 34923000 - Road traffic-control equipment
- 34996100 - Traffic lights
- 45233294 - Installation of road signals
- 63712700 - Traffic control services

II.2.3) Place of performance

NUTS codes

- UKJ11 - Berkshire

Main site or place of performance

Berkshire

II.2.4) Description of the procurement

This notice marks the commencement of a pre-market engagement exercise to conduct consultations with potential suppliers with expertise in successfully delivering similar services and to obtain general feedback on the Council's proposed approach to the procurement exercise.

A pre-market engagement document has been produced by the Council (a copy of which is available by issuing a request via the email address set out above) which explains the potential scope of the opportunity in further detail.

At present, the supply, installation, commissioning, inspection, and maintenance of intelligent traffic systems are delivered through our existing Traffic Control Systems Contract, which has been in place for over 10 years. Given the length of time since the contract has had a significant review, we recognise that there is an opportunity to build upon the service delivery provided to date and take steps to maximise the opportunities available to both the Council and the appointed supplier.

In terms of what the future may look like, the general objectives of the requirement are as follows:

To support the Authority in operating, maintaining, inspecting, and refurbishing our intelligent transport systems.

The five Berkshire Authorities operate and maintain approximately 525 intelligent transport assets, comprising of signal-controlled junctions, signal-controlled crossings, Fire Station Wig-wags, car park equipment, variable message signs, rising bollards and C.C.T.V. cameras.

The Council operates a whole life asset management programme and is currently expecting to spend approximately £2,500,000.00 per annum on refurbishment of its intelligent transport systems.

We recognise that in order to maximise the success of this contract, the Council will need to

put in place a contract which provides the appointed supplier with further opportunities to deliver innovative services which may change the way in which the contract is delivered in the future. We therefore plan to encourage the successful bidder to work together with the Council and its partner organisations to innovate and enable the results to be implemented.

For example, the Council are currently considering how greater use of technology may improve service delivery, how other services can be delivered in an innovative way via the appointed supplier and putting in place a mechanism which encourages the supplier to approach the Council with new ideas which can actually be implemented. We are keen to hear your views on this.

II.2.14) Additional information

Please use the following link to access Pre-market Engagement documents:

<https://supplierlive.proactisp2p.com/Account/Login>

II.3) Estimated date of publication of contract notice

20 June 2022

Section IV. Procedure

IV.1) Description

IV.1.8) Information about the Government Procurement Agreement (GPA)

The procurement is covered by the Government Procurement Agreement: Yes

Section VI. Complementary information

VI.3) Additional information

The Council anticipates that the value of the initial term of the contract would be in the region of GBP £25,000,000.00 as indicated in Section II.1.5). However, this is an indicative figure only based on its current 'core' scope of requirements and on the assumption that the contract would be in place for a maximum duration of 10 years (i.e., a 5-year initial term plus options to renew thereafter).

By publication of this notice, the Council notifies interested parties that it intends to undertake certain further pre-market engagement activities in respect of the procurement of Maintenance of Traffic Signals and Other ITS Equipment.

We therefore invite interested parties to respond to the pre-market engagement questionnaire published via the Proactis Supplier Network at <https://supplierlive.proactisp2p.com/Account/Login>

Parties should note that participation in this pre-market engagement exercise, is not a prerequisite to participating in any subsequent procurement process. The Council is committed to ensuring that all parties are treated equally and any information shared during the pre-market engagement exercise will be made available to all parties once any formal procurement process is initiated. Parties should also note that the conduct of this pre-market engagement process does not oblige the Council to undertake any formal process as a result of this exercise and should note that they are responsible for their own costs in participating in any pre-market engagement activity.