

Date of issue: Friday, 10 March 2023

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 Ajajib	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, 20TH MARCH, 2023 AT 6.30 PM	
VENUE:	COUNCIL CHAMBER - OBSERVATORY HOUSE, 25 WINDSOR ROAD, SL1 2EL	
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER: (for all enquiries)	NICHOLAS PONTONE	07749 709 868

NOTICE OF MEETING

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



STEPHEN BROWN
Chief Executive

AGENDA

PART I

<u>AGENDA ITEM</u>	<u>REPORT TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>	<u>WARD</u>
	Apologies for absence.		
1.	Declarations of Interest	-	-
	<i>All Members who believe they have a Disclosable Pecuniary or other Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting must declare that interest and, having regard to the circumstances described in Section 9 and Appendix B of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter is discussed.</i>		
2.	Minutes of the Meeting held on 27th February 2023 and 7th March 2023	1 - 24	-
3.	Slough Borough Council's Implementation of the Recruitment Direction	25 - 34	All
4.	ICT & Digital Strategy 2023-2026	35 - 56	All
5.	Contract Award for Voluntary and Community Sector Contracts	57 - 84	All
6.	Simplified Planning Zone - Slough Trading Estate	To Follow	Britwell and Northborough Cippenham Green; Farnham; Haymill and Lynch Hill
7.	Recommendations from the Cabinet Committee on Asset Disposals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GRE5 (Nova House) 	To Follow	All
8.	References from Overview & Scrutiny	-	-
9.	Exclusion of Press and Public	-	-
	It is recommended that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the item in Part 2 of the Agenda, as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial or 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

10.	Contract Award for Voluntary and Community Sector Contracts - Appendices	85 - 88	All
11.	Recommendations from the Cabinet Committee on Asset Disposals - GRE5 (Nova House) Appendices	To Follow	-

Key decisions are shown in bold

Press and Public

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

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

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

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

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Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 27th February, 2023.

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

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Smith

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Mann and Akram

PART 1

112. Guillotine

The Leader stated that due to the extensive length of the agenda, particularly the budget reports, he anticipated that it was unlikely the Cabinet meeting would be concluded within the two and half hours (9.00pm) set out in the Executive Procedure Rules.

In accordance with Executive Procedure Rule (i) (a), the Leader therefore proposed and it was agreed to extend the meeting beyond this time to continue in the normal manner and complete the business remaining on the agenda.

Resolved – That the meeting continue in the normal manner beyond two and a half hours to complete the business remaining on the agenda.

113. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

114. Minutes of the Meeting held on 16th January 2023

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 16th January 2023 be approved as a correct record.

115. Accounts and Audit Update

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that presented the audited Statement of Accounts for 2018/19.

The accounts had been considered by the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee on 22nd February 2023 at which it had been agreed that they be recommended to Council on 9th March 2023. However, given the significant issues in the preparation of the accounts and the audit, it was considered appropriate that the Cabinet also receive them and ensure the findings were taken into account and recommendations from the external auditors addressed.

The context and key issues were summarised. The accounts for 2018/19 should have been prepared by 31st May 2019 but due to the deficiencies in basic record keeping and working papers five drafts were produced through to May 2021 when the new finance team joined the Council. At that point it was recognised that those accounts were still not fit for purpose and they were extensively reviewed resulting in 50 changes affecting 100% of the figures and 80% of disclosure notes. The key changes were set out including land and buildings incorrectly valued, MRP not charged in line with regulations, staff costs incorrectly capitalised and inadequate provisions for bad debts. The net value of the balance sheet had been reduced by over 40%.

The key deficiencies identified included inadequate accounting records; ineffective systems of internal control, risk management and governance; and a grossly inaccurate Annual Governance Statement. These issues had resulted in the external auditor, Grant Thornton, had indicated that it was highly likely that the audit opinion for 2018/19 would be a disclaimer of opinion. This was thought to be a unique opinion issued to a local authority and the Cabinet noted that it was likely to be repeated in 2019/20 and 2020/21 due to the same deficiencies in the Council's accounting records during that period.

The timetable for the production of accounts for 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 was explained, with the accounts for the current year of 2022/23 expected to be prepared by 31st December 2023.

(Councillor Pantelic joined the meeting)

The Cabinet fully recognised the financial and accounting failures during that period that led to the significant delay in the accounts and the audit opinion. The approval of the accounts and the work that had been done by the new finance team on process improvements, as detailed in the series of Financial Action Plan updates in the past 18 months, would now provide a sounder financial base from which the Council could now move forward. The Executive Director emphasised the scale of work that the Council still faced and stated it was likely to take around five years to embed the necessary changes and reach financial stability.

Lead Members asked about the key risks to sustaining the progress that had been made, including the imminent departure of the interim finance team. Assurance was provided that the new finance structure was in place and posts were being filled. A handover process to the new Executive Director Finance & Commercial had already begun.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet formally received the report, recognised the deficiencies identified and affirmed its commitment to continue to deliver the improvements set out in the Financial Action Plan and address any issues raised by the external auditor.

Resolved –

- (a) That the accounts be received; and
- (b) That the issues arising from the preparation and audit of the statement of accounts set out in sections 2.3 to 2.9 of the report be noted in order to ensure that the findings were taken into account by Cabinet when making decisions; and
- (c) That any recommendations made by the external auditors be addressed.

116. Update on Objection to 2018/19 Accounts and issuing of Statutory Recommendations– Purchase of Observatory House

The Cabinet received a report from the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee regarding a report from the external auditors, Grant Thornton, in relation to an objection received from a member of the public on the 2018/19 accounts regarding the purchase of Observatory House.

The objection submitted had not been upheld by Grant Thornton and their letter setting of their findings had been presented to the audit committee. However, Grant Thornton had decided to make two statutory recommendations relating to the way the decision to acquire the property was taken; and the limited information made available to Members at the meeting of the Cabinet on 28th May 2018 when the decision to acquire Observatory House was made. Statutory recommendations needed to be considered and responded to by full Council and this would take place at the meeting on 9th March 2023.

Given the issues raised it was appropriate that Cabinet receive the auditors findings, lessons learnt and agree the actions be implemented. The specific recommendations were:

- *“Information to support decision-making – ensure that for important (in financial or strategic terms) decisions, sufficient and adequate information is made available to members within the formal governance processes to support the decisions made, including a comprehensive business case.*
- *Use of Lead Members & Directors Group – ensure that the informal Lead Members & Directors Group is not used as a substitute for formal decision-making by Cabinet and other parts of the formal member structure, ensuring there is adequate consideration and documentation of important decisions within the formal decision-making arrangements.”*

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The report set out the lesson learnt and the improvements made to decision making processes since 2018/19, including new processes to significantly improve the quality of reports for key decisions, including full business cases. Further recommended actions included additional training for Members and officers on governance, decision making and business cases.

The Cabinet noted that the objection had not been upheld, but accepted the findings leading to the issuing of statutory recommendations. The management response that would be considered by Council was endorsed. The Leader commented that further improvements were needed in the rigour of decision making processes, and timeliness of reports, and that this was a matter he would discuss further with the Chief Executive.

Resolved – That the report be received and that Cabinet ensure that the actions in relation to Cabinet reports and business cases be adopted.

117. Section 25 Report

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that set out the Executive Director Finance & Commercial's (Section 151 Officer) report on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the budget calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.

The Council was required to consider such a report from the Section 151 Officer and it advised that the reserves were adequate for 2023/24, providing the extensive risks detailed in the report were contained and that the Council's financial strategy was delivered but would take a further five years to conclude and become financially stable. The key risks were considered including the fact that reserves, whilst adequate, were at the lower end of where they should be and continued support be forthcoming from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) including through their agreement to capitalisations directions. This was contingent on the Council delivering its challenging savings proposals and asset disposal programme.

The Cabinet noted that Section 151 Officers conclusion in paragraph 9.2 of the report that in the financial circumstances the Council was in it was impossible to give a level of assurance that would normally be required in a Section 25 report, but that the Council now had a well-developed and rigorous financial strategy in place and was therefore able to set a budget.

Councillor Smith addressed the Cabinet and expressed concerns at the level of reserves and the significant risks that the Section 151 had detailed in the report. The comments were noted.

After due consideration, the Cabinet agreed to recommend the report to Council on 9th March 2023.

Recommended – That Council had regard to the Section 25 report when making decisions about the calculation of council tax requirement.

118. Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2027/28

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that set out the proposed capital programme for the period 2023/24 to 2027/28.

The strategy had been refocused on improvement works to operational assets and public realm works. The aim was to rationalise the capital portfolio, ensure necessary works to maintain the condition of retained assets and minimise other works. The impact was a reduced programme totalling £102m which was fully funded and would not require any additional borrowing. The programme was fully funded through grants, Section 106 contributions and capital receipts from the asset disposal programme, which was key element of the Council's corporate and financial strategy. Future disposals were crucial to help reduce borrowing and MRP.

The Cabinet commented that the programme was still relatively large and included some important transport, infrastructure and education schemes. Members asked how the programme would be properly managed to minimise slippage and Officers commented on the steps being taken to ensure schemes were delivered.

Councillor Smith addressed the Cabinet and commented on the proposed additional loan of £5m to GRE5 for works to address fire safety issues at Nova House. The Executive Director Finance & Commercial stated that a full report would be provided to Cabinet in March and the capital programme made the necessary provision if the proposals in that report were agreed.

At the conclusion of the discussion it was agreed to recommend the capital programme to Council.

Recommended – That the Capital Programme for 2023/24 to 2027/28 as set out in the report and Appendix A be approved.

119. Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that set out the Council's treasury management strategy for 2023/24 to 2027/28 which covered the borrowing and debt reduction strategy, prudential indicators, Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy and investment strategy, including loans to third parties.

The proposed strategies for MRP, annual investment strategy and approved counterparty list for investments were unchanged from 2022/23. A much improved overall position was reported with borrowing being repaid ahead of schedule and the Capitalisation Direction fully financed three years ahead of

schedule. The Council was on track to repay the remaining £133m of temporary borrowing by September 2023, subject to the continued successful delivery of the asset disposal programme. The asset disposal programme had a target of sales for £50m in 2022/23 but was forecast to achieve £210m. The target for 2023/24 was £75m and the current forecast was £410m. The Council may be able to bring overall borrowing back down to a sustainable level by March 2025. The Lead Member highlighted the potential opportunity to pay off the pension fund deficit in 2023/24 which could yield a £5m annual revenue budget saving.

Lead Members welcomed the good progress that had been made over the past year and agreed the strategy should be recommended to Council.

Councillor Smith addressed the Cabinet and commented the relatively poor rates of return on investments under the strategic acquisitions programme and sought assurance a minimum rate of return of 5% per annum would be achieved in future. In response, it was commented that the main problem with the assets purchased in the past was that the cost of MRP had not been properly considered. The Council had no plans acquire new assets for investment purposes.

Recommended –

- (a) That the Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) for 2023/24 to 2027/28 be approved including:
 - i. Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement for 2023/24 (Appendix 1)
 - ii. Annual Investment Strategy for 2023/24 (Appendix 2)
 - iii. Approved Counterparty List (Appendix 3)
 - iv. Approved Countries for Investments (Appendix 4)
 - v. the Prudential Indicators for the period 2023/24 to 2025/26 (Section 4 of the TMS)

120. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2023/24 and 30-Year Housing Investment Plan

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that set out the proposed 30-year Investment Plan for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and both the revenue and capital business plans.

The plan demonstrated that the Council was able to fund the proposals subject to the assumptions in the plan and that the HRA remained sustainable and viable over the 30-year period. The Council owned and managed approximately 7,600 properties of which there were 6,035 HRA social and affordable rented properties. No new acquisition or new build proposals were made in the business plan. Social rents would rise by 7% for 2023/24 as agreed by Cabinet in January, and service charges would increase by the

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same amount. The five-year HRA capital programme of £52m was reviewed. The main items included repairs and stock modernisation.

The Cabinet welcomed the fact that the HRA was in surplus and that the housing stock was generally in good condition. After due consideration, the recommendations were agreed and the report would be presented to Council on 9th March 2023.

Recommended –

That the recommendations be agreed and that it be presented to Council on 9th March 2023:

- (a) That the HRA revenue budget for 2023-24 (Table 1 & Appendix A) be approved.
- (b) That the HRA 5-year revenue budgets for 2023-24 to 2027-28 (Table 1 & Appendix A) be noted.
- (c) That the HRA 30-year revenue budgets for 2023-24 to 2052-53 (Appendix B) be noted.
- (d) That the HRA 5-year Capital Programme for a total £52.714m (Table 3 & Appendix C) be approved.
- (e) That the 30-year Capital Programme for 2023-24 to 2052-53 (Appendix D) be noted.
- (f) That the draft HRA reserves and balances for the 5-year Business Plan (Appendix E) be noted.

121. Update on Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that updated on the High Needs Budget position and the progress to date on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan 2022/23 to 2026/27.

The background to the current position was summarised and it was noted that in May 2021 the DSG was heading towards a cumulative deficit of more than £40m by 2026/27 and overspending by £7m per annum in 2020/21 with no plan to deal with these issues. A significant amount of work had been undertaken since May 2021 to address the problem, including a major cost reduction programme that was forecast to bring the DSG back into in-year balance by 2025/26. The Council had participated in the DfE Safety Valve programme and had formally submitted a plan to DfE in January 2023 which, if successful, would see the historic deficit of £27m finance by the DfE. The outcome of the submission was awaited. If successful, it was essential that the Council kept DSG in balance, otherwise the historic deficit would fall back

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to the Council. This would take sustained and proactive leadership and resources to ensure it could be delivered.

The Cabinet discussed the potential timeframe for staged payments to the historic deficit and asked if the Council would still have sufficient officer resource and expertise to manage it. The decision of the DfE was expected by the end of March and there would be regular monitoring and reporting. Members commended all the officers involved from finance, education and across the Council who had contributed to important work to address the issues.

The Cabinet then agreed to recommend the report to full Council.

Recommended – That the following be noted:

- (a) The forecast position for DSG spend in 2022/23 to 2026/27.
- (b) The overarching issues that had resulted in the DSG deficit and the actions taken to date to address these.
- (c) The Council had been taking part in the 'safety valve' intervention programme with the DfE and has submitted its final proposal for addressing the deficit on the High Needs Block.

122. 2023/24 Budget

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets summarised the revenue budget 2023/24 that was proposed to be recommended to full Council on 9th March 2023.

The budget context, assumptions and key risks were summarised. The Government had approved the Council's request to raise Council Tax by a total of 9.99%, which was 5% more than the usual referendum threshold. The additional income was important to increase the Council's tax base and would have a significant impact on the savings plans. A requirement of the proposed additional increase was that an enhanced Council Tax Reduction Scheme be put in place to protect the lowest income households and this scheme would be considered later in the meeting.

The two key parts of the Council's financial strategy were delivering the proposed savings programme which totalled £22.4m in 2023/24 and continuing to dispose of assets. The Lead Member explained the extensive and rigorous process to identify, test and agree each saving proposal. It was emphasised that it was essential the savings programme was delivered and directorates would be expected to identify alternative savings during the year if those set out were not achieved. Contingency against savings delivery had been made but non-delivery had to be avoided at all costs. The pressures included high inflation and a provision had been made for pay settlement of 4.8% and 4.9% for contract inflation. If the budget was successfully delivered

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the Council would already be on track to achieve almost half of the 2024/25 savings, with the remainder to be identified by May 2023.

The DLUHC Best Value Lead Commissioner addressed the Cabinet and highlighted the scale of the challenge the Council still faced. He emphasised the importance of culture change in the organisation and that this was a whole council process whereby every officer must adhere to their budget limits. The Commissioners had supported the Council Tax proposal, otherwise a higher savings target would have been required and there were no alternative proposals. The Improvement & Recovery Board had spent considerable time validating every savings proposal.

The Leader commented that there had been some slippage in the current year's savings programme, and although this had been offset by some corporate items to balance the budget overall, it was crucial that the Council improved its track record for savings delivery. Further work with Slough Children First would also need to take place to address the company's overspends.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet agreed to recommend the revenue budget to full Council.

Recommended –

1. Approval of the 2023/24 budget to enable the Council Tax for 2023/24 to be set;
2. Approval of the Model Council Tax Resolution 2023/24 as set out in Appendix B;
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to place a notice in the local press of the amounts set under recommendation 2 within a period of 21 days following the Council's decision;
4. Approve the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as based on the estimated financial deficit in the Capitalisation Direction and to be funded by capitalisation of:
 - a. £267.1m up to 2022/23
 - b. £31.6m for 2023/24
 - c. £58.4m for beyond 2023/24
5. Approve the overall General Fund revenue budget of £143.4m, to include:
 - a. growth for pressures of £12.2m
 - b. proposed savings by Directorates of £22.4m

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6. Approve measures to control spending and improve the finances of the Council at Appendix D

Noted:

7. The balanced budget position for 2023/24 requiring savings of £22.4m and the projected financial deficit between 2024/25 to 2027/28 .
8. The intention to increase Council Tax by 7.99% in 2023/24.
9. The intention to increase Council Tax by a further 2% in 2023/24 in respect of the Adult Social Care Precept.
10. The assumed funding for the protection of social care 2023/24 through the Better Care Fund..
11. That due regard has been had to the s.25 report by the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial..
12. The minutes from the 2023/24 Budget Scrutiny Sessions at Appendix H.
13. Approve the process for access to contingency as set out in paragraphs 2.16.57 to 2.16.62.

Resolved – That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director Finance & Commercial, in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets, to amend and finalise any of the budget reports prior to be submitted to full Council for approval on 9th March 2023.

123. Financial Update Report - P9 2022/23

The Executive Director Finance & Commercial summarised the budget monitor for the period to the end of December 2022.

It was noted that that there was an overspend of £4.3m across service areas but this position was balanced through items such as an improvement in the collection fund, underspends in treasury and corporate budgets and the use of capitalisation. The capital programme was forecasting a £2.6m underspend.

The Cabinet agreed the recommendations.

Resolved –

(a) That the following be approved:

- that the fully-funded capital scheme proposed to make efficient use of the DfT grant to a projected value of £1.943m as set out in paragraph 9.5 of this report be added to the capital programme

- the virements as set out in Appendix E.

(b) That the following be noted.

- 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 £4.256m across service areas, comprising a further anticipated ask from SCF for contract funding support of £2.760m, shortfalls on savings initiatives within Council directorates of £2.1m and a range of other broadly offsetting under and overspends. This position is then balanced through an improvement in the collection fund position, underspends in Treasury and corporate budgets and the use of capitalisation;
- that the General Fund Capital Programme is forecasting an underspend of £2.633m at a spend of £26.022m;
- that the HRA is forecasting a surplus and contribution towards capital funding and HRA reserves of £2.604m, a £0.073m adverse variance against budget;
- that the HRA Capital Programme is forecasting to underspend against budget by £3.761m;
- that the DSG balance is forecast to be a cumulative deficit of £27.108m by the end of this financial year, reflecting an in-year deficit of £1.638m, with plans to reduce the in-year movement to a balanced position by 2025/26;
- that maintained schools are projecting a reduction in balances by 31 March 2023 from £9.555m to £6.478m, with 4 out of 16 schools expecting to be in deficit with an aggregate deficit of £0.741m.

124. Financial Action Plan - Update

The Cabinet received that latest update on the Financial Action Plan that summarised the work undertaken to address the financial issues the Council faced and the recommendations made by external agencies.

The comprehensive report detailed that the progress that had been made and the Cabinet was asked to recommend the report to Council. This was agreed.

Recommended –

- (a) That the summary 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 noted. Specifically, the report provided an update on the following issues:

- Capitalisation Direction
- progress being made on generating capital receipts
- budgets
- Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)
- the Council's borrowing levels
- accounts
- the dedicated schools grant
- the finance structure
- revenues and benefits
- Council accounting, HR and procurement system (ERP)
- commercial and procurement improvements
- internal audit actions
- company governance and actions

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

(c) Cabinet agreed to recommend the report to Council.

125. Approval to write-off individual debts greater than £15,000

The Lead Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance introduced a report that sought approval to write-off uncollectable debts that exceeded £15,000 in relation to adult social care, council tax and business rates.

The total sum of the debts proposed to be written-off was £1.186m, although it was noted that much of this debt was very old and some of it dated back to 1997. In all cases requests for write-offs were only recommended after all avenues to collect the debt had been exhausted. The Cabinet approved the write-off requests as set out in the appendices to the report.

Resolved – That the write-off of those debts identified in the report be authorised.

126. Update on Discretionary Council Tax premium on empty properties and second homes

A report was considered that sought approval to give delegated authority to the Executive Director Finance & Commercial to devise a policy for additional Council Tax premiums to be introduced for empty homes and second homes.

It was noted that in May 2022 the Government's Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill put forward discretionary Council Tax premium options on long term empty properties and dwellings occupied periodically (second homes). If the Bill received Royal Assent before 31 March 2023, these options would become available to billing authorities with effect from 1 April 2024 at the earliest.

The Government had confirmed that billing authorities that wished to adopt premiums for second homes were required to make a determination confirming their requirements at least 12 months prior to the financial year in which the changes will come into effect, meaning that the Bill would need to obtain Royal Assent prior to 1 April 2023 in order to adopt the changes for the year commencing 1 April 2024.

After due consideration the recommendations were approved.

Resolved – That delegated authority to the Executive Director for Finance and Commercial, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance, to devise a policy for additional Council Tax premiums to be introduced for:

- 100% premium for properties which have been empty and unfurnished for a period between 1 (previously 2) and 5 years;
- 100% premium for second homes; and
- To bring the policy to full Council once the legislation is in force.

127. Resilience contract for Revenues and Benefits work

The Lead Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance introduced a report that sought approval for a contract to provide off-site temporary resources to process revenues and benefits work through a Framework Contract held by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

The contract would deliver a saving of £0.890m to August 2025 in comparison to the current costs of using interim support which was £0.369m in 2023/24. The estimated contract value between 1st April 2023 to 28th August 2025 was £1.345m. It was noted that the contract was not with LB Tower Hamlets, merely that it was procured through a Framework Contract that they held.

The Cabinet asked about the performance management arrangements and in response the Executive Director Finance & Commercial stated that the contract enabled the revenues and benefits service to draw down staff where required, on a better value contract than the one currently in place, and that the support was needed whilst the restructure of the revenues and benefits services was implemented over the next year.

The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Authorised commencement of procurement for the provision of off-site processing resources through the Framework Contract held by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets;

- (b) Delegated authority to the Executive Director for Finance and Commercial following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance to award a contract.

128. Procure a provider of e-vouchers for Housing Support Fund awards

A report was considered that sought authority from Cabinet to commence to procure a 5-year contract to provide e-vouchers to help provide additional options for vulnerable residents who applied for help through the Housing Support Fund.

Currently support was via Paypoint and through vouchers to purchase food through the Sainsburys gifting platform with white goods supplied by Argos. By contracting with a new provider that had wider access to other supermarket outlets it would offer residents in receipt of support a wider choice to shop closer to where they lived or to shop around and achieve better value.

After due consideration the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Authorised commencement of procurement for the provision of an e-voucher provider.
- (b) Delegated authority to the Executive Director for Finance and Commercial following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance to award a contract.

129. Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023-24

The Lead Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance introduced a report that proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

In agreeing the Council's request to raise Council Tax by 9.99% the Government had expressed an expectation that steps be taken to mitigate the impact on those least able to pay Council Tax. It was proposed that a further £1.2m be added to the scheme for 2023/24 to make it more generous. The current maximum reduction in Council Tax for working age households was 80% but the proposed new scheme would have a maximum reduction of 100%. Modelling suggested that 3,552 of the 6,606 working age households with the lowest incomes would not pay any Council under the revised scheme and a further 1,805 would pay less than they currently did. A minority of households in receipt of support would pay more and more funding would be provided to the Council Tax Hardship Fund.

The Cabinet welcomed the more generous scheme proposed that would increase the support provided to the lowest income households in Slough. In

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addition to the support for those households there was a further benefit in an anticipated reduction in collection costs. The scheme was subject to public consultation.

The Cabinet agreed to recommend the revised scheme to Council.

Recommended –

- (a) That the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24 (Appendix D) be recommended to Full Council for adoption for the financial year 2023/24.
- (b) Agreed to allocate £0.040m into the Council Tax Hardship Fund and to use the Council's £0.253m allocation of the Council Tax Support Fund to protect the current levels of support provided to those taxpayers who would otherwise lose under the proposed scheme.

130. Approval of contract sum and update on business plan for Slough Children First Limited (SCF)

The Lead Member for Children's Services introduced a report that sought agreement for a delay in the approval of the Slough Children First (SCF) business plan for 2023 to 2028 and agreement for the contract sum for 2023/24.

It was recognised that the company required a high quality, long term business plan. The current plan was approved on an interim basis and the re-submitted plan had been subject to a review by Mutual Ventures. The new Executive Director People (Children) / Chief Executive of SCF had only recently started in post and it was considered appropriate to provide more time to re-draft the plan under the new leadership. It was anticipated that the new business plan for SCF be brought to Cabinet in Quarter 2 of 2023/24.

The Council was, as a minimum, required to agree the Contract Sum for SCF for 2023/24 and it was proposed that this be £36.067m, which was an increase of £4.632m on the 2022/23 base budget.

The recommendations were approved.

Resolved –

- (a) Noted the draft SCF's business plan for 2023/24 to 2027/28 at Appendix A and agree that this should not be approved as the annual business plan.
- (b) Approved a Contract Sum for 2023/24 of £36.062m, an increase of £4.632m on the 2022/23 base budget.
- (c) Delegated authority to the Executive Director of Strategy and Improvement, in consultation with the Lead Member of Customer

Services, Procurement & Performance, to offer an enhanced level of support services with a charging mechanism to reflect cost recovery.

- (d) Noted that a report will be brought back to Cabinet in Quarter 2 of 2023/24 with a new business plan for SCF, following consultation with key stakeholders and alignment with the Council's Corporate Plan.
- (e) Noted and accept the recommendations from the People Scrutiny Panel Task and Finish Group and delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, to appoint lead officers to progress each recommendation and to request that the SCF Board of Directors ensure that these recommendations are considered and reflected in a new business plan.

131. Energy Flex Purchases 23/24 (Purchase Strategy)

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report on the purchasing strategy for energy.

The volatile market conditions following the war in Ukraine were noted and the strategy proposed aimed to minimise the Council's exposure to further price increases. If agreed, the Council would purchase 50% of its energy volume in advance and the detailed proposals were set out in the report. It was noted that since the report had been published the PFI schools had indicated that they no longer wished to be included in the contracts and this would have an impact on the volumes purchased.

The Cabinet agreed the recommendations subject to the inclusion of the Lead Member for Customer Services, Procurement and Performance, as well as the Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets, in the Member consultation process as part of the delegation. Decisions taken under the delegated authority should be reported to Members as highlighted in the Commissioners comments.

Resolved –

- (i) That the following purchase strategy be adopted:
 - a. Approved the purchase of 50% of the '23/24' energy volume for Summer 23 and Winter 23.
 - b. Approved the purchase of the remaining energy volume if the wholesale price for that forward period falls below £150/MWh (power) and 150p/therm (gas), the floor price and where feasible well below the floor price.
 - c. Approved the default position to purchase energy volume (power) on a month ahead, and gas on a day ahead (spot price) should wholesale prices for forward period remain above £150/MWh (power) and 150p/therm (gas).
 - d. Set a wholesale energy market price cap for the month ahead and Winter 23 of £250/MWh (power) and 300p/therm (gas) and if

markets increase such that the cap is expected to be exceeded, or is exceeded, then Cabinet approves the purchase of the remaining energy volume for 23/24 to limit further cost exposure.

- (ii) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Place & Communities, in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial (the S151 officer) and the Lead Members (Finance Oversight & Assets and Customer Services, Procurement & Performance) to purchase energy in line with the above guidelines.
- (iii) That officers be required to report back to Cabinet by February 2024 on the current state of energy markets and any proposed changes to purchasing strategy of future energy volume in the final year of the flex energy contracts 24/25.

132. Implementation of Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ) Boroughwide

The Lead Member for Transport & The Local Environment introduced a report that set out why the Council should move from an ad-hoc approach for the provision of parking restrictions to the use of Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) wherever practicable.

Implementation of CPZs would include public consultation in each case but the aim was to have a standard approach for the provision of parking restrictions to bring consistency. The Cabinet discussed that Colnbrook should be prioritised under the approach given the significant parking issues caused by its proximity to Heathrow Airport.

After due consideration the recommendations were approved.

Resolved –

- (a) Approved the use of Controlled Parking Zones with resident permit schemes as outlined in the report, following the statutory consultation, as the Council's standard approach for the provision of parking restrictions.
- (b) Delegated authority to the Executive Director for Place and Communities, in consultation with the Lead Member for Transport and the Local Environment, to consider any objections received following the statutory consultation and to make the necessary traffic regulation orders to determine the final scheme for each location.
- (c) Approved the Parking Permit Policy provided as Appendix A

133. E-Scooters and e-Bikes trial and scheme

The Lead Member for Transport & The Local Environment introduced a report that proposed to restart the e-scooter trial, subject to a tendering exercise,

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and award of a new contract to the successful bidder. The new contract would include the provision of both e-scooters and e-bikes for public hire.

The e-scooter trial in Slough had been suspended last year, however, it had been popular and well used scheme. The proposal was to re-start the scheme for a period of up to 4 years to cover the national trial period to May 2024. A follow up report would come back to Cabinet after national trial had ended to provide updates on the remaining trial period and any legislative and operational changes required by DfT.

The Cabinet emphasised that safety and responsible usage were key issues to be addressed in the new contract arrangements. The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Approved the restart of the e-scooter scheme in Slough, extended to include e-bikes, for a period of up to 4 years, to cover the national trial period up to May 2024 and any agreed trial extension by the Department for Transport (DfT) and subsequently the remainder of the 4-year term subject to the full legislation of e-scooters.
- (b) Approved the commissioning of a provider for the e-scooter/e-bikes trial.
- (c) Delegated authority to the Executive Director for Place and Community, in consultation with the Lead Member for Transport and the Local Environment, to approve the award of contract and final scheme operations.
- (d) Noted that a follow-up report will be brought back to Cabinet after the national trial ends, to provide updates on the remaining trial period and any legislative and operational changes required by the DfT.

134. CCTV Services

The Cabinet considered a report that sought approval for the discontinuation of the Council's dedicated CCTV team and the transfer of responsibility for public facing CCTV to Thames Valley Police from 1st January 2024.

The proposal would avoid annualised costs of £630k and bring an annualised budget saving of £105k. The discontinuation of the dedicated team would mean the incidental services currently provided by the CCTV team would be returned to become the responsibility of the originating service or be discontinued entirely. The report set out the issues involved with the alternative arrangements being put in place through to the handover to Thames Valley Police. The Cabinet welcomed the principle that CCTV would transfer to the Police and that this was part of a Thames Valley wide objective of the Police & Crime Commissioner.

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Councillor Smith addressed the Cabinet and expressed a number of concerns about the proposal including the lack of a clear plan; the decentralisation of the incidental services to Council departments; and data protection issues. The Cabinet noted the comments and highlighted that it was confident the Council could work with the Police to implement the handover and deliver a better service overall. The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Approved the cessation of responsibility for all public facing CCTV from 1 January 2024.
- (b) Noted that a further report would be presented in the Autumn to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to Cabinet to review SBCs role in our joint commitment with Thames Valley Police to community safety from 1 January 2024 onwards. This would not involve any financial commitment by the Council to CCTV.

135. Library Services

The Lead Member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills introduced a report on the future provision of the library service.

The report to Cabinet in March 2022 had approved the Library Service Plan 2022-27 following public consultation. It had been agreed that a further report would be provided to Cabinet 12 months after that decision to provide further recommendations on how best to deliver library services within the Council's constrained financial position in 2023/24.

The report recommended that in 2023/24 a predominantly self-service library service be delivered from the four existing buildings – The Curve, Britwell Hub, Cippenham Library and Langley Library. There would be amended opening hours as set out in paragraph 2.16.1 of the report, the maintenance of an online library offer and expanded volunteering opportunities. The proposals would deliver a further budget saving of £276k.

The Cabinet welcomed the proposal to retain the existing four buildings and highlighted the importance of ensuring the staffing arrangements were resilient so that the revised opening hours could be delivered as proposed. An update report would be provided to Cabinet in July 2023.

After due consideration, the recommendations were approved.

Resolved –

- (a) Approved a library model of predominantly self-service library service from 4 buildings across the borough (The Curve, Britwell Hub, Cippenham Library and Langley Library) with the opening hours set out in paragraph 2.16.1 of the report.

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- (b) That a report be received a report at July 2023 Cabinet to review the performance of the library service in the first 2 months of the 2023/24 operating model, including performance against planned opening hours and the blend of footfall across the opening hours.

136. Refresh of Corporate Plan

The Cabinet considered a report that set out the process for a refresh of the Corporate Plan that took account of developments since the current plan, 'Doing Right by Slough' was approved by Council in May 2022.

The recovery programme had evolved over the past year and the new census data needed to be considered. It was also important to undertake more resident engagement and this was a key part of the programme. The timetable was summarised and it was anticipated that the revised plan be considered by Cabinet in June and onto Council for approval.

Resolved –

- (a) Approved the process, timetable and consultation plans for a refreshed Corporate Plan as set out in Appendix 1.
- (b) Delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to finalise the draft Corporate Plan for public consultation following the elections in May 2023.

137. Improvement & Recovery Update

The Cabinet noted the detailed progress updates provided on the recovery and improvement programme.

The Commissioners one-year on letter to Ministers on their assessment of the Council's process was expected to be published shortly alongside the Ministerial response.

The update was noted.

Resolved –

- (a) That the progress made by the Council since the previous report in addressing the Directions of the Secretary of State be noted;
- (b) That the next steps be agreed as set out in the action plans and other workstreams that have been developed to address the Directions.

138. Recommendations from Cabinet Committee on Asset Disposals

There were no recommendations from the Cabinet Committee.

139. References from Overview & Scrutiny

The Cabinet considered the recommendations of three scrutiny task and finish group reports on:

- Contract management (Overview & Scrutiny)
- Slough Children First Business Plan (People)
- Complaints Process (Customer & Community)

Lead Members welcomed the excellent work that scrutiny had done and this was a view shared by Commissioners as an improved model for future scrutiny. The Cabinet agreed to accept the recommendations and asked that progress on implementation be monitored and reported back.

The Cabinet asked that scrutiny members on the task and finish groups be commended for their reports.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Task & Finish Group reports from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Contract Management), People Scrutiny Panel (SCF business plan) and Customer & Community Scrutiny Panel (Complaints Process) be approved.
- (b) That the members of the Task & Finish Groups be thanked and commended for their reports.

140. Exclusion of Press and Public

All business was conducted in Part I of the meeting therefore it was not necessary to exclude the press and public.

141. Approval of contract sum and update on business plan for Slough Children First Limited (SCF) - Appendix A

Resolved – That the Part II Appendix be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.54 pm)

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Cabinet – Meeting held on Tuesday, 7th March, 2023.

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

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Smith

Apologies for Absence:- None.

PART 1

142. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

143. Disposal of Council Asset at North West Quadrant

The Cabinet considered a report that sought approval for the disposal of land assets at the North West Quadrant (NWQ), the former Thames Valley University site.

It was one of a series of sites owned by the Council and opted to the Slough Urban Renewal partnership. The Cabinet approved the disposal strategy for the NWQ site in July 2022 and the proposed sale had been subject to due diligence and negotiation. Information on the proposed purchaser and the financial information was detailed in the Part II appendix, which was considered and noted in Part I without disclosing any of the exempt information.

Lead Members were advised that the proposed sale value reflected best consideration reasonably obtainable for the disposal of the asset in accordance with the relevant legislation.

The disposal would make a further significant contribution to the asset disposal programme and would take total sales in 2022/23 to £200m. The Council was on track to repay all its temporary borrowing by September 2023. Lead Members highlighted that the site had been vacant for some time and asked about the likely development timeline. In response, it was noted that the purchaser was a highly reputable specialist development organisation and it was in the developers interest to progress the plans. It was hoped a development agreement could be signed by the end of the summer. Members also asked about the planning status of the site and whether the Council had sought overage provisions. The Executive Director Housing & Property stated that overage had not been pursued but the unconditional sale helped the Council maximise the capital receipt. The temporary car parking arrangements on the site and implications for its future closure were also discussed.

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At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet approved the disposal on the terms proposed and agreed the recommendations. The Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had agreed that the call-in requirement could be waived to enable to deal to proceed swiftly so the Council could achieve the capital receipt.

Resolved –

- (a) Agreed to the disposal of the NWQ site substantially in accordance with the Heads of Terms at Appendix 2 to the report, and delegated authority to the Executive Director of Housing and Property, in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight and Council Assets and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to enter into the Sale Contracts and the related legal documentation in connection with the disposal and to approve the final disposal terms.
- (b) Agreed to the key terms of related corporate transactions that would be required as a result of the disposal of the site, including the treatment of associated pre-development costs and steps preparatory to the winding-up of NWQ LLP, and delegated authority to the Executive Director of Housing and Property, in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight and Council Assets and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to enter into all related legal documentation, and to approve the final terms.

144. Exclusion of Press and Public

All business was conducted in Part I and it was therefore not necessary to exclude the press and public.

145. Disposal of Council Asset at North West Quadrant - Appendices

Resolved – That the Part II appendices be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 6.42 pm)

Slough Borough Council

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

1. Summary and Recommendations

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

Recommendations:

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

Reason

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

Commissioner Review

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

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

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

2. Report

Introduction

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

"5. All functions to define the officer structure for the senior positions, to determine the recruitment processes and then to recruit the relevant staff to those positions."

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

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

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

3 Options considered

This report is for noting only

4 Background

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

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

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

5 Implications of the Recommendation

Financial implications

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

Legal Implications

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

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

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

Risk management implications

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

Environmental implications

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

Equality implications

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

Procurement implications

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

Workforce implications

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

Property implications

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

6 Background Papers

See the annex attached

Annex

Third tier posts by directorate:

People – Adults:

Reporting to AD Adult Social Care Operations

Group Manager - Long Term Services – Level 10

Group Manager - Short Term Services – Level 10

Reporting to AD – People Strategy and Commissioning

Group Manager – Purchasing - Level 10

Group Manager – Market Management – Level 10

Group Manager – Commissioning – Level 10

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

Commissioning Support Officer - Level 5 – business support

Reporting to Deputy Director of Public Health

Public Health Principle – Level 10

Public Health Intelligence Officer – Level 6

Public Health Business Support – Level 5

Strategy and Improvement:

Reporting to AD Strategy

Group Manager - Data, Insight, Strategy – Level 10

Reporting to AD Transformation

3x Programme Managers – Level 9

2 x Project Support Officers – Level 6

Reporting to AD HR

Group Manager HR – Level 10

Health and Safety Manager – Level 9

Workforce Development Manager – Level 9

Business Continuity and Emergency Planning Manager – Level 9

Reporting to AD Customer and Business Services

Group Manager Customer Services – Level 10

Complaints, Casework & FOI – Level 8

Reporting to Chief Digital Officer

Enterprise Architect - Level 10

Governance Reporting & Compliance Manager - Level 10

Programme Delivery Manager - Level 10

Technology Operations Manager - SML11

ICT&D Services Manager - Level 10

Digital Customer Engagement Manager - Level 10

Reporting to Head of Communications and resident engagement

Group Manager – Communications – Level 10

Property and Housing

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

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

People Children's

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

Place and Communities

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

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

Finance and Commercial Services

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

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

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

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

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	20 th March 2023
Subject:	ICT & Digital Strategy 2023-2026
Lead Member:	Cllr Zaffar Ajaib
Chief Officer:	Sarah Hayward, Executive Director of Strategy & Improvement
Contact Officer:	Simon Sharkey Woods, AD Chief Digital & Information Officer
Ward(s):	N/A
Key Decision:	YES
Exempt:	NO
Decision Subject To Call In:	YES
Appendices:	Appendix A – ICT & Digital Strategy – Capability, Capacity & Resilience

1. Summary and Recommendations**Summary:**

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposed new strategy for all ICT & Digital services at Slough Borough Council for the period 2023 to 2026.
- 1.2 The report provides the case for an “adaptive strategy” that allows for rapid improvements and change where the fixed points are our vision (what the best version of our organisation is, as defined in our corporate plan) and the council’s purpose (why we exist, and why it matters).
- 1.3 The report describes three core themes. These are linked to technology infrastructure and support service improvements, a refreshed approach to digital channels for residents, and a new structured approach to the platforms that bring together data from across the council and partners to inform decision making.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1.4 Approve the refreshed strategy for ICT & Digital services as detailed in this report and the full strategy document which can be found in Appendix 1.

Reason: Approval will allow the ICT & Digital team to progress with work that will lead to a more sustainable and effective technology and digital service.

Commissioner Review

Commissioners have reviewed this report.

2. Report

Introduction

- 2.1 The directions issued on the 1st December 2021 to Slough under Section 15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999 stated the need for “An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of the Authority’s IT.” The modernisation programme, approved in the Cabinet meeting of March 2022, continues to resolve the legacy issues to achieve the proper functioning of IT. This strategy moves that on and is the approach to ensuring technology and digital services remains fully aligned to the needs of residents and staff beyond this, and never again requires this level of intervention.
- 2.2 Technology strategies in the past have been a mix of key technology decisions and milestone improvements to the services being described, effectively making them more like a programme plan. Recent advances in the way that technology services are consumed, particularly Cloud services, as well as the increasing rate of technology innovation means that this traditional approach is no longer applicable and new thinking is required to ensure services are delivered well.
- 2.3 The adaptive strategy proposed for 2023 to 2026 focuses on capacity, capability, and resilience. It is designed to be flexible enough to cope with rapid changes of focus and priority, and to exploit the right technologies as and when they become available.

Options considered

- 2.4 When considering how to approach a new paradigm for the way technology and digital services were provided, the AD Chief Digital & Information Officer had to factor in a high level of uncertainty at Slough Borough Council. As a result of this, traditional approaches that included a commitment to fixed, timebound works was not going to be a viable option.
- 2.5 A review of the latest thinking found a more flexible, agile based approach that would provide a way of being able to adapt more rapidly to anything that was required to serve residents and staff effectively. The adaptive strategy that has been built and can be seen in Appendix 1 is aligned to this approach.

Background

- 2.6 A comprehensive strategy for the provision of technology and digital services at Slough Borough Council has not been established since the insourcing of the service back from the transactional service provider several years ago. The challenges following the move back in-house, the Covid-19 pandemic, the major re-organisation of roles and responsibilities during the Our Futures programme, and the financial crises that followed, has meant there has not been enough stability to make a credible plan for future services.
- 2.7 Following the establishment of a programme of works to modernise and fix legacy technology infrastructure, endorsed by Cabinet in March 2022, the recruitment of more resource into the team, including Slough’s first AD Chief Digital & Information

Officer, as well as the stabilising of the wider management team at the council, the environment is sufficiently stable to enable a plan to now be proposed.

2.8 The levels of uncertainty do remain high, and this has been factored in to the strategy that is shared with this report.

2.9 The 3 core themes of the strategy are:

- The modernisation of the existing technology infrastructure and a reset around the way that IT support services are provided to users.
- A reset in the way we organise ourselves to exploit new digital channels that have the potential to simplify the way we interact with residents.
- Building approaches to collating information and data that empower the council to develop deeper insights and support informed decision making.

2.10 To support the refreshed approach the ICT & Digital team will be increasing its transparency about how it is performing and will be seeking to provide as close to real-time data about what we provide to staff internally, and to residents on digital channels.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

3.1.1 There are no new finance implications as a result of this high-level strategy. The financial impact of ICT & Digital works will be managed through the usual budgeting processes of the council.

3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 There are no known direct legal implications of this strategy.

3.2.2 The indirect positive effect of this strategy will be to reduce the risk of service failure across the council, lower the potential for cyber-attacks, and improve our stance in respect of the data protection act.

3.3 Risk Management Implications

3.3.1 The risk of major failures of critical services will reduce as the activities that flow from this strategy are progressed.

3.4 Environmental Implications

3.4.1 The work to significantly improve the approach to IT service management will have an impact on managing hardware that will mean we use equipment more efficiently. This should prevent waste and ensure we have the smallest possible footprint in terms of the use of physical devices.

3.4.2 The focus on the use of Cloud/internet-based services will also lower the carbon footprint of what we do as we will be sharing resources with others rather than building infrastructure for ourselves that is only partially utilised.

3.5 Equality Implications

3.5.1 There are no known equality implications as a result of this strategy.

4. Background Papers

None

ICT & Digital Strategy 2023-26 – Capability, Capacity & Resilience
Date Approved: (tbc March 2023 Cabinet)
Date of Review: (March 2024)

Version Control

Version	Date	Updated by	Description
0.1	30/01/2023	Simon Sharkey Woods, AD Chief Digital & Information Officer	First draft issued before the formal governance started.
0.2	03/02/2023	Simon Sharkey Woods, AD Chief Digital & Information Officer	Second draft issued with proposed board paper with Cabinet.
0.3	10/02/2023	Simon Sharkey Woods, AD Chief Digital & Information Officer	Draft following feedback from stakeholder's pre-2 nd stage governance.
0.4	17/02/2023	Simon Sharkey Woods, AD Chief Digital & Information Officer	Draft following feedback from s151 and monitoring officers. Version for Commissioners and CLT.
0.5	28/02/2023	Simon Sharkey Woods, AD Chief Digital & Information Officer	Revised draft following feedback from Commissioners.

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Strategy at a Glance

Capability, Capacity & Resilience

In the most successful authorities, the ICT & Digital services provision has been moving from being a support service to having a transforming impact on the role of local government, the operating model of the authority, how public services are delivered, and how communities are engaged. As a result of many factors, Slough Borough Council has not moved as quickly on this change as other authorities, and the time is now right for a reset that enables the organisation to accelerate its adoption of new ways of working. This is a key element of the work required to establish Slough as a sustainable and impactful council for the community.

The ICT & Digital Strategy detailed here has been built to support the refreshed corporate plan. It sets the direction for the next three years and is part of establishing corporate control of all the technology and digital services across the council. It also underpins the strategic ambition of the authority to become an enabling council, providing increasing value for residents through services that are joined up and easy to access.

An adaptive strategy

In this adaptive strategy the fixed points are our vision (what the best version of our organisation is, as defined in our corporate plan) and the council's purpose (why we exist, and why it matters). The broad strategic themes that have emerged are linked to the direction set by stakeholders, feedback around issues from residents, and to the experience and learning of undertaking work that moves us in the direction we are taking. Over time we expect our strategic themes to change in focus, size, significance, and priority. Rather than establishing fixed workstreams, and rigidly pursuing them at the expense of any other possibility, we will accept and welcome change as an opportunity to increase value and continually improve.

Accountability

Although the work of ICT & Digital is moving away from rigid workplans, we will constantly review our focus and priorities. Transparency and accountability are built into the proposed approach. We will track the pace, quality, and efficiency of everything we do. The strategy will be overseen by the AD Chief Digital & Information Officer and delivery monitored by the ED Strategy & Improvement.

Themes

The core themes of this strategy are:

- **Modernisation & IT Service Management Reset** – on-going focus on modernising and improving services, and the re-design and implementation of new ways of working that will provide IT resources to staff that work reliably and improve the efficiency of the way we work for residents. This theme includes:
 - The continuation of works to stabilise and improve existing services.
 - A new approach to ICT support that enables users to self-serve and manage their issues easily.
 - Control of user access and permissions that ensures security and tight control of data access and licencing costs.

- A continuing focus on diversification and the lifting of critical services to robust Cloud/internet-based options to minimise risk and lower maintenance costs.
 - Tighter control of technology assets to ensure that all assets provide the maximum value to the authority.
 - Support for staff to exploit the tools and services we have available so that they can operate increasingly efficiently.
 - An ambition to reach a fully optimised state against the ITIL 4 framework within two years.
- **Digital Reset** – a re-design of the way the council builds and serves access to services via digital platforms. This will include:
 - Supporting the move of the council from being primarily a public service provider to become a community enabler that links all local providers together for the benefit of residents.
 - Enhancing the ability of the council to have more direct, intelligent interaction with citizens and communities.
 - Establishing a model that allows for the organisation to evolve and change without huge cost and effort, thereby future proofing the organisation to remain a sustainable entity.
 - Only implementing digital access to services where we are confident that the expectation set at first point of contact is met by the actions that then follow.
 - **Exploiting data more effectively** – improving the awareness of what data we have, how we use it, the quality of it and how we can bring it together to inform the decision making across the council to drive efficiency and impact. This will include:
 - Utilising technologies that enable the transformation, aggregation, and presentation of data.
 - Building and actively managing a central view of all the key data assets in use across the council.
 - A refreshed approach to data quality that identifies data asset owners and establishes the responsibility for maintaining high quality data.
 - The ability to provide, in near real-time, access to information about organisational performance through dashboards or reporting.
 - The ability to increasingly undertake deeper analytics to test thinking around new ways of serving residents and to drive continual improvement.

Welcome and Introduction

Following a period of analysis and research we are glad to present the ICT & Digital strategy. It is a component of the wider change taking place at Slough Borough Council to ensure we head towards a sustainable future operating model and provide impactful services for the people we serve. It is directly linked to our corporate plan and is underpinned by principles that will remove the need for such a radical change in future years. These principles include:

- Corporate management of all ICT & Digital infrastructure
- An organisation prepared to learn and adapt at pace

- A focus on continual improvement
- Culture and behaviours that encourage challenge and debate
- Working collaboratively

Introduction

The IT department in councils was for many years a small, back-office organisation setup to provide basic technology support services for devices and line-of-business applications. For the more progressive public sector organisations, this perspective has changed, and technology and digital services has become one of the core components of more radical organisational transformation. Technology has fundamentally impacted the way services are provided and more rapidly changed working practices over the past 5 years than in the previous 20 years. This is continuing at pace and at the time of writing, technologies such as ChatGPT and other AI based services were gaining profile and efficacy. Slough Borough council has not been able to progress as quickly as other organisations due to a range of issues including, but not limited to, the transactional services contract that was in place for a number of years, the Covid pandemic, and the recent financial difficulties. It is now time to reset and increase the pace of adoption of new ways of working. This will support the council in reaching a sustainable state and improve our impact for residents into the future.

Purpose of this strategy

This strategy is designed to provide a model for the way ICT & Digital services are provided so that the council can adapt more quickly and easily to the changing needs of the residents it serves. It will help the council grow its impact and do this whilst working to maintain tight financial control. Where investments are made, they will be based on formal return-on-investment (ROI) modelling so that the benefits of any such investment have a robust business case.

Scope of this strategy

The scope of this refreshed strategy for ICT & Digital is wider than any that have come before. This is due to the increasing use of technology across all aspects of an organisation. The scope includes:

- The management of all technology systems, devices and services used by staff to support the work being done to provide front-line services to residents.
- Provision of all the resident facing services provided by the council that are provided through the internet on a range of digital platforms.
- The hosting and maintenance of all data assets used to support the council to undertake its activities.
- All back-office infrastructure managed by the ICT & Digital team on behalf of the council.
- The management of all internet provided (Cloud) services provided to users to manage the work they undertake.
- The management of security across all technology and digital services to ensure the risk of disruption to services is mitigated.

Setting the Scene

Current State of Services

At the time of writing the ICT & Digital Team was midway through a major programme of modernisation work linked to investments made in March 2022 to help resolve some urgent and pressing issues with the back-office infrastructure. As well as resolving fundamental problems the work has included the lifting of some services to internet hosting (Cloud) provision which has lowered risk and improved service quality. Our core ERP (enterprise resource planning system, covering finance, HR, payroll etc.), and our revenues and benefits system are examples of this change. The work has also had a focus on strengthening our approach to cyber security so that the council is more resilient against the increasing threat of cyber-crime.

An update on the progress of this work was provided to Cabinet in December 2022 and the paper presented by the team also alluded to the development of this strategy. Phase one of the modernisation work will continue throughout 2023 and further business cases will be created later in the year for future phases of activity that continue to improve the foundational elements of the infrastructure the council requires to meet its ambition. ICT & Digital services will never be in a static state and the council should expect an agile style continuum of planning and delivery as a normal part of the way services will be managed in the future. In this new paradigm the ICT & Digital team will need to work in close collaboration with all services as we seek to identify increasingly efficient ways for services to be provided.

IT Service Management Maturity

To deliver a consistent high-quality service there are a number of things that need to be in place. The industry standard for how to establish good ways of working in IT can be found in the ITIL framework. Version 4 is the current iteration of this framework. The ITIL 4 framework identifies five levels of IT service management process maturity:

1. **Initial** – the IT service management (ITSM) processes are not particularly organised or useful.
2. **Repeatable** – the ITSM are partially project-based for some elements.
3. **Defined** – the ITSM processes are defined and documented in a way that provides an holistic approach for the service.
4. **Managed** – with 3. (above) in place ITSM is then actively managed and tracked to ensure consistency.
5. **Optimised** – all processes and functions are documented, aligned to robust governance, tracked, and therefore provide an opportunity for continual improvement.

At the current time, and albeit subjective due to a lack of detailed analysis, we estimate that the IT service management practices in place are around 1 – 2 on this scale. A recently refreshed focus on improving ITSM has the ambition to improve this position and aspires for

the team to be optimised in two years. This is important because it will lead to lower overall IT costs, higher service levels and standards, improved employee productivity and efficiency, and higher customer satisfaction through consistency.

Resource

The team has an approach to the resource required to meet the aspiration of this strategy and it started with a full team restructure in 2022. The original shape and size of the team was insufficient for the future ambition of the council and was heavily dependent upon expensive interim resource that would be unsustainable in the longer term. The restructure has established a flatter, more open structure and has new roles that have been established to manage financial control, procurement, risk, audit and digital services. The team will continue to evolve over the coming years, but another such largescale restructure should not be required. The 4 core areas of the team are:

- **CONTROL** - Control is a multi-disciplinary area with its own autonomous managers giving an appropriate level of separation. It covers the ICT&D Programme Delivery Team, Enterprise Architecture, and Governance, Compliance & Reporting.
- **CORE** - Core is where the technical staff that cover projects as well as the 2nd and 3rd line support of all applications and systems reside. This group will continue to need significant capacity in the medium term. This area is managed by our Technology Operations Manager.
- **CUSTOMER** - Customer is the primary contact point for staff to engage with the ICT & Digital Team. Incidents and requests are made via the customer channel through the ServiceDesk, and new works are discussed through the business partnering function. Both elements are managed by our ICT&D Services Manager.
- **DIGITAL** - Digital is the lead area on work to provide public facing services that help the Council to be more efficient and to ensure residents receive the best possible service at the first point of contact.

Some of the interim resources we have in the team have chosen to move to become permanent team members and we have been successful with several external recruitments. More are planned and it is hoped that recent changes in the market will make it possible to attract skilled candidates.

Despite the progress we have made, not everything we do will be covered by permanent members of staff and for some areas, particularly highly specialist areas, we will still need to augment the permanent team with some interim or 3rd party resource to support the work we will undertake.

On top of the restructure and ongoing recruitment we have also been in discussion with other parts of the council about where some roles and responsibilities should sit in a future state. At the time of writing, we are considering a potential move for some specialists working on digital services so that we can bring all the skill in this area into one place. Any moves of this type are linked to our ambition to make the council more efficient in the way it operates.

Links

This strategy is not standalone and will support many other strategies and plans being developed across the council. We have been engaging with many teams to ensure what is detailed here will be a genuine support for other key focus areas. The most critical alignment is between this strategy and the refreshed corporate plan. We are now in close and regular contact with the team leading on this to ensure the plan and this strategy are aligned.

Other key pieces of work this will align to include (but are not limited to):

- A refreshed Data Strategy
- A refreshed Customer Services Strategy
- Slough Borough Councils Property Strategy
- Slough's ongoing development of hybrid working

How We Made This Strategy

The key developments and events that have led to this strategy being written and shared, are detailed below:

- The recruitment of the first Associate Director & Chief Digital & Information Officer (AD CDIO) at the council. This is the first time there has been an individual with a technology background at this level of the council.
- The review of the status of ICT & Digital services by the newly recruited AD CDIO.
- The completion of the restructure for the ICT & Digital team to enable it to have the capacity to meet the demands it was receiving and the changing operating model of the council.
- Progress against the technology modernisation programme of works and the learning from undertaking these works.
- Closer collaboration with other areas of the council, especially business and customer services, HR, strategy, and communications.
- Emerging thinking from across the local government sector.
- Increasing opportunities for the intelligent use of internet based (Cloud) technologies in support of the council.
- The improving culture at the council enabling more cross departmental collaboration and thinking about the future use of technology.

Our Priority Areas

The 3 priority areas of this strategy are:

1. Improving the reliability of technology services and transforming the way support is provided for them.
2. Resetting the council's approach to the way residents access services and increasing the volume of interactions through lower cost digital channels.
3. Supporting the exploitation of data more effectively so that the council can prioritise precious resources to have the most impact for residents.

These will now be covered in more detail.

1. Improving technology and support

The ICT & Digital team is, at time of writing, in the process of working through phase one of the modernisation programme, initially approved by Cabinet in March 2022. This modernisation has progressed at pace although the volume of activity is less than originally envisaged nearly a year ago. This is predominantly down to the amount of unforeseen work, and issues with acquiring the resource and specialist suppliers that were needed to support the team and complete the work.

The continuation of phase one of the modernisation programme to stabilise and improve existing services will remain a key priority until at least the end of 2023. As new phases of work are required, new business cases will be created, and all governance followed to ensure the appropriate oversight for senior staff and Members. A key element of the future work will be our ambition to lift more services to internet-based (or Cloud) options. This not only reduces the ongoing costs of supporting these services, it also diversifies the locations where our critical systems are located thereby increasing the resilience of the councils operational activities.

Our approach to any remaining locally managed infrastructure will be to simplify wherever we can. This will be heavily linked to the new operating model in terms of the office space we have, and how we support the hybrid working future. As well as making sure we only have what we genuinely need, we will factor in the total life costs of maintaining and upgrading any infrastructure that is deployed. This will prevent the need for a major reset like the current modernisation programme in the future.

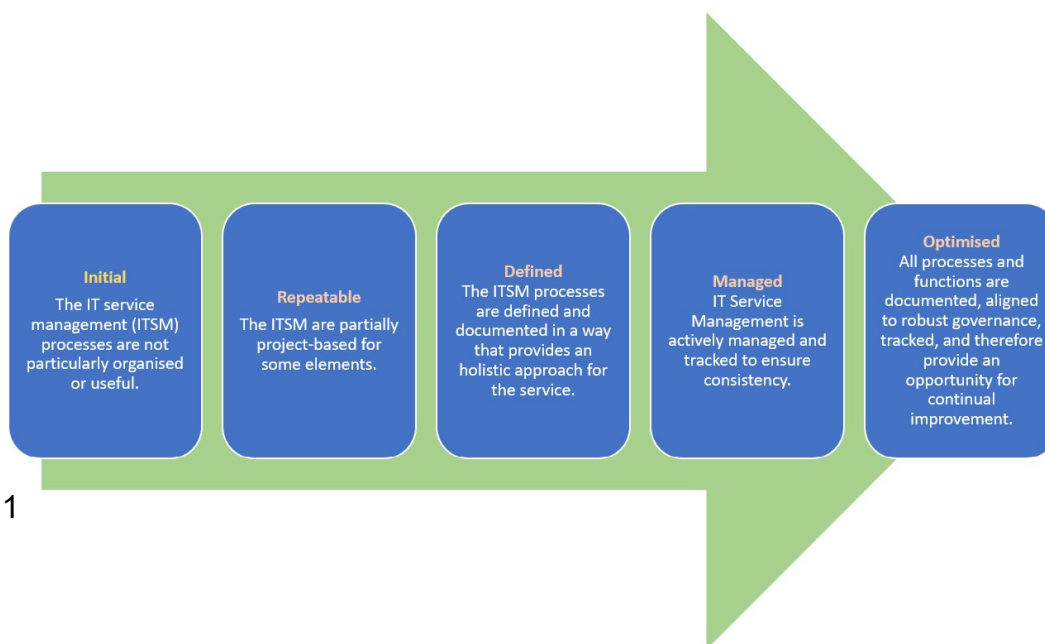


Figure 1

The support service linked to everything that is provided by the ICT & Digital team will be improved significantly through the adoption of standard operating procedures (SOPs) that will drive consistency. The result of taking this approach will be consistency in the way services are provided for all staff. We will also be adopting a modern, appropriately scaled IT service management system which will provide users with a self-service portal. Users will be able to request support or services, and track progress from the new portal. Our target is to improve the quality of IT service provision by aligning to the ITIL 4 framework and moving from 1-2 (minimal structure)

on the maturity scale, to 5, where all processes and functions are documented, aligned to robust governance, tracked, and providing an opportunity for continual improvement.

The ICT & Digital team will also work to actively manage the details of users on the core directory. This will improve security, allow for single sign-on (SSO) to various services, and ensure we are only licenced for what we use.

To help each team across the council to improve its use of technology we will also start, during 2023, to take an holistic approach to the discussions we have so that we can evaluate the whole experience, instead of fixing point issues. This new approach will move around from team-to-team, and we will start with a few smaller teams to test the concept. The plan is to discuss the equipment being used; the skills required to utilise all the services that are available and have discussions about what elements of the work of the team could be automated. We are planning an initial trial of the concept in the Spring of 2023.

Working with HR, the ICT & Digital team will also have a focus on upskilling staff more generally on the services we provide. As well as exploiting what we already have more effectively, this will enable us to keep up to date with the increasing developments taking place, especially with the Cloud services we use.

2. Resident access to services

Improving the way that council and residents interact is essential if Slough Borough Council is to achieve a sustainable model for the future. If the interactions are not good enough and the expectations that are set are not realistic, the participation in the public service process will be limited to protest and complaint. The council has experienced a significant amount of this in recent times.

Local authorities are increasingly becoming custodians of a marketplace of services that residents require to achieve their life outcomes. The focus for a council like Slough will be on dealing with democracy, governance, data and the analysis of need. The council will support communities to become more resilient for themselves by the effective signposting of services and by monitoring and continually improving what residents access. Where transactional services are provided by the council the interaction will need to be increasingly frictionless and impactful. In other words, all access points to council services need to be simple and easy to use and deliver what is expected of them. Although digital channels will increase, not everyone in our community is digitally enabled and this will need to be accommodated through mediated access where required.

The ICT & Digital team will take a lead role in redesigning the governance within the council so that the thinking on how to create more efficient points of access to services is joined up and coherent. The ambition is to improve Slough Borough Council's maturity in this area and transform the customer journey for our residents.

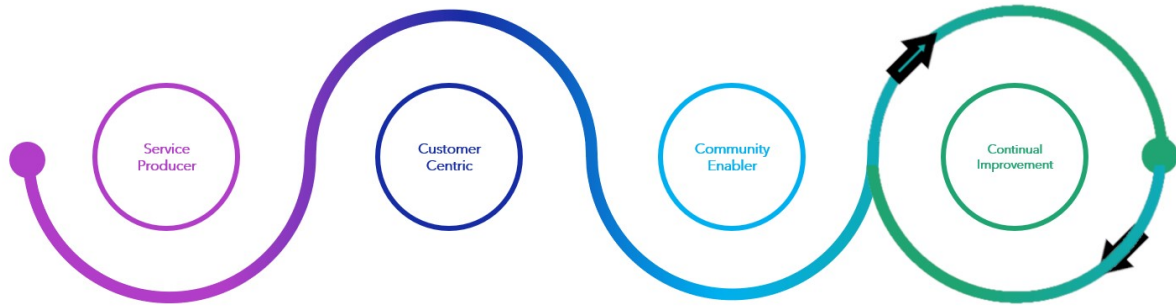


Figure 2

The council will increasingly move from service provider, to moving to be customer centric, and ultimately position itself as a trusted community enabler. Once achieved, the council will then focus on continual improvement, a process that will enable it to adapt to changes in technology, new ways of working, and the shifting expectations of residents.

Minimising the effort for residents to engage with the council will of course improve the efficiency of the council as well. Precious resources can be directed back to improving the impact of what is provided instead of wasteful spending on inefficient back-office process.

The ICT & Digital Team will re-establish new ways of working linked to provision of omnichannel services throughout 2023/24. From 2024 through to 2026, the team will increasingly work with directorate across the council and external partners to continually improve what is provided.

3. Empowering the use of data

The recent events at Slough Borough Council have caused an inconsistency in the way that data is recorded, managed, and used to the benefit of the organisation. The ICT & Digital team has a responsibility to actively support better ways for staff to capture and manage what is required, and to collaborate with the Strategy team on ways to use what we have, to continually improve our ability to make decisions and target the finite resources at the council to greatest impact.

The AD Chief Digital & Information Officer currently chairs the Data Strategy Group. The group has been debating how to reset the position for the council and has recently moved into an action orientated mode where some clear outcomes have been set. These will help provide a better understanding of what we have, the quality of the data available, and how we might bring it together to best effect.

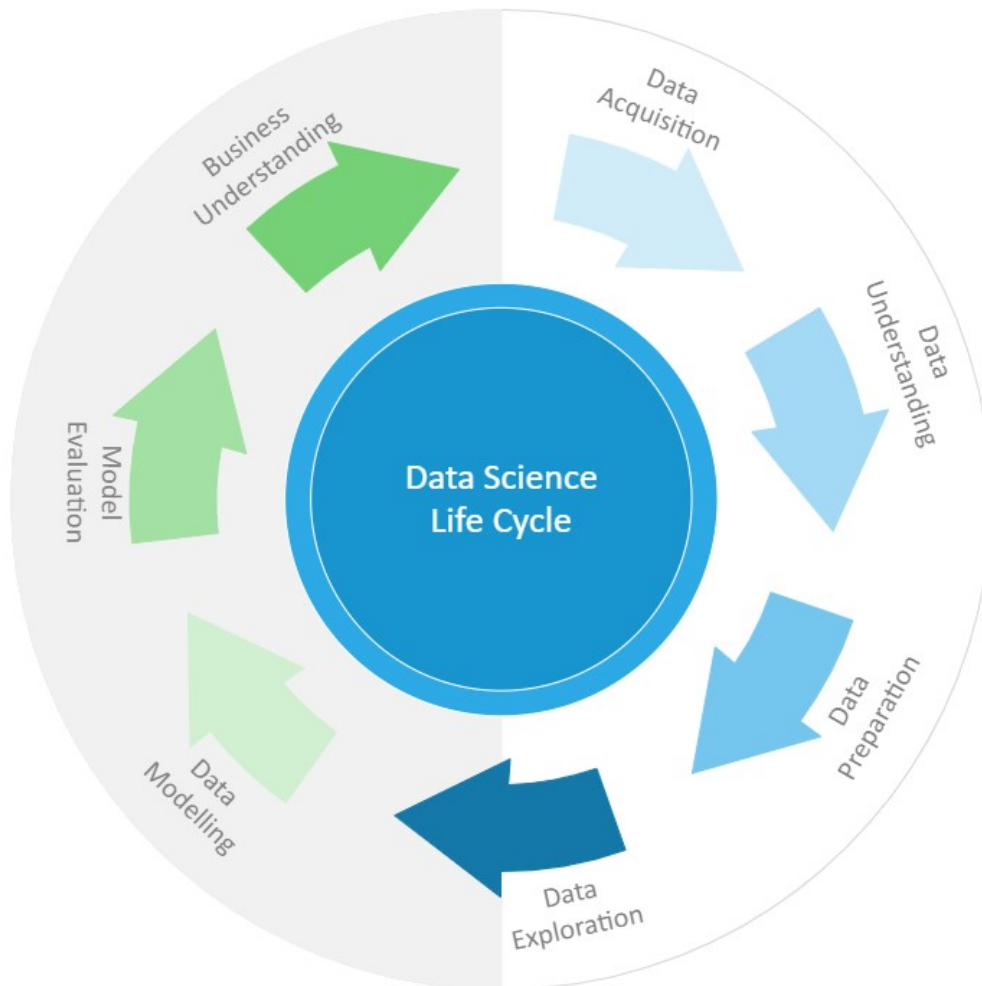


Figure 3

Figure 3 above shows the data science lifecycle. To date, Slough Borough Council has not been able to undertake much of the kind of modelling found in many other organisations. This is linked to inconsistency in the way that data is captured and managed, combined with the need to establish a comprehensive corporate level oversight of the data available. The issues have meant that the council has been predominantly working on the elements shown in shades of blue. There is a significant effort required, as well as resource implications to consider, for Slough Borough Council to significantly uplift its approach to the areas shown in green. There is, however, likely to be a strong business case to do this.

The ICT & Digital team will be reviewing the platforms and services that will offer the best foundational environment for undertaking deeper analysis and modelling during 2023. We will be seeking to build on the tools and investments we have already made to maximise the return on investment of anything that is already in place. As the governance and working practices evolve, the technologies we seek to deploy will also continually evolve. The ICT & Digital team will seek to maintain research on best practice across the industry with a particular focus on local government. By carefully adopting technologies that can change and evolve, the council will be able to exploit the potential in new functions and features at a higher rate than before and will not be left behind.

Next Steps

This strategy has been written in a way that acknowledges and takes account of the levels of uncertainty that exist at the council whilst it builds a new operating model that is affordable, and impactful. This ICT & Digital strategy aligns to the evolving corporate business plan and has a focus on capacity, capability, and resilience. There has been significant progress during 2022 and so we are also now seeking to embed the learning of the work done to date into the approach for the next 3 years.

Key elements of the work taking place in 2023/24:

- A continuation of the modernisation programme with a focus on working through the activities linked to the original approval from Cabinet in March 2022.
- The development of business cases for further investments in ICT & Digital that are focused on improving efficiency and/or lowering risk for the council.
- A focus on establishing consistent practice and service management maturity based on ITIL principles.
- Agreement on the architecture and approach to bringing our data together to understand our residents and inform decisions and then ultimately, to support the building of models that utilise AI and machine learning to provide increasing insight around the way we provide services.
- Establishing a culture of continual improvement within the ICT & Digital team that supports our ability to lower costs and improve the quality of the services provided.
- Increasing engagement and collaboration with service departments via our model of business partnering, and through engagement with senior leadership forums.
- The establishment of coherent, inclusive governance that enables the council to build more effective and impactful engagements for residents, especially through digital channels.

During 2024/25 we will then continue by:

- Continuing to improve our approach to service management to achieve a fully optimised service that has the ability to continually adapt and learn.
- Finding more ways to link the services provided by Slough Borough Council with partners and to find ways to amplify what they do to have an even greater impact on the lives of residents.

The work taking place in 2025/26 will evolve over the coming year or so and will be heavily dependent on what other key strategies set for the future state of the council. These include:

- Data Strategy

- Customer Services Strategy
- Slough Borough Councils Property Strategy
- Slough's approach to hybrid working

Measuring Success

During 2022 the ICT & Digital team started working on a monthly service report to enable all stakeholders to track our progress against the most important areas of what we do. Our plan for 2023/24 is to:

- Continue to evolve the service reporting we undertake with increasingly more of it being linked to near real time dashboards and analytics that are available all the time, not just in the scheduled reporting.
- Continue phase one of the modernisation programme as defined in the Cabinet report of March 2022.
- Achieve ITIL maturity level 4 for IT service management.
- Finalise the approach to corporate data architecture systems.
- Establish the new governance and complete the initial re-design of services provided by digital channels.

During 2024/25 we plan to:

- Achieve ITIL maturity level 5 for IT service management
- Establish Slough Borough Council as the key enabling organisation in Slough in terms of residents accessing what they need from all service providers in the area.

Performance measures for 2025/26 will be identified over the coming 12-18 months as a clearer picture of Slough Borough Council's future state emerges.

Glossary

AI – Artificial Intelligence. Applies to systems endowed with the intellectual processes characteristic of humans, such as the ability to reason, discover meaning, generalise, or learn from experience.

Cloud (computing) - The practice of using a network of remote servers hosted on the internet to store, manage, and process data, rather than a local server or a personal computer.

Data Asset – Any data, held in any format, that is valuable to an organisation and the work it undertakes.

ERP – Enterprise Resource Planning. A system providing core back-office services such as finance, HR etc.

Hybrid (working) – A working pattern that includes working from a range of locations, typically with the most time spent in an office or working from home.

ICT – Information & Communications Technology

ITIL – Information Technology Infrastructure Library. This framework describes processes, procedures, tasks, and checklists which are neither organisation-specific nor technology-specific but can be applied by an organisation toward strategy, delivering value, and maintaining a minimum level of competency.

ITSM – IT Service Management. A generic term for the operating processes undertaken by a technology team.

Machine learning - The use and development of computer systems that can learn and adapt without following explicit instructions, by using algorithms and statistical models to analyse and draw inferences from patterns in data.

Omnichannel - Denoting or relating to a type of customer interaction which integrates the different methods of contact available to residents (e.g. online, in person, or by phone).

ROI – return on investment (model). A way of explaining how increased investment can save money in the medium and longer term, typically over 3 or 5 years.

SSO - single sign on. The use of a single set of credentials to login to multiple services.

SOPs – standard operating procedures. The agreed processes to undertake key tasks across the team that must be followed for consistency.

Sources

1. Top 4 Signs Your IT Service Management is Not Mature

([IT Service Management Maturity Assessment: 4-Step Checklist \(infopulse.com\)](#))

2. Five Easy Pieces by Piers Campbell, a leading thinker on adaptive strategy and emergent planning.

(<https://www.linkedin.com/newsletters/6967462100361170945/>)

3. Slough Borough Council Customer Service Strategy (2020)

4. Initial ICT Improvement Programme (Cabinet meeting - March 2022)

(<https://democracy.slough.gov.uk/documents/s68217/IT%20Improvement%20Programme.pdf>)

5. ICT & Digital Update – Progress and next steps for the proper functioning of IT at SBC (Cabinet meeting – December 2022)

(<https://democracy.slough.gov.uk/documents/s74083/Report%20and%20Appendices.pdf>)

6. <https://www.iese.org.uk>

(<https://iese.org.uk/downloads/white-paper-digital-in-local-government/>)

Slough Borough Council

REPORT TO: Cabinet

DATE: 20th March 2023

SUBJECT: **Contract Award for Voluntary and Community Sector Contracts**

CHIEF OFFICER: Marc Gadsby, Executive Director People (Adults)

CONTACT OFFICER: Jane Senior – Associate Director People Strategy and Commissioning
Diana Balsom – Interim Commissioning Manager

WARD(S): ALL

PORTFOLIO: Cllr Natasha Pantelic, Social Care and Public Health

KEY DECISION: YES

EXEMPT: **Part Exempt** –Appendices 1 and 2 are exempt as it contains the following category of exempt information as specified in Paragraph 3, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, namely: “Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)”

DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN: YES

APPENDICES :

Appendix 1 **EXEMPT** Successful Bidder Lots 1 and 2

Appendix 2 **EXEMPT** Pricing Schedules Lots 1 and 2

Appendix 3(A) Performance Targets Lot 1
Appendix 3 (B) Performance Targets Lot 2

Appendix 4 New Service Model

Appendix 5 Equalities Impact Assessments Lots 1 and 2

1.1 Summary and Recommendations

This report seeks approval to award contracts to two providers for the delivery of voluntary and community sector and information and advice services following a procurement by open tender. Contracts will commence in July 2023 and will be for a period of three years plus two optional extensions of one year each, subject to satisfactory performance. Contracts will be funded through the Better Care Fund and the Public Health grant.

1.2 Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Agree to the award of a contract to Supplier A for the delivery of Lot 1: Voluntary and Community Sector services for the period of 5 years (three- year contract plus two optional extensions of one year each subject to satisfactory performance) from 1st July 2023 to 30th June 2028. This will be at a total contract value of £2,041,255.
2. Agree to the award of a contract to Supplier B for the delivery of Lot 2: Information and Advice Services for the period of 5 years (three- year contract plus two optional extensions of one year each subject to satisfactory performance) from 1st July 2023 to 30th June 2028. This will be at a total contract value of £600,000.
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director for People (Adults) in consultation with the Lead Member for Public Health and Social Care to complete the final negotiations and enter into contracts with Supplier A and Supplier B.

1.3 Reason:

To provide contracts for two remodelled services for voluntary and community sector and advice and information services which more fully align services to the strategic aims of the Council and its partners, significantly reduce demand for adult social care and deliver best value.

Commissioner Review

The commissioners are content with this report

Report

2. Introductory paragraph

- 2.1 In November 2022, Cabinet approved the re-tendering of voluntary and community sector and information and advice services in two lots to replace existing provision.

Lot 1 – The Voluntary and Community Sector Service

Lot 2 – Advice and Information Service.

- 2.2 This report sets out the results of the tendering and evaluation process and recommends contract award to two suppliers to deliver against the agreed model.

2.3 Remodelling the Voluntary and Community service provision as per the agreed model supports the following key priorities:

Slough Corporate Plan 2022-25

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

An environment that helps residents live more independent, healthier and safer lives.

Slough Wellbeing Strategy 2020-25

Priority 2: Integration:

Increase the number of people living independently at home and decrease the proportion living in care homes

Increase the number of people who are managing their own health and care needs.

Slough Health and Social Care Plan

More integrated and pre-emptive service offers

- Expand community and voluntary sector role in social care
- Improve strength based and personalised ways of working in social care.

Options considered:

2.4 In the report to Cabinet in November 22, a number of procurement options were considered and presented.

Option	Pros	Cons
<p>Option 1</p> <p>Do not procure new services to replace existing provision when contracts expire.</p>	<p>Not undertaking a procurement would reduce pressure placed upon teams engaged in procurement activity.</p>	<p>The preventative offer within Slough would be severely compromised at a time of increasing demand and would increase pressure on statutory services.</p> <p>The Council would be failing in its statutory responsibilities under the Care Act 2014 in respect of promoting wellbeing, preventing the need for care and support and providing good quality information and advice.</p> <p>Savings would not be delivered to the Council as</p>

		the service is funded through the Better Care Fund and Public Health grants – although on balance, these funds could potentially be invested elsewhere.
<p>Option 2</p> <p>Issue a contract extension for both services as they are currently arranged.</p>	<p>This would ensure continuity of service delivery to local people provided by the voluntary and community sector, including vulnerable local people in particular.</p>	<p>There is no clear legal justification for issuing a contract extension. A revised model has been developed for the voluntary and community sector which takes account of performance information, feedback from stakeholders and other data concerning demand at the front door.</p> <p>This approach would not test the market and the Council could not be certain that best value is being achieved.</p> <p>The carers service element of the current contract is not currently performing to the standard required – although carers accessing services do value them.</p>
<p>Option 3</p> <p>Agree to procure two new services for the voluntary and community sector and information and advice by competitive process and to bringing the carers service in house.</p> <p>Recommended</p>	<p>The new model takes account of performance information, stakeholder feedback and other data concerning demand at the front door to enhance the preventative offer and to address deficits in performance – partially due to the current model.</p> <p>Addresses a conflict of interest where the infrastructure organisation also delivers services.</p>	<p>This route places pressure upon teams engaged in procurement activity. It will be important to ensure that elements of the carer service which are working well are not disrupted through bringing back in house.</p>

	Implements a competitive process in order to deliver best value for the Council.	
<p>Option 4</p> <p>Procure services as one lot either as a single provider, or lead provider / sub-contractor model</p>	<p>The Council would be required to contract manage one supplier rather than two.</p> <p>However, under a lead provider model, officers would be expected to retain oversight of performance of the sub-contractor and to drill down through ‘the supply chain’ to obtain more detailed information and challenge performance as necessary. Any gain in officer time therefore would be minimal.</p>	<p>It was considered that this model would limit the market with different organisations having different areas of expertise and not necessarily having an appetite to enter into lead provider/ sub-contractor arrangements and causing an unnecessary complication in the procurement process.</p> <p>One provider could bid for both lots if they wish and , and under these circumstances it would be reasonable to expect that economies of scale in respect of overheads, would be reflected in the price.</p> <p>A similar arrangement was previously in place but did not work satisfactorily and the provider delivering information and advice gave notice and exited the arrangement.</p>

2.5 Option 3 was considered the most suitable option for securing new services through competition and bringing carers services back in house.

Background

2.6 The voluntary and community sector plays an important role in supporting the Council and its partners in delivering against key local priorities and meeting its statutory responsibilities in respect of the Care Act 2014. This includes promoting wellbeing, preventing the need for care and support, and providing good quality information and advice.

2.7 Key elements of new service provision are set out in the table below:

Lot 1 Voluntary and Community Sector		
Service Area	Components	Rationale for Inclusion
Capacity Building / Infrastructure	Overheads	Usual overhead requirements relating to the operation of a service.
	Volunteers	<p>To recruit and retain volunteers, provide appropriate, cost-effective training and a matching service with VCS organisations and activities across the borough, including Council led activities. To advertise new volunteering opportunities.</p> <p>To support the Council in developing a Volunteer Strategy and the likely need for volunteers and how they might appropriately be deployed.</p> <p>To provide a training package for new volunteers and the completion of DBS checks where appropriate.</p> <p>To obtain feedback on the volunteer experience and areas for improvement.</p> <p>To routinely report on numbers of new volunteers, number of volunteers overall, reasons why people become volunteers or decide not to continue as a volunteer.</p>
	Public Facing Directory of Services and Signposting.	<p>The extensive feedback collated as part of the re-commissioning process shows that many professionals are often not aware of the range of voluntary and community sector groups which are available in the local area.</p> <p>The provider will be required to further develop and maintain and publish on its website a directory of local services (currently being developed by Health).</p> <p>This will include whether VCS groups welcome volunteers, which will directly link into the matching service.</p>
	Enhance the skills of voluntary organisations through a programme of core training	Ensure that VCS organisations understand how to legally and safely operate a voluntary organisation – trustees, insurance, registration with the charity commission etc.

	Enhance the viability of voluntary organisations through supporting to bid for non- Council funds	Target funding to be secured each year to support viability and sustainability of the VCS organisations. To report back on which organisations have been supported. To advertise this service on its website.
	Implement a Quality Assurance Programme (Slough Quality Projects accreditation).	To ensure that services provided by the VCS adhere to clear quality standards and have due regard for matters such as safeguarding, maintenance of appropriate boundaries etc.
Front Door	Increase the preventative offer at the ASC front door.	Embed up to 2 community connector roles -employed by the provider but embedded in the ASC Front Door. They will provide clear advice and information on how to access support from the VCS to prevent and delay need. The community connector will have access to a wide range of provision through the directory of services above. Community Connectors will gather information around need and any gaps in provision, to feed into the One Slough bidding process (see below), which will in turn prevent or delay the need for care and support.
	Increase the preventative offer upon discharge from hospital.	Embed one community connector role-employed by the provider but embedded within the hospital social work team. They will provide clear information and advice on how to access support from the VCS to prevent or delay the need for Adult Social Care. Community Connectors will have access to information about a wide range of provision, which in turn will help people access this and prevent the need for care and support. The community connector/ carer advisor will be required to work flexibly across the front door and hospital social work teams to ensure that cover arrangements are provided for annual leave and so on. Community Connectors working within

		the hospital social work team, will also support and advise new and existing carers on the type of support which is available in the community and also make appointments with the Carers Co-ordinator as necessary (see below)
Slough Community Fund	<p>Oversee the allocation and monitoring of the Slough Community Fund in line with agreed local aims and objectives agreed by local stakeholders (Health, the Council and the Coproduction network).</p> <p>Ensuring funding is matched to areas identified at the ASC Front Door and through Social Prescribing Networks.</p>	<p>Match funding to areas identified at the ASC Front Door and through social prescribing networks (Council and PCN) as being gaps or requiring additional capacity.</p> <p>Capture data on this – so that funding for groups is evidence based and data driven and informs bidding decisions.</p> <p>Ensure wide advertising of bidding opportunities to secure the widest reach across local voluntary and community sector organisation to ensure that local need is met.</p> <p>Ensures flexibility in approach and enables funding to be targeted at need.</p> <p>The new service will increase the amount of funding available for this purpose.</p> <p>Services aimed at young people and families will also be commissioned as part of the fund, for example services for young carers.</p>

Lot 2 Information and Advice		
Advice and Information	<p>Income Maximisation</p> <p>Advice and Information:</p> <p>Housing Adult Social Care Legal Relationships Benefits and Tax Credits. Signposting to VCS Cost of Living</p>	<p>The new service will strengthen the advice and information offer in respect of social care in accordance with the Care Act 2014.</p> <p>The service will increase the number of face-to-face sessions which are undertaken.</p> <p>The service will maintain the use of volunteers to support the core service and provide adequate training to enable them to fulfil this role.</p> <p>The service will draw upon the Directory of Services produced by the Infrastructure Provider to signpost to the VCS.</p>

		<p>The service will liaise closely with the contract management team and share detailed data concerning accommodation advice sought</p> <p>The contract management team will liaise closely with Housing Need and with ASC to feed in areas for development and obtain information.</p> <p>Undertake detailed casework.</p> <p>Strengthen links with Housing and with Adult Social Care.</p>
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2.8 New service provision was shaped through extensive partnership working and consultation as described in the report to Cabinet in November 22. There are a number of key benefits to the new model:

- Promotion and development of new and existing organisations aligned to local need – addressing ‘cold spots’ where demand is not being met.
- An enhanced volunteer pathway and matching approach to provide reciprocal benefits for both volunteers the organisations they support.
- An ability to evidence impact through better data collection and to thereby strengthen bids for national and local funding.
- The ability of the Advice and Information service to provide effective housing advice that supports the housing team in a more formal way has been introduced.
- The introduction of Community Connectors at the Adult Social Care front door and within Hospital Social work teams, allows non-care, non-safeguarding work to be diverted into community support, using the Directory of Services, thereby reducing demand on the social care teams and formal care interventions.
- Underpinning the model is system networking and the collection of data that demonstrates:
 - The level and distribution of preventable demand
 - The effectiveness of community interventions
 - ‘Cold spots’ where demand is not being met
 - Strategic and tactical responses

. Further information is contained at Appendix 3 (A) and Appendix 4.

Market Engagement

2.9 A virtual on-line market engagement event was advertised on 21 October 2022 and

scheduled for 31 October 2022 to assess the market conditions and readiness for a revised service specification during November 2022.

- 2.10 Due to the small number of queries, individual discussions were held with 4 potential bidders to talk through the vision for future service delivery and collate provider feedback. The small number of interested parties demonstrates a limited market for services that are reliant on good local knowledge.
- 2.11 New service specifications were developed and included all of the service improvement areas that were highlighted. These specifications were published with the procurement documents.

The Procurement Process

- 2.12 The procurement for the new services has been conducted in line with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the council's Contract Procedure Rules with assistance from Procurement and HB Public Law.
- 2.13 Notification of the tender was issued through the SE Shared Services E Portal.
- 2.14 As part of the tender response, bidders were required to respond to a separate quality questionnaire for each of the 2 lots, as well as submitting separate pricing schedules (again one for each Lot), alongside their required declarations and other contractual documentation returns. Bidders were advised that the evaluation would be based on an 80/20 quality/price ratio for each of the 2 lots.
- 2.15 As part of the submission, there were 4 interested parties and during the clarification phase 3 clarification queries were raised.
- 2.16 By the deadline of 12 noon on 11 January 2023, only one bid per each lot was submitted which has now been evaluated and the pricing matrix validated by Finance.
- 2.17 As a 'lessons learnt exercise' it is planned to contact the remaining non-bidding suppliers who had expressed an interest in this tender but decided not to submit a bid. Feedback will be used to inform future tendering exercises.

Quality Evaluation

- 2.18 Bidders were required to complete 10 questions for Lot 1, and 7 questions for Lot 2 in relation to the quality of the service. Bidders were informed within the guidance notes provided the weightings applied to each question and how the overall tender would be evaluated and awarded.
- 2.19 The weighting that was applied was 80% quality and 20% price.
- 2.20 An evaluation panel undertook independent scoring of the Quality Method statements for both lots. The panel comprised the following members:

- 1 x officer from Frimley ICB
- 1 x officer from SBC Communities Team
- 1 x officer from Public Health

- 1 x officer from SBC Contracts team
- 1 x officer from SBC ASC operations team
- 2 x officers from SBC People, Strategy and Commissioning

- 2.21 The pricing schedules were validated via the Procurement Team. As there was only 1 submission per contract, the maximum price score of 20 % was awarded to those suppliers.
- 2.22 During the evaluation of the bids, a number of clarification questions were raised by the panel to Lot 1 Provider A to obtain further clarity on the application of proposed toolkits and software.

Evaluation Outcome

- 2.23 The Quality Method Statement score was 60 for Lot 1 and 72 for Lot 2.
- 2.24 The pricing is set out in Exempt Appendix 2.

Market Conditions

- 2.25 Whilst there was some interest from non-local service providers, they failed to bid for the service. Their feedback at the time suggested that the services and funding were too small. The organisations will be contacted to determine the reason for their lack of submission which will improve our understanding of the market.

Preparation for the Next Stage

- 2.26 Further to approval of the recommendation to award the contract(s), commissioners will work with the successful bidders to deliver the implementation plans submitted as part of the procurement exercise.

Contract Monitoring

- 2.27 The services will be monitored via a formal contract management approach at quarterly intervals. The Providers will be responsible for monitoring and evaluation based on the service specification, monitoring performance against agreed targets and outcomes, and demonstrating the impact of the provision.
- 2.28 As developmental approaches to remodelled provision, the first year of operation for both services will provide a benchmark for targets to be improved upon in the following years of the contracts.
- 2.29 In response to the difficulty in basing target numbers on the fluctuating needs and demands experienced during the Covid pandemic over the last three years, the provider was invited to specify year one targets based on their operating model as determined within the pricing schedule.
This took into account the demand data set out for year 2021/22

- 2.30 Contract monitoring will be supported by a workbook based upon the 'Measuring the Impact' sections of the services key components as listed within the specification. In addition, we expect providers to report back on:
- Progress towards achieving outcomes and the difference interventions have made
 - Accountability for any objectives/outcomes not reached
 - Organisation update including on governance, staffing and volunteers
 - Planning to achieve outcomes and overcoming challenges faced
 - Case studies of groups/individuals accessing the Service, demonstrating how they benefited from it
- 2.31 Providers will also be expected to feedback on the quality of the Service(s) as well as demonstrating how this feedback is being used to improve service delivery. Quality feedback and direction for improvements will be enhanced by regular stakeholder feedback events that aim to give a voice to Slough's VCS groups and those who may use or support them. These stakeholder events aim to provide feedback in a supportive environment from a grassroots level allowing wider integration and co-production within service development.
- 2.32 In addition, an annual Contract Review Meeting will be undertaken - evaluating performance with the Provider, which may lead to the agreement of variations in the contract. Reports will be made annually to Cabinet concerning performance.
- 2.33 The Provider will also comply with any other reasonable instructions, guidance, monitoring, and reporting obligations requested.

3.0 Financial implications

- 3.1 The delivery of voluntary and community sector services, including the provision of information and advice, support the agreed priorities of the Council and the wider Health and Social Care Partnership. Hence the ongoing increased funding from the Better Care Fund to reinforce its commitment to working with the voluntary and community sector to deliver priorities that meet the obligations from the Care Act 2014 and Health and Social Care Act 2012.
- 3.2 The budget for Provider 1 and Provider 2 over the period - 2023/28 is £2,641,255 over five years, £528,251 annually. This service is entirely grant funded from an allocation from the Better Care Fund (**BCF**) - £338,251 and Public Health Grant - £190,000 sufficient to fund the five-year contract subject to ongoing grant allocation.
- 3.3 The service provided by the voluntary sector is closely linked to achievement of ASC Front Door initiatives being explored as part of the ASC Transformation Programme which is required to deliver savings of £4,962,000 to the Adults Social Care budget over 23/24.
- 3.4 Both the BCF and Public Health are annual grants to the council and as such there is a risk to certainty of available funding of this contract being dependent on external factors. It is recommended that the annual value of the contract will have to adjust to

reflect any material changes to any funding allocation, including aligning the contract with the grant conditions if possible.

- 3.5 The bidders have also described how they will attract additional funding into the service.
- 3.6 The pricing schedule received from both bidders is within budget. This equates to:
- £408,149 annually for the first 5 years for lot 1 and
 - £120,000 annually for the first 5 years for lot 2.

Please see Exempt Appendix 2 for further detail.

4.0 Legal implications

- 4.1 Section 2 of the Care Act 2014 places a duty on local authorities to provide or arrange for services, facilities or resources which will prevent or delay the development of, or reduce the needs for care and support of, adults in its area. In performing that duty, a local authority must have regard to:
- a) the importance of identifying services, facilities and resources already available in the authority's area and the extent to which the authority could involve or make use of them in performing that duty.
 - b) the importance of identifying adults in the authority's area with needs for care and support which are not being met (by the authority or otherwise).
 - c) the importance of identifying carers in the authority's area with needs for support which are not being met (by the authority or otherwise).
- 4.2 The Care Act 2014 Section 5 imposes a duty on local authorities to shape an effective marketplace of services to meet care and support needs in the local area. The Act describes how local authorities will manage the market to drive innovation, choice, quality, and continuous improvement whilst ensuring value and promoting Wellbeing. The Act places the following duties for adult social care commissioning authorities:
- To promote wellbeing for people with care and support needs.
 - Focus on outcomes that are important to people and the delivery of person-centred care.
 - Outcomes based commissioning to develop services for people, carers, and the wider population to achieve wellbeing alongside meeting care and support needs.
- 4.3 Duties in the Act include the following commissioning functions:
- Co-production with stakeholders in service design.
 - Market engagement and shaping to influence local services on offer and to address barriers faced by the market in service delivery.
 - Integration with local partners to achieve population-based outcomes to improve wellbeing
- 4.4 Section 12 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 introduced a duty at Section 2B of the NHS Act 2006 for the council to take appropriate steps to improve the health of the people who live in its area.

- 4.5 Section 6C of the National Service Act 2006 as amended by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the Local Authorities (Public Health Functions and Entry to Premises by Local Healthwatch Representatives) Regulations 2013 provide for the discharge of public health functions by Local Authorities.
- 4.6 The Health and Social Care Act 2012 introduced duties for Health and Wellbeing Boards in relation to JSNAs- Joint Strategic Needs Assessments. The purpose of JSNAs is to improve the health and wellbeing of the local population and reduce health inequalities. A product of the JSNA is the evidence-based priorities for commissioning, which will improve outcomes for the local population, reduce health inequalities and address the wider determinants of poor health. Prevention, support to carers and working with local voluntary groups to strengthen community resilience to manage own care are all priorities listed in the JSNA.
- 4.7 The contracts will enable the Council to comply with its duties under the Health and Social Care Act 2012. The draft terms and conditions of contract were published with the procurement documents and HB Public Law shall support the Council by finalising the contracts with Supplier A and B, in line with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.
- 4.8 The procurement for the new services has been conducted in line with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the council's Contract Procedure Rules with assistance from Procurement and HB Public Law.
- 4.9 Paragraph 8.2 of the Contract Procedure Rules states that where a competition has been undertaken and only a single bid has been received, the award of a Contract subject to an appropriate review being undertaken and an audit trail being available for inspection, can be approved by an Executive Director and or Cabinet.

5.0 Risk management implications

- 5.1 Overall, the risks associated with contracting as per the new model can be themed as follows.

Risk	Assessment of Risk	Mitigation	Residual Risk
Mobilisation will not take place on time	Medium	The risk attached to the Lot 1 provider recruiting new staff in a timely way is offset by utilising existing staff members	Low
Duplication of existing services through the Slough Community	Medium	The Lot 1 Provider will be required to further develop and maintain a directory of services which will ensure all provision in the borough is mapped and this will reduce	Low

Fund element of the contract		the risk of duplication of provision going forward.	
Lack of alignment with strategic aims of the council and its partners.	Medium	The new model allows for better data collation and wider networking across the system to inform service priorities	Low
Poor performance outcomes	Medium	There will be clauses in the contract terms and conditions covering breaches and under-performance.	Low

5.0 Equality implications

- 5.1 Please see the Equalities Impact Assessment at Appendix 5
- 5.2 The bidders were required to set out how they will meet equalities requirements through the tendering process. This includes meeting the diverse cultural and language needs within the borough and seeking to recruit people with a lived experience.

6.0 Procurement implications

- 6.1 The following sets out the procurement timetable for both services:

Procurement Stage	Timetable
Tender documents issued	09 12 22
Clarifications deadline	22 12 22
Bid deadline	11 01 23
Evaluations Complete	27 01 23
Internal approval process	03 02 23 – 09 03 23
Approval for Contract Award	20 03 23 (Cabinet)
Notification of contract award decision	27 03 23
Call In	
Standstill period	07/04/2023
Mobilisation	08 04 23 – 30 06 23
Contracts go live date	01 07 23

7 Workforce implications

- 7.1 Officers do not believe that there will be staff TUPE implications for the two new services. However, TUPE is likely to apply to the Carers activity which will return in-house from July 1, 2023. The commissioning and operational teams are working with

HR to support the process in a timely way, as well as integrating the change into the Front Door Transformation piece.

8.0 Property implications

8.1 There are no property implications.

9.0 Background Papers

None

Exempt Appendix 1 – Successful Bidders

Contains exempt information and is in Part II of the agenda

Exempt Appendix 2 - Pricing Schedule for Lots 1 and Lot 2.

Contains exempt information and is in Part II of the agenda

Appendix Three (A)

Overview of targets

Targets Lot 1: VCS Service

It has been difficult to establish an accurate baseline for activity over the last few years due to the impact of the Covid pandemic, and the extreme impact it had on the voluntary sector. In addition, the revised service introduces new requirements of the provider. Therefore, we are treating the service as developmental, and we will establish a revised baseline at the end of year one based on actual performance. These revised baselines will be used to inform service development and improvement from year 2 onwards. Tenderers were asked to submit their proposed targets for year one based on the funding formula they have used within the pricing schedule. For the incumbent, this would allow them to reflect the financial impacts of the changed model, which specifically ask for 3 new roles.

Area	Proposed target Year 1
Developing VCS groups	
Number of new community groups supported	20
total community groups supported	120
Number of groups supported into accreditation	20
Amount of external funding achieved	750,000
Developing volunteers	
Number of new volunteers	300
total number of volunteers	700
number of core training sessions delivered	60
Directory of Services	
total number of hits	15,000
total number of local VCS groups on the site	100
Front Door work	
Number of ASC front door calls diverted from social work teams	744
Number of hospital discharge referrals linked into community support	480

Lot 1 – Quality and Impact Indicators

The following KPIs will support the provider and commissioners to understand the success and challenges of the key stages in service provision and development. They will be used in combination with the predicted targets outlined within the pricing schedule to steer the contract from year 2 onwards.

A. Directory of Services

Total hits	measurement per quarter plus culminative total
Top 5 searches by issue	“
Top 5 hits by issue	“
Top 5 searches by geography	“
Top 5 gaps by issue	“

Impact of promotional campaign descriptor/date: Impact on searches; Impact of hits

Qtly survey- end user satisfaction: % reporting ease of use;% able to find support

Qtly survey -community group feedback: Increased demand experienced; ability to meet demand

B. VCS Support

VCS group recruitment dashboard indicating per qtr.:

- nos. of new groups expressing an interest
- nos dropping out before training/setting up and why
- Nos. of new groups undertaking training
- nos dropping out of training/setting up and why
- nos. of new groups setting up
- total number of groups supported
- nos of groups sustaining activity for 3/6/12/18/24/24+ months

Nos of New and returning group training delivered per qtr.: By theme; In house/Subsidised/Free

Total delivered/Culminative

Nos reporting positive impact of training post session; after 3, 6 12 months

Nos of groups achieving external funding by theme and target groups – per qtr. and culminative.

Nos of funding bids supported, Nos succeeding

Total funding achieved

C Volunteer Development

recruitment dashboard indicating per qtr.:

nos. of new volunteers expressing an interest and nos applying

nos recruited/nos unsuccessful /nos exiting- and why

Nos. of new vols undertaking core training and nos exiting mid training – and why

nos. of new vols completing core training and nos exiting post training – and why
total nos of new vols trained
nos of new vols matched with placement and nos exiting – and why

numbers of new volunteers sustaining placements for 3, 6, 12, 18, 24 months
reason for exiting

numbers of new and returning volunteers trained in house, via subsidised or free offers and total delivered
Nos reporting positive impact of training post session; after 3, 6 12 months

Impact on the wellbeing of peoples supported through SBC 'in-house' volunteers
nos of vols in placements for in house projects
nos of people supported linked with other support groups via DoS (where applicable) and % indicating a positive impact through this intervention
nos of people supported taking up a voluntary role and % indicating a positive impact
Nos of people supported involved in Borough -wide initiatives and % indicating a positive impact

D. Community Fund

Nos of applications by theme, nos approved, and total funding agreed

Impact of funding by project; theme; Target nos; Nos reached; Anticipated benefits.
% of recipients reporting benefits achieved

E. Networking Activities and feedback opportunities

Aims and outcomes by:
VCS sector- wide/ VCS by theme/VCS by geography
Physical meetings/Online meetings/Hybrid meetings
Newsletters/social media/email/post
other

Appendix Three (B)

Overview of targets

Targets Lot 2: VCS Advice and Information Service

The baseline numbers below represent activity undertaken over the specified 2021/22 period by current provision. As a new long-term service, we will establish a revised baseline at the end of year one based on actual performance. These revised baselines will be used to inform service development and improvement from year 2 onwards.

Area	Baseline 3 Nov 21 to 30 Sept 22
total numbers of people supported	1000
number requiring case management	962
Total income generated for people	£300,082

Lot 2 – Quality and Impact Indicators

Nos accessing support, by theme and by single intervention or casework approach

Source of referral

Where people are signposted

Where people are formally referred into a service

Nos of cases positively resolved, by theme

Income maximised by nos supported, total £ achieved and source of £

Demographic profile broken down by age, sex, gender identity, disability/long term condition, ethnicity

Appendix 4 Diagram of New Service Model



Equality Impact Assessment

Directorate: People Strategy & Commissioning People (Adults)								
Service: Voluntary and Community Sector								
Name of Officer/s completing assessment: Jane Senior								
Date of Assessment: 30/09/2022								
Name of service/function or policy being assessed: Voluntary and Community Sector								
1.	<p>What are the aims, objectives, outcomes, purpose of the policy, service change, function that you are assessing?</p> <p>The purpose of this Equality Impact Needs Assessment is to assess the possible effects of Slough Borough Council procuring a new VCS Infrastructure Service and Advice and Information Service in place of existing provision.</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>Services are currently commissioned by the People Strategy and Commissioning Team sitting with the People Adults directorate.</p> <p>Current services are operated by Slough CVS and Slough Citizens Advice East Berkshire under contract.</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> <table border="1" data-bbox="232 1102 2011 1414"> <thead> <tr> <th>Characteristic</th> <th>Positive , Negative, Neutral or Unknown Impact</th> <th>Rationale for Assessment</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Age</td> <td>Positive</td> <td>The information and Advice service is available to all adults who require advice in respect of a number of different areas, including housing advice, care and support, income</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Characteristic	Positive , Negative, Neutral or Unknown Impact	Rationale for Assessment	Age	Positive	The information and Advice service is available to all adults who require advice in respect of a number of different areas, including housing advice, care and support, income
Characteristic	Positive , Negative, Neutral or Unknown Impact	Rationale for Assessment						
Age	Positive	The information and Advice service is available to all adults who require advice in respect of a number of different areas, including housing advice, care and support, income						

		<p>maximisation and so on, Whilst it is not intended that children will access the service themselves – they are likely to benefit from advice and information which is sought on their behalf by parents or carers.</p> <p>The VCS Infrastructure organisation administer grants for a range of VCS organisations which will directly benefit children and adults.</p>
Disability	Positive	People with a disability will be able to access and positively benefit from both services. .
Gender Reassignment:	Positive	People seeking or having been through gender reassignment will be able to access and benefit from both services.
Marriage and Civil Partnership:	Positive/ Neutral	People who are in a marriage or civil partnership will be able to access and benefit from both services
Pregnancy and maternity:	Positive/ Neutral	Those who are pregnant will be able to access and benefit from both services
Race:	Positive	<p>Both services seek to reach all elements of the community. Culturally specific provision is commissioned through the VCS Infrastructure organisation as appropriate. Refugees are able to access Advice and Information services.</p> <p>A gap identified through engagement relates to translation services. This could be met through recruiting volunteers with language skills as part of the Provider 1 specification.</p>
Religion and Belief:	Positive	People of any religion and belief are able to access and benefit from services.
Sexual orientation:	Positive	People of any sexual orientation are able to access and benefit from services.
Other: Mental Health,	Positive	<p>The service will be positive for two different additional groups:</p> <p>Mental Health: Preventative . Community Connectors will be able to access a range of provision within the community and their feedback on gaps in service will influence the bidding requirements for the Slough Community Fund.</p>

4.	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.	Access to VCS and Advice and Information Services	
5.	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?	There will be no negative impact.	
6.	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).	Data concerning uptake of provision is monitored and has been assessed.	
7.	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>The recommissioning of the VCS has been considered by a project group comprising representatives from the following: People Strategy and Commissioning, People (Adults) Operations, Public Health, the Co-production Network, PCNs Frimley ICB and Public Health.</p> <p>Engagement has been undertaken with; Social Workers, Carers, Volunteers, the Co-production Network, the Communities team, Housing Needs, PCN Social Prescribers.</p>	
8.	Have you considered the impact the policy might have on local community relations?	<p>Services will be tendered fairly and competitively. There should not be any impact upon community relations. The amount of available funding remains the same. The Community Grants programme aligns with health, social care, public strategic priorities.</p> <p>.</p>	

9.	<p>What plans do you have in place, or are developing, that will mitigate any likely identified negative impacts? For example, what plans, if any, will be put in place to reduce the impact?</p> <p>Appropriate mobilisation period. A requirement to collect equalities data. Communications out.</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>Robust evaluation of bids. Effective contract management.</p>

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

Timetable for Implementation

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

Action	Target Groups	Lead Responsibility	Outcomes/Success Criteria	Monitoring & Evaluation	Target Date	Progress to Date
Contract management	All	Contract Management	Services delivered in accordance with the specification including collecting relevant monitoring data.	Quarterly	October 23	NA

Name: Jane senior
Signed:(Person completing the EIA)

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

Date:

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