

Date of issue: Friday, 7 July 2023

<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>	
	Councillor Smith	Leader of the Council – Improvement & Recovery
	Councillor Chahal	Deputy Leader of the Council – Financial Oversight, Council Assets, Procurement and Revenue & Benefits
	Councillor I. Ahmed	Leisure, Community Cohesion, Regulation, Enforcement and Planning
	Councillor Bedi	Transport, Housing, Highways, The Environment and Environmental Services
	Councillor Kelly	Education, Children's Services, Lifelong Skills and Governance
	Councillor Muvvala	Public Protection, Customer Service, I.T and Young Futures
	Councillor Wright	Health, Social Care and Wellbeing
<b>DATE AND TIME:</b>	<b>MONDAY, 17TH JULY, 2023 AT 6.30 PM</b>	
<b>VENUE:</b>	<b>COUNCIL CHAMBER - OBSERVATORY HOUSE, 25 WINDSOR ROAD, SL1 2EL</b>	
<b>DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER: (for all enquiries)</b>	<b>NICHOLAS PONTONE  07749 709 868</b>	

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>
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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 19th June 2023	1 - 4	-
3.	Improvement & Recovery Update	5 - 12	All
4.	<b>Approval of annual business plan for Slough Children First Limited (SCF)</b>	13 - 70	All
5.	Early Help Partnership Strategy	71 - 118	All
6.	<b>Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) updated Policy and Use</b>	119 - 164	All
7.	<b>Approval to Appoint Supplier(s) of DSO Vehicles</b>	To Follow	All
8.	<b>Procurement of Temporary Labour Contract</b>	165 - 172	All
9.	Library 2023/24 Operating Model Performance Report	173 - 190	All
10.	<b>A4 Cycle Lane (Huntercombe Lane to Uxbridge Road)</b>	To Follow	All
11.	Exclusion of Press and Public	-	-
	<i>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).</i>		

## PART II

12.	<b>Approval to Appoint Supplier(s) of DSO Vehicles - Appendix</b>	To Follow	-
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**Key decisions shown in bold.**

## **Press and Public**

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

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

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

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

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**Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 19th June, 2023.**

**Present:-** Councillors Smith (Chair), Chahal (Vice-Chair), I. Ahmed, Bedi, Kelly, Muvvala and Wright

**Also present:-** Councillors Mann, Matloob, Qaseem and Hulme

**Apologies for Absence:-** None.

**PART 1**

**7. Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

**8. Minutes of the Meeting held on 24th May 2023**

**Resolved –** That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2023 be approved as a correct record.

**9. Refresh of Council's Corporate Plan**

The Leader of the Council and the Executive Director, Strategy & Improvement introduced a report that set out the draft structure for a refresh of the Council's corporate plan for public consultation.

It was highlighted that the refreshed plan would be aligned to the Medium Term Financial Strategy and be the framework to guide the authority in the delivering the recovery programme and meet residents needs. The plan would come back to Cabinet and to Council in September following the consultation. It would be an update on the existing corporate plan agreed in May 2022 and take into account the new census data and progress of the Council's recovery.

The census data highlighted some of the key demographic features of Slough such as the rapid growth in population, high levels of housing density and significant levels of health inequalities. The draft priorities in the plan reflected these trends with a vision that including closing the healthy life expectancy gap, by focusing on children. Working effectively with partner agencies and voluntary and community sector would be key to successfully delivering the plan.

The Leader also highlighted the challenge the Council faced in regaining the trust and confidence of residents, as evidenced by the key findings of the survey conducted early in 2023 by the LGA, which were summarised in paragraph 2.8 of the report. For example, only 25% of Slough respondents said that they trusted SBC "a great deal or fair amount" compared to 59% of national respondents.

Councillors Mann, Hulme and Matloob asked questions of Cabinet including whether the overarching purpose of the plan should be limited to closing the health gap by focusing on children, given the wide range of other issues in the evidence base such as housing affordability and crime. Concerns were also raised about the consultation arrangements particularly whether the six-week timeframe was sufficient and how the digital divide would be addressed given that feedback was invited through the Citizen Space platform.

The Leader responded the points raised and explained the rationale for the focus on addressing health inequalities with a focus on children and young people. It was emphasised that the document was being issued for consultation and residents were encouraged to give their feedback. The Cabinet considered that a six-week consultation was sufficient for a high level consultation and any significant service changes would be subject to their own detailed consultation. Support would be available in libraries to address the issues raised about digital access.

The Cabinet agreed that the report showed a robust, evidence based approach was being taken to develop the refreshed plan and that the consultation would draw out the key issues to be considered in the reports to Cabinet and Council seeking approval of the plan. The recommendations were therefore approved.

**Resolved –**

- (a) That the draft corporate plan structure (as at Appendix A to the report) be approved for the purpose of public consultation.
- (b) That it be noted that a report would be brought back to Cabinet in September for Cabinet to recommend a final version for formal approval by Council.

**10. Berkshire Community Equipment Service (BCES) procurement**

The Lead Member for Health, Social Care & Wellbeing introduced a report on the procurement of community equipment services which supported residents to be independent at home and reduced the need for long term, high cost care.

Cabinet authority had been given in June 2022 to continue partnership working with local authorities and health bodies in Berkshire to develop a new model for the delivery of community equipment services, led by West Berkshire Council. The Lead Member summarised the work undertaken since June 2022 and the recommendation that the joint commissioning approach continue with the current contract being extended for a period of five years with the potential for a further two one-year extensions. It was considered that the current arrangement worked well and key improvements were outlined in the report that would be explored to ensure value for money and reduce costs.

## **Cabinet - 19.06.23**

The Cabinet asked a number of questions about how performance would be managed and was assured that robust arrangements were in place. It was stated that 12-months notice to exit the contract could be given if performance was not satisfactory, although it was emphasised that processes were in place to resolve any issues that arose during the period of the contract.

After due consideration the recommendations were agreed by Cabinet.

### **Resolved –**

- (a) That it be agreed that West Berkshire District Council award a contract to NRS Healthcare for a period of five years plus two optional extensions of one year each, subject to satisfactory performance, through utilising the call off option from Buckinghamshire Integrated Equipment Service Single Supplier Framework.
- (b) That the continuance of the Berkshire Community Equipment Service (BCES) Section 75 Agreement be approved to allow the partnership arrangement currently in place to continue.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.06 pm)

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## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	17 July 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Improvement and Recovery update
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Dexter Smith, Leader of the Council
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Stephen Brown
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Sarah Hayward
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Key Decision:</b>	NO
<b>Exempt:</b>	NO
<b>Decision Subject To Call In:</b>	NO
<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 – Report to Improvement and Recovery Board 25 May 2023 Appendix 2 – Report to Improvement and Recovery Board 27 April 2023 Appendix 3 – Report to Improvement and Recovery Board 23 March 2023

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report provides the quarterly update to Cabinet on progress being made by the Council against the Secretary of State Directions issued in December 2021, and the overall council recovery plan.
- 1.2 This report also sets out the current position with Government intervention. Commissioners wrote to the Secretary of State in December 2022 to provide a detailed overview of the progress made by the Council during the first year of intervention. The Secretary of State subsequently wrote to the Council on 16 March 2023.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1.3 Cabinet is requested to:
  - a) Note and comment on the progress made by the Council since the previous report in addressing the Directions of the Secretary of State;
  - b) Note the content of the Commissioners report and letters from the Secretary of State;

- c) Agree to the next steps to deliver against the issues raised by Commissioners and the Secretary of State as set out in the action plans and other workstreams that have been developed to address the Directions.

## **Reason**

- 1.4 Since the last report in February 2023 there have been three meetings of the Improvement and Recovery Board in March, April and May. Copies of the reports to these meetings are attached as Appendices.
- 1.5 The Commissioners wrote to the Secretary of State on 22 December 2022 setting out the position of the Council against the Directions during the first year of intervention <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/slough-borough-council-commissioners-second-report>.
- 1.6 The Secretary of State has subsequently responded to the report <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/slough-borough-council-ministerial-response-to-commissioners-second-report> and written to the Council <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/slough-borough-council-letter-to-chief-executive>
- 1.7 Formal meetings with Commissioners continue monthly in the form of the Improvement and Recovery Board. Quarterly updates will continue to be brought to Scrutiny and Cabinet setting out the detail of the issues reported on at these progress meetings along with additional areas of focus and activity as required by Commissioners, although other Cabinet reports will also reference progress and cabinet agendas and decisions strongly link to improvement and recovery activity.
- 1.8 This report and the appendices set out the progress made to date and the next steps to accelerate change against the journey to recovery and improvement.

## **Commissioner Review**

*“The Council is working hard to address the significant problems that it faces. The new administration and senior managers are enthusiastic, realistic, and properly focused on the tasks ahead.*

*Whist strenuous effort is essential it is not the same as success in resolving the issues. The council will want to resist the temptation to declare victory too soon or to see hard work, on its own, as being enough. Challenges remain and it is not possible yet to say that even in the medium term they will be fully resolved.*

*These challenges include but are not limited to:*

- *Winning the trust and commitment of the workforce to obtain the best from them*
- *Having a strong medium term financial strategy and a firm financial footing*
- *Implementing effective IT systems and processes*
- *Improving engagement with the public*
- *Fully engaging elected members in the running of the council*
- *Delivering improvement at pace*
- *Anticipating, preparing for and removing obstacles to the planned improvements*
- *Rising to the challenges faced by children in Slough”*

## **2. Report**

### **Introduction**

- 2.1 As previously reported Members are aware the Council received a formal direction from DLUHC made under s.15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999, including a direction that prescribed functions are to be exercised by Commissioners; and the appointment of Commissioners from 1 December 2021.
- 2.2 The Council took a number of steps, including approving a new Corporate Plan in May 2022 that set out its strategy for improvement. This is in the process of being refreshed and a report will be submitted to June Cabinet to approve a version for public consultation.
- 2.3 Commissioners have recognised that there is now a more holistic approach to reporting progress against the various action plans in place to address the Directions and this is presented in the reports attached to the Improvement and Recovery Board.
- 2.4 The Commissioners' report to the Secretary of State dated 22 December 2022 sets out the position after the first 12 months of intervention and highlights a number of outstanding concerns which are summarised in the Background section of this report.
- 2.5 The Secretary of State subsequently wrote to the council in March 2023.

### **3 Options considered**

- 3.1 It was agreed by Cabinet in November that regular public reporting on the Council's ongoing response to Government intervention was essential to ensure transparency and accountability.
- 3.2 This report enables Cabinet to formally note and comment on the next steps for the council following the issues raised in the letters from Commissioners and the Secretary of State, although the new Leader and lead members have already been closely involved with recovery and improvement activity.
- 3.3 A separate report was submitted to June Cabinet on a refresh of the Corporate Plan to set the direction of the council in light of the ongoing challenges faced.

### **Background**

- 3.4 It is now over a year since Commissioners were appointed by the Secretary of State. During that time the Council has had the opportunity to discuss with Commissioners the extent of the challenges it faces.
- 3.5 The Commissioner team has changed recently with the appointment of Gerard Curran and Denise Murray in May 2023, replacing Max Caller and Margaret Lee. Gavin Jones remains as a commissioner and has been appointed as the Lead Commissioner. A first meeting of the Improvement and Recovery Board with new Commissioners and the new Leader of the Council took place in May.
- 3.6 Cabinet agreed in November to a more holistic method of reporting progress against the Directions and this has been welcomed by Commissioners.
- 3.7 Senior level appointments including the Chief Executive, Executive Directors for Finance & Commercial and Strategy & Improvement have created more of a

sense of stability and an ability to oversee a refreshed corporate approach to financial planning, improvement and recovery.

- 3.8 The Commissioners' report to the Secretary of State sets out the position after the first 12 months of intervention and highlights a number of outstanding concerns. These include:
- Pace of progress and ongoing need for SBC to understand the implications of the Directions and the changes required, both political and officer
  - Lack of progress to promote and embed culture change
  - Challenge of achieving ambitious savings requirements combined with rising service demand particularly children's services
  - External audit and opinion for 2018/19 not yet complete and likely to raise procurement and asset concerns
  - Implications of the acquisition of the Akzo Nobel site
  - Ongoing issues with Slough Children First business plan and financial investment requirement
  - Need for a member committee on SBC companies
  - Requirement for continued financial support beyond the period of the Directions
  - Long-term planning for the viability of the council
- 3.9 It is clear that Commissioners remain extremely concerned at the pace of progress and the long term viability of the council.
- 3.10 For these reasons, the appendices to this report present an overview of the workstreams in place to address each of the Directions and how these have been reported to Commissioners.
- 3.11 To address the specific issues of concern raised by Commissioners the format of the Improvement and Recovery Board has been amended so that alongside the standard reporting on the Directions, there are now 'deep dives' into individual Directions or other recovery workstreams.
- 3.12 A separate report on the council's strategic direction in the form of a refreshed Corporate Plan was submitted to June Cabinet to confirm the continued focus on improvement and recovery and:
- Set a renewed purpose and set of strategic priorities for the council
  - Ensure greater alignment with the medium term financial strategy.
- 3.13 In addition, the Cabinet and other member forums continue to receive reports which relate to specific directions and improvements, including finance action plan updates, reports on specific company governance, updates on ICT, procurement and internal audit progress, asset disposal recommendations and updates and updates on senior officer staffing restructure.

## 4 Implications of the Recommendation

### Financial implications

4.1 This progress update report is intended to complement existing financial reporting in particular against the Financial Action Plan. Any actions arising from the recommendations will be funded from within existing budgets.

### Legal implications

4.2 On 1 December 2021 the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities made statutory directions requiring the Council to take prescribed actions and that certain functions be exercised from this date by appointed Commissioners, acting jointly or severally. The directions were extended on 1 September 2022. The directions were made under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999 due to the Council having failed to comply with its best value duty. The general duty of best value is set out in section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 and requires local authorities to “make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness”. This requires consideration of overall value, including economic, environmental and social value, when reviewing service provision. There is also a duty to consult when deciding how to fulfil the best value duty. Annex A of the directions set out the action the Council is required to take.

4.3 Annex C sets out the functions to be exercised by the Commissioners. This includes functions associated with governance and scrutiny of strategic decisions, requirements for the proper administration of financial affairs, functions associated with the oversight of collection of revenues and benefits and appointment of the three statutory governance officers and the scrutiny officer, as well as functions to define the officer structure at a senior level, determine recruitment processes and recruit relevant staff to these positions. The Explanatory Memorandum to this Direction confirms that in practice most decisions are expected to be taken by the Council, however the Directions are designed to give the Commissioners the power to tackle weaknesses identified to ensure the Council is better equipped to meet the best value requirements. Cabinet should have regard to the advice and comments of the Commissioners contained in this report.

### Risk management implications

4.4 The table below sets the key risks

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Mitigations</b>
Financial	Failure to deliver financial sustainability	Financial action plan, Capitalisation Directive and immediate to long-term savings plans
Legal	Failure to address the Directions and demonstrate compliance with the Council’s best value duties or other legal duties leading to increased legal	Appointment of new interim Monitoring Officer to bolster capacity at senior management level. Recruitment of interim support for governance and scrutiny.

Risk	Summary	Mitigations
	challenges to decision-making and further statutory intervention.	A whole system approach, focusing on the basics of local government governance and decision making, including training and development and involvement of legal services at an earlier stage of policy formulation.
Reputational	Failure to meet the requirements contained in the Directions leading to further intervention from Government	A more comprehensive and corporate approach has been developed building on lessons learned over the past year to provide greater confidence in the Council's journey and direction of travel

### Environmental Implications

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

### Equality implications

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

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

The protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race;
- religion or belief;
- sex;
- sexual orientation.

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

### Procurement implications

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

### **Workforce implications**

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

### **Property implications**

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

## **5 Background Papers**

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## Slough Borough Council

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	Cabinet
<b>DATE:</b>	17 July 2023
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Approval of annual Business and Improvement Plan for Slough Children First Limited (SCF)
<b>CHIEF OFFICER:</b>	Stephen Brown – Chief Executive
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Sarah Wilson – Head of Legal
<b>WARD(S):</b>	All
<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>	Councillor Smith – Leader of the Council Councillor Kelly – Lead Member Children’s Services
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	YES
<b>EXEMPT:</b>	NO
<b>DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN:</b>	YES
<b>APPENDICES:</b>	Appendix A - SCF Draft Business and Improvement Plan 2023 to 2026

### 1 Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report seeks approval of the Slough Children First (SCF) Business and Improvement Plan for 2023 to 2026 (Appendix A), on an interim basis as well as noting the position on retrospective in-year change requests for the previous two financial years to fund historic deficits. . As SCF is wholly owned by the Council, it is bound by its articles to submit its draft Business and Improvement Plan for approval by the Council. The Business and Improvement Plan is a critical document governing how SCF conducts its business, and it is not permitted to enter into transactions, agreements, or contracts unless they are in accordance with its Business and Improvement Plan.

#### Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- a) Approve the SCF’s Business and Improvement Plan for 2023 to 2026 at Appendix A on an interim basis.
- b) Request that the SCF board provide the Council will quarterly update reports setting out progress, risks, and options for further savings, the first to be reported to Cabinet in the Autumn 2023, such report to explicitly include a

- medium term financial strategy to show how SCF can move to a financially sustainable position and updating on a new contractual performance framework.
- c) Note the request for funding of deficits from 2021/22 and 2022/23 and defer consideration of the same until the first update on delivery against the Business and Improvement Plan is submitted.

**Reason:**

SCF requires a high quality, long-term Business and Improvement Plan setting out its strategic priorities and financial strategy. The previous year's plan was only approved on an interim basis and the re-submitted plan was subject to a review by Mutual Ventures with Cabinet agreeing not to approve it in February 2023 and to require an updated version to be submitted in July 2023. SCF has a new executive leadership team who have worked with the Company board and in collaboration with corporate colleagues to put together a Business and Improvement Plan to support SCF to deliver high quality and cost-effective services. This plan requests further significant financial support for the financial year 2023/24 over and above what was agreed by Cabinet in February 2023. In addition, whilst the plan sets out savings, these are likely to contain demand pressure, as opposed to deliver savings in accordance with what was assumed in the Council's MTFs. Unfortunately this puts pressure on other Council services and could lead to savings needing to be made to services that provide support to children and families as part of a wider early help system, which in turn puts further pressure on statutory and discretionary children's social care services.

It is recognised that the executive leadership team in SCF is new and following the Ofsted inspection immediately put in place a focused 12-week improvement plan to avoid drift and delay whilst the continuous (permanent) Business and Improvement Plan is going through this formal approval process. The work to deliver the 12-week plan has already started to improve service delivery and deliver financial savings. The Council must continue to monitor SCF's performance to ensure that limited available funding is directed to the right place and supporting the Council's improvement journey. For this reason, it is recommended that a report is brought back in 3 months' time with a progress update based on information presented to the SCF's quarterly contract monitoring meetings. The Council will consider the requests to provide funding for the historic deficit arising from overspends in the previous two financial years at the same time.

**2 Report - Introduction**

- 2.1. SCF became wholly owned by the Council on 1 April 2021, with new articles of association setting out its governance arrangements. The Articles of Association set out a list of reserved matters, which must be approved by the Council, as the sole owner of the Company.
- 2.2. SCF delivers prescribed statutory and discretionary children's social care functions under a direction of the Secretary of State and in accordance with a service delivery contract between SCF and the Council. Improvement activity across children's services is a critical part of the Council's improvement journey and the Council should work with the new SCF executive leadership team to ensure that the services can be delivered in a cost-effective way, contributing to the delivery of required financial savings to enable the Council to become financially sustainable within the medium term.

- 2.3. A new Chief Executive for SCF (also the Executive Director of People – Children / statutory director of children’s services) commenced in role in January 2023. On the day of her arrival Ofsted commenced its inspection of children’s services and found that overall the service ‘requires improvement to be good,’ but the impact of leaders is ‘inadequate.’ The People Scrutiny Panel task and finish report recommended an enhanced focus on partnership working, alongside other recommendations for SCF which have been incorporated into the Business and Improvement Plan. The submitted draft Business and Improvement Plan is a significant improvement on the previous plan, with clear and focused improvement plans linked to savings, however it also requires significantly more funding than the Council has budgeted for, which puts pressure on other council services and on the Council’s long-term viability.
- 2.4. The Department of Education (DfE) has appointed a Commissioner, Paul Moffat to oversee Children’s Services improvement who has had oversight of this plan. He is currently the interim Chair of SCF, although plans are in place to appoint a new permanent Chair.

### **Commissioner Review**

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) commissioners were consulted on this report and a number of comments on the detail of the report have been responded to prior to publication.

The DfE commissioner is currently the Chair of SCF and has been involved in discussions on the Business and Improvement Plan at board level.

### **Options Considered**

2.5. The following options were considered:

<b>Option</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>	<b>Recommended</b>
<b><i>Option 1: Approval of business and improvement plan</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensures compliance with Articles of Association.</li> <li>Ensures SCF has a longer-term business strategy to manage its services.</li> <li>The new plan will have the ownership of the new Chief Executive and Board of SCF.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The plan does not set out details of how risks are to be managed or provide assurance on deliverability of some of the plans.</li> <li>The plan assumes funding that has not been agreed by the Council and will put pressure on other services.</li> </ul>	<b>Not recommended</b>
<b><i>Option 2: Approval of business and improvement plan on an interim basis, with further requirements.</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensures compliance with Articles of Association.</li> <li>Allows time for the plan to be properly scrutinised and feedback given.</li> <li>Avoids the previous Business Plan being rolled over.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SCF will have to invest more officer and board time in collaboration with colleagues from SBC to prepare an update report.</li> </ul>	<b>Recommended</b>  <b>Officers will work with SCF executive leadership team on monitoring data and delivery plans to support</b>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows for progress against targets to be considered and for more ambitious targets to be set where supported by data.</li> <li>• Allows for focused discussions with Council services on how to support with further financial savings within SCF, for example housing.</li> <li>• Allows for an update to be given on progress against the plan, including further information on a medium term financial strategy to ensure SCF will be financially sustainable in future years.</li> </ul>		<b>delivery of the Business and Improvement Plan</b>
<b>Option 3: Do not approve the Business and Improvement Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council does not approve the business and improvement plan and requires an updated version to be prepared in a new timetable.</li> <li>• The business and improvement plan can set out a more realistic and affordable medium term financial strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The previous interim Business and Improvement Plan will apply, which does not address how SCF will seek to deliver financial savings in the current context.</li> <li>• SCF is not able to demonstrate improvement in its Business and Improvement Planning processes, an issue that was flagged in the governance review.</li> <li>• Time and resource will be put into updating the plan which would be better put into effective delivery plans.</li> </ul>	<b>Not recommended</b>

## **Background**

2.6. SCF's objects are set out in its Articles of Association. These are to provide social care, youth justice and other related services and support to children, young people, and their families for the advancement of the community, and in particular:

(a) to keep children and young people safe from harm;

(b) to provide high quality and coordinated services in connection with children, young people, and their families, including in relation to children's safeguarding, children in care and at the edge of care, children leaving care and adoption and fostering services;

- (c) to innovate and to secure improvements in the quality and effectiveness of the services provided to children, young people, and their families in respect of social care, family support and youth offending services and demonstrate value for money in doing so;
- (d) to advance and promote social care, family support and youth offending services available to children, young people, and their families;
- (e) to work collaboratively with other agencies to identify the individual social care needs of children and young people and to establish suitable arrangements to prepare for and meet such needs;
- (f) to make a positive and effective contribution to multi-agency early intervention support for children, young people, and their families to avoid the need for more intensive social care support;
- (g) to ensure that effective care planning and appropriate intervention is in place which protects children from harm, reduces the need for children to be in care unless absolutely necessary, and supports those in care;
- (h) to establish and operate arrangements based on best practice and innovation and to work in partnership with all agencies involved with children, young people, and their families to encourage and support children and young people to achieve positive outcomes; and
- (i) to establish, promote and encourage the development of collaborative working arrangements between individuals and organisations in the field of information, advice, guidance, and support to deliver high standards of social care, family support and youth offending services to children and young people.

2.7. The Council requested that these objectives were specifically referenced in the Business and Improvement Plan and this has now been actioned. SCF also sets out a vision and ambition for children, priorities, and enablers. The enablers form the basis of the Director of Children's Services report to the Getting to Good Board chaired by the DfE Commissioner. There is a financial focus to the plan, including savings targets for 2023/24 and 2024/25 as well as the previously mentioned 12-week improvement plan and the subsequent continuous improvement plan.

2.8. As part of ensuring appropriate scrutiny and challenge, the draft of the previous plan was reviewed by Mutual Ventures, who were commissioned by the DfE and by a task and finish group of members from the People Scrutiny Panel. Key findings from these reviews are set out below:

### **Affordability of services**

2.9. Mutual Ventures made it clear that both the Council and SCF need to be clear about the affordability of services and have full confidence in the proposed plans, given the Council's tightening financial envelope. Mutual Ventures assessed that SCF's previous business plan under-estimated the cost of invest to save proposals and inflationary pressure and was potentially over-ambitious regarding placement rates and vacancy factor. However, in other areas, it viewed the proposals as not being ambitious enough. It is important to note that some matters have moved on considerably since the Mutual Ventures review and there is a new executive

leadership team in SCF who are bringing fresh experience and challenge. Therefore, whilst it is relevant to consider the analysis contained in the review, appropriate weight needs to be given to it in view of these changes.

- 2.10. The figure below is an extract from the Mutual Ventures report which was published as an appendix to the February cabinet report. This indicates that the 2023/24 funding requirement was £39.330m, however this took account of a £3.387m deficit. If this deficit is funded via adjustment of previous years' contract sums, the budget requirement is £35.943m. The Council agreed a contract sum in excess of this figure, but the current Business and Improvement Plan is indicating that a further £4.4m is required over and above this figure.

Figure 16. Comparison of business plan with review outputs, in £'000.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
<b>SCF BUSINESS PLAN (Appendix D)</b>							
Current SCF contract value	31,700	32,350	32,770	33,170	33,573	33,966	34,361
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
SCF Business plan position	5,175	3,387	2,158	1,433	420	(745)	(1,620)
	37,070	35,836	35,023	34,708	34,094	33,321	32,841
<b>ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO - REVISED ASSUMPTIONS</b>							
Revisions to Business plan resulting from review findings.		(146)	(307.00)	(313.00)	(299.00)	(178.00)	(92.00)
<b>Baseline revisions</b>							
	236	211	197	186	167	154	
	(875)	(892)	(910)	(910)	(890)	(890)	
	(639)	(681)	(713)	(724)	(723)	(736)	
<b>Demographic growth revision</b>							
	64	22	(103)	(210)	(330)	(483)	
<b>Savings impact revisions</b>							
	220	336	435	517	585	626	
	820	890	890	847	793	740	
	442	480	513	460	451	523	
	471	587	587	587	589	587	
	151	338	524	685	731	740	
	400	397	391	390	389	379	
	412	371	742	371	405	(0)	
	2,914	3,408	4,082	3,858	3,942	3,596	
<b>Additional inflation</b>							
	1,408	1,760	1,872	1,953	2,054	2,104	
<b>TOTAL REVISIONS</b>							
		3,601	4,202	4,825	4,574	4,765	4,388
		(59)	(41)	(30)	(37)	(35)	(32)
Revised funding requirement	37,070	39,330	39,184	39,503	38,630	38,007	37,198

- 2.11. There are no specific requests for “invest to save” funding in the Business and Improvement Plan, although the detail demonstrates that additional funding is needed in the early years of the Plan to assist with delivery of savings and containing demand pressure in future years and helpful assumptions are given on the impact of these proposals. Reference is also made to applying for grant funding from the DfE to support transformational change. The savings proposals include ambitious targets to reduce placements costs and less stretching targets for some other areas. It is assumed that the proposals have built in inflation and that SCF will be able to contain further demand and inflationary pressures within its medium-term financial plans as this was built into the modelling undertaken by Mutual Ventures.
- 2.12. SCF will be asked to produce quarterly updates and the first update should set out a medium-term financial strategy to becoming financially sustainable and include updates on progress against the improvement plan. This will assist the Council to set its own MTFs building in sufficient funding for SCF in future years, as well as receiving assurance information to demonstrate that the services are value for money.

### Proactive demand management

- 2.13. Mutual Ventures state that the financial outlook for SCF could be improved through a dedicated drive to focus on throughput of work, with a review of existing cases being closed where they are low risk.
- 2.14. The Task and Finish Group heard that managing risk and closing cases requires stable leadership and management to ensure social workers felt confident and safe in their decision-making and this is now in place.
- 2.15. The draft Business and Improvement Plan makes the following assumptions to reduce spending:
- a 5% reduction in families being stepped up to statutory social care by more targeting in the early help teams;
  - The in-house fostering service will target six new carers by the end of 2023/24 with further recruitment planned in future years;
  - Improved commissioning for accommodation for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and commissioning support to improve participation with children and young people (subject to receipt of DfE grant funding).
- 2.16. It is critical that there is a renewed focus on driving down demand where appropriate and monitoring against these targets will help identify whether these are overly ambitious or not ambitious enough.

### **Workforce**

- 2.17. Mutual Ventures stated that the previous invest to save proposals did not address the main reason that staff are leaving, namely caseloads. Mutual Ventures also commented on the intention to keep the two managed agency (Innovate) Teams until March 2025 as concerning, as these teams are expensive and should only be used to fill short term gaps. With stable, skilled, and confident leadership it was proposed that a more ambitious target could be set and caseload levels are now less of a concern, leading to a reduced need to rely on such teams.

The Task and Finish Group heard from frontline managers about the strong morale and the positive impact that programmes such as Step Up to Social Work and employing overseas qualified social workers were having on recruitment and retention. The latest figures indicate that the current workforce strategies are working, although more focus should be given to career development pathways and practice development and support. SCF has recently partnered with “Frontline” as further evidence of investment in practice development and support. The draft Business and Improvement Plan assumes an increase in permanent recruitment by 1% each year to reduce the costs spend on more expensive agency arrangements. This is building on the current successful programmes already in place which have seen an increase in the ratio of permanent to agency/vacancy which now sits at 77:23. This has enabled the release of one managed agency team 20 months earlier than planned and the second 18 months earlier.

### **Early Help**

- 2.18. SCF is expected to and does positively and effectively contribute to multi-agency early intervention support for children, young people, and their families to avoid the need for more intensive social care support.
- 2.19. The Mutual Ventures report noted that all the original invest to save proposals will strengthen the service offer and there should not be a ‘pick and mix’ approach.

- 2.20. The Task and Finish Group noted the national evidence of the need to focus on the wider children's workforce and ensuring that the wider partnership worked effectively to support children and young people.
- 2.21. An in-year funding request to support increasing the size of the targeted early help service was agreed in 2022/23 and there is evidence that this has started to have an impact on reducing reliance on statutory intervention for families. This service should also have a focus on multi-agency working and encouraging other agencies to take the lead on specific aspects of early help support.
- 2.22. The assumptions made in relation to an effective early help system have been highlighted in the proactive demand management section above.

### **Edge of Care**

- 2.23. The Edge of Care team is intended to focus on preventing family breakdown and contextual safeguarding (safeguarding children from risks outside the home including criminal or sexual exploitation and youth violence).
- 2.24. The Task and Finish Group also heard from practitioners who had seen the success of a previous Innovate Team which consisted of multi-disciplinary practitioners who supported young people and families in crisis.
- 2.25. An edge of care team is intended to support reunification of children coming home from care in appropriate cases and reduce placement costs.

### **Deliverability and leadership capability**

- 2.26. Mutual Ventures raised concerns about delivery capacity and capability and that SCF needs to strengthen its governance arrangements, business plan monitoring processes and benefits management discipline, work which is now underway. This includes strengthening the finance function, developing a structured approach to demonstrate value for money, having in place robust governance and board oversight arrangements and comprehensive risk assessment processes.
- 2.27. Some of these issues have also been identified as part of the Council's governance review of SCF. The Council appointed an Executive Director – People (Children) who is also the statutory Director of Children's Services who is seconded into SCF and appointed by SCF as the Chief Executive. This permanent appointment has led to a permanent leadership team however, SCF also needs to consider how to improve its programme management capability to ensure improved governance and delivery of projects. The appointment of a new Business and Improvement Planning manager is a positive step to ensure this. Robust and timely reporting of the delivery of the Business and Improvement Plan will ensure that the board receives the information it needs to exercise its governance functions appropriately.
- 2.28. SCF now has a new Director of Operations in addition to the new Chief Executive and some additional capacity at board level, with a process overseen by the DfE to recruit a new Chair to the Board.



## **Partnerships**

- 2.29. Both Mutual Ventures and the Task and Finish Group refer to the critical importance of the wider partnerships. Other Local Authority areas that have made sustained progress are good at engaging and collaborating at a strategic and operational level. Engaging partners is one of SCF's enablers for improvement.
- 2.30. It is positive to see a priority around partnership working, both with the Council and wider children's workforce, including the community and voluntary sector. One of the enablers is also around engaging partners.
- 2.31. Reducing demand on statutory social care and investing in early help is a partnership responsibility and this cannot be achieved by SCF or the Council alone. Requesting an update in 3 months will allow the Council to review SCF's progress in ensuring both the statutory partnerships and individual partner agencies are fully contributing to supporting families and children in Slough to thrive.

## **Governance and contractual requirements for approval of the business plan**

- 2.32. Article 7 sets out the requirements for an annual business plan. This requires that for each year, no later than 30 September in the preceding year, the board of directors should prepare and submit a draft business plan for approval by the Council covering the next 3 years. The content of each business plan shall include relevant information under each of the following headings:
- (a) introduction;
  - (b) strategic framework;
  - (c) working with partners;
  - (d) priorities and objectives;
  - (e) financial strategy and plans;
  - (f) profit and loss account;
  - (g) cash flow statement;
  - (h) revenue budget and working capital requirements; and
  - (i) capital expenditure requirements.
- 2.33. The Business and Improvement Plan can be varied each year, but that will also require prior written approval of the Council. If, prior to the state of the year, the board of directors has not sought the approval of the Council then for as long as approval has not been secured, the business plan for the previous year shall continue to apply.
- 2.34. Since February 2014, the Slough Children's Services have been subject to intervention from the Department for Education. The draft Business and Improvement Plan sets out a focused 12-week plan and a continuous improvement plan intended to provide a roadmap and an accountability framework for how it will deliver good services to enable the intervention to be removed.
- 2.35. In addition to the Business and Improvement Plan, if SCF finds itself in a position whereby it cannot balance its budget in year, there is a contractual mechanism to allow it to submit an in-year change request for increased funding either on an invest to save or demand pressures basis. There is a detailed process to follow to ensure the requests can be properly considered by the Council and to manage any disputes between the parties. SCF has submitted 6 in-year change requests for 2021/22 and 2022/23 to deal with its historic overspends. The Council did approve similar requests last year but requested that submission of further requests be

delayed pending receipt of the revised Business and Improvement Plan. The requests are summarised below:

### **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)**

2.36. The Council supported a previous request for funding to support an increase in the numbers of UASC, but for 2022/23 this was only for a 6-month period. On the basis of the previous request, it was assumed the annual figure would be about £450k and provision was made for additional funding in the contract sum set for 2023/24. However, the 2022/23 figure is now £742k, which is partly due to an increase in numbers from 31 in September 2022 to 45 in March 2023. SCF is clear about the need to recoup all monies from the Home Office and has social workers with increasing skills in undertaking age-assessments and decision making on whether to defend age assessment challenges. Updates will be presented in the quarterly reports.

### **Legal Costs**

2.37. These costs include court fees, legal fees from the Reading joint legal team, counsel's fees, and expert fees. The costs are largely dependent on the number of care cases and other legal proceedings such as judicial reviews but are also impacted by more complex cases and judicial continuity issues requiring more hearings or court delays. The new leadership is looking to reduce the number of proceedings in the future by focusing on child in need, child protection and PLO processes. Benchmarking data needs to be used to demonstrate cost efficiency. The Business and Improvement Plan rightly focuses on early help and edge of care team, and these should lead to a reduction in the number of proceedings in the future.

### **Salary pressures**

2.38. The salary pressures were not unforeseen and should have been budgeted for by SCF. However, it is positive that the workforce strategy has led to the Innovate teams being released earlier than expected and the ratio of permanent to agency has improved significantly providing evidence to indicate that the strategy is working.

### **Loss of transformation grant**

2.39. The loss of DfE grant in 2022 has been covered by the increased contract sum for 2023/24, however it would have been more prudent if SCF had considered its options at the point the grant was stopped, rather than continuing to fund services for which it had no budget. The Business and Improvement Plan refers to applications for grant funding from DfE and if provided, SCF needs to have and has requested project management capacity to ensure the funds are used in accordance with the terms of the grant.

### **Placement pressures**

2.40. The Mutual Ventures report contains revisions based on unrealistic assumptions on unit cost and placement budgets. The request states that costs are low statistically, however no benchmarking data is presented to allow comparisons to be made. Costs have increased significantly since August 2022. The Scrutiny task and finish group raised concerns about increases in fostering households being undeliverable, which would place further pressure on the placements budget. The placements budget is clearly strongly linked to the number of children in care and most solutions are relatively long term. The quarterly reports should contain a detailed section on

placement budgets, including benchmarking data and progress against savings proposals, including risks.

### Care leavers/care experienced young people

- 2.41. The historic overspend is £430k, not including spend on UASC. It is not clear why this was not foreseeable or what consideration was given to the risks or reducing the cost of support. Most of the overspend has been funded by grant, which is positive. Further work needs to take place between SCF and the Council's housing service to understand how delays in housing panels can lead to overspends and how the risk of this is raised corporately.
- 2.42. The Council will formally consider whether to provide funding to cover historic deficits upon receipt of the first update. This will allow the Council to see whether the current proposals to reduce costs are delivering against their aims and to understand whether SCF is able to manage within its contract sum, and potentially identify further savings in-year which could offset the accumulated deficit.

## 3. Implications of the Recommendation

### 3.1. Financial implications

- 3.1.1. Full Council in February 2023 approved a contract fee for 2023/24 of £36.067million - an increase of £4.632m from the previous fee.
- 3.1.2. SCF have requested one off funding amounting to £5.312 in respect 2021/22 and 2022/23, outside of the agreed budget setting process. This is summarised in the table below:

#### 21/22 and 22/23 One off Bids for funding

	£m
DfE Transformation Grant loss	0.348
Salary Pressures	1.432
Placements	2.180
Other Child Support	0.095
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children	0.742
Legal Costs	0.515
<b>Total Additional Budget Pressures 2023-24</b>	<b>5.312</b>

The Council has already agreed over £2m of funding for specific in-year change requests (agreed in September and December 2022 cabinet meetings). Some additional provisions have been set aside to cover additional requests for historic deficits and these are contained within the Council's Outturn position, although these funds have also been held as contingency against other risks/pressures.

- 3.1.3 At the time the 2023/24 Council budget was set, it was on the basis of SCF staying within with the agreed contract fee of £36.067m. However, the Council has now received an indication for additional ongoing funding for 2023/24, outside of the budget process amounting to £4.447m. This will need to be considered as part of the Council's outturn position, P3 forecast and the updated Council's MTFs.

3.1.4 The assumed contract sums in the draft plan for 2024/25 and 2025/26 will put significant pressure on the Council's financial strategy, including requiring savings from other Council services, as there are no further savings being submitted from SCF services. If these increases in funding are agreed, SCF will need to contain any demand and inflationary pressure within these contract sums. It needs to manage its risks and provide clear evidence-based business cases for any funding on an invest to save basis and demonstrate that it has the delivery capability to deliver such proposals.

3.1.5 The Company has no reserves and relies on the £5m loan from the Council for cash-flow. This loan will permit SCF to be financially solvent, however it must ensure that this loan is only used for cashflow purposes and not utilised for service delivery pressures. The Council expects repayment of the loan in full at the end of the service delivery contract, which ends in 2026 if not extended and this carries a high risk for the Council

### 3.2 Legal implications

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

### 3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 There are risks that the company will not achieve its agreed budget as highlighted in the report. The Council is mitigating this risk through regular financial and performance monitoring meeting and reports to Cabinet on a quarterly basis against the plan. The risks to children and families as a result of risks arising from the lack of a Business and Improvement Plan and effective leadership within SCF are covered in the Council's corporate risk register and in the governance review, which are regularly monitored by the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.

### 3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 None

### 3.5 Equality implications

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

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

3.5.2 The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day-to-day business and to keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services. As a body delivering public functions, SCF is expected to comply with this duty.

3.5.3 High quality and cost-effective children's services are critical to supporting both the Council and SCF to meet their equality duties, particularly in relation to advancing equality of opportunity by way of reducing inequalities that exist between certain groups of vulnerable children and their families and the wider population. As part of the update reports, it is expected that information will be presented on how SCF is meeting its equality duties and how this is supporting the Council to meet its own duties.

### 3.6 Procurement implications

3.6.4 There are no procurement implications from this proposal. SCF operates within the "Teckal Exemption" meaning that the Council does not have to undertake a procurement process to commission services from it. This exemption is on the basis that the Council has adequate control over SCF and that at least 80% of SCF's services are provided to the Council.

### 3.7 Workforce implications

3.7.1 None.

### 3.8 Property implications

3.8.1 SCF will need to consider its future building requirements as part of the Council's wider asset disposal programme. At present SCF operates from 3 separate buildings, including leasing office space in Observatory House, operating a contact centre in Cippenham, and operating a respite centre in Priors Close and these are all seen as required operational assets.

## 4. **Background Papers**

None.

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Slough Children's First Business Plan 2023-26

This is Internal Version

External version to include images

Owner:

Board Chair

**Our three year vision and aspiration with a detailed one year business plan for 2023-24 (*will be formatted*)**

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## Introduction from the Board Chair and Chief Executive

Dear Colleague,

### Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving.

Slough's Children's Services delivered by Slough Children First (SCF) are rated by Ofsted as 'Requires Improvement' and particularly as the area of Leadership and Management is assessed as inadequate this is simply not good enough for our children. We need to do more to meet children's needs at the earliest possible opportunity, safeguard them from the risk of significant harm, ensure they live in stable and loving homes and move into adulthood with confidence and the skills and knowledge they need to live successful and fulfilling lives. We must do this despite the national challenges facing us in our post-covid world and Slough Borough Council's (SBC) exceptional financial circumstances.

However, exciting times are ahead as there are now unprecedented opportunities to work across SBC and SCF on a shared agenda for improving children's lives and as the Slough Children First (SCF) Chair and Chief Executive, we see everyone's clear and resolute determination to enable all Slough's children to achieve their full potential. In Slough we have a rising childhood obesity issue in an already complex system where healthy life expectancy is ten years younger than neighboring Boroughs. These factors require a whole council, all partnership and community approach sharing an ambition for Slough's children and delivering a continuum of support particularly at an Early Help level but also through to more intense statutory services. Our business plan aligns with the Council plan for the Borough and our success will be clearly evidenced in clear key performance indicators.

Whilst acknowledging the challenges, this Business and Improvement Plan sets out the improvement journey and identifies solutions required to get to 'Good'. Our confidence in planning and delivering improvements for children is strengthened by the quality of our workforce. We value every one of them highly and want them all to appreciate their individual role in our improvement agenda. This confidence is increased by having a permanent leadership team and although we value our agency workers, an increasingly permanent workforce with a significantly decreasing staff turnover.

We recognize that almost all children and their families will need some help at some point in their lives, and given the national challenges faced by families, we want our families to know that we are here to help. In addition, Slough has a significant transient population with vulnerable families migrating into Slough from elsewhere in the country and from other parts of the world where they may have faced extreme danger and are now living with significant trauma. We do this through our partnership arrangements and relationships with other organisations, such as the Council, Schools including Early Years Providers, the Health Integrated Care Board, Health providers, the police, the Community and Voluntary Sector and faith communities.

The intention of our business plan is not to capture everything we do as a company or a detailed financial plan. It is a high-level strategic document which provides a clear framework for decision-making and how we prioritise and allocate our resources. We acknowledge the importance of living within our means and ensuring that we evidence best value for money. This will mean doing more for less.

This is a huge challenge, but this Business and Improvement Plan evidences our ambition and our commitment to being meeting it head on.

Signatures / NAMES

# Our Overarching Three Year Vision

There have been some important changes since Slough Children First (SCF) was formed in April 2021. Most notably, from May 2023 the Board has a new Chairperson and a new Non-Executive Director representing the Council’s interests in the work of the Company. There is also a new and permanent Leadership team as the Chief Executive and Director of Operations joined the Company in January and February 2023 respectively and our Heads of Services are all permanently in post. Crucially in January 2023 Ofsted conducted our ILACS inspection (Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services) the outcome of which is that social care services remain rated as ‘Requires Improvement’, but Leadership and Management is now ‘Inadequate’. The recommendations from this inspection are set out in Appendix 2.

Ofsted notes that since the previous inspection in 2019 the overall quality of practice remains unchanged and several of the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection have not been successfully tackled.

Given the above it seemed appropriate for SCF to move into a new phase, and this led to the decision to redefine the way in which we work, and in consultation with our workforce to change SCF’s Vision so it becomes **our** new Vision.

In developing our vision and thinking about our values we engaged the whole workforce Here is what they said a new Vision should represent.



Here is what our staff told us about the values that are important to them in their work with children and young people.



**Vision**

Our vision is that children in Slough are **Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving.**

The Company as an entity has delivered social care services for Slough Borough Council (SBC) since 2016/17 but its name and ownership changed in 2021 when it became Slough Children First (SCF) and wholly owned by SBC. SCF works closely with SBC directorates, in particular the education service, sharing one ED of Children’s Services, who is the Chief Executive of SCF, and a member of SBC’s Corporate Leadership Team.

The aim is for the services delivered by SCF to move back into the Council during the lifetime of this plan. To support this ambition, we must continue to strengthen the relationship between the Council and Slough Children First, particularly regarding the complex financial environment. Both the Council and SCF are in intervention and formally scrutinised by Commissioners from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Department of Education (DfE) respectively. This scrutiny will ultimately determine when this can happen.

Comment / Quote from children/young people

**Our Ambition for Children and Young People.**

**We know that everyone needs some help sometimes...**

**By 2026**

- **We will** have developed and embedded new ways of working with, and for, Slough's communities, including our faith communities facilitating and providing support and help when it is needed and in a way which prevents need and risk from increasing.
- **We will** make services easy to access and at the right level to meet need. This means the right support, for the right child, in the right place and at the right time.
- **We will** support children and families to stay together when it is safe to do so, providing 'early help' in partnership with other agencies working with children such as schools and health.
- **We will** empower families to make their own decisions using ways of working such as Family Group Conferences.
- **We will** make informed decisions to avoid 'drift and delay' when children are at risk of significant harm planning for them to live in their 'forever homes' as soon as possible.
- **We will** work closely with the whole family to enable them to develop the skills and confidence to manage situations at a much earlier stage.
- **We will** develop and embed better ways of listening, enabling and working alongside children and young people. We need to support them, so they feel confident in telling us about their day-to-day realities but also to give them the opportunity to shape the services they receive.
- **We will** intervene in families' lives in a respectful and transparent manner, focusing on reducing risk so they can be supported without statutory intervention at an early help level.
- **We will** always recognise the importance of family, community, learning and enjoyment as central to a child's safety and wellbeing. We can only do that by working together.

These ambitions cannot be achieved without our fantastic workforce. **The leadership team will** listen to and hear what our staff are saying to us, and feedback on how this has influenced service development and therefore outcomes for children.

## Slough Children First and Slough Borough Council, a Borough that prioritises its Children and Young People

Children and young people are a priority for Slough Borough Council. The Corporate Plan focuses on "Closing the healthy life expectancy gap by focusing on children". This underpins our work together to deliver our top priorities for children by:

- Providing quality services for vulnerable children and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people
- Tackling high rates of child obesity

- Increasing children and young people's participation in decisions that affect them and in shaping the future of Slough.

SCF is a company wholly owned by SBC and co-located with Council services in Observatory House, 25 Windsor Road, Slough SE1 2EL. As a separate company we set our objectives out within our Articles of Association. These are to provide social care, youth justice and other related services and support to children, young people, and their families for the advancement of the community, and in particular:

- (a) to keep children and young people safe from harm;
- (b) to provide high quality and coordinated services in connection with children, young people, and their families, including in relation to children's safeguarding, children in care and at the edge of care, children leaving care and adoption and fostering services;
- (c) to innovate and to secure improvements in the quality and effectiveness of the services provided to children, young people, and their families in respect of social care, family support and youth offending services and demonstrate value for money in doing so;
- (d) to advance and promote social care, family support and youth offending services available to children, young people, and their families;
- (e) to work collaboratively with other agencies to identify the individual social care needs of children and young people and to establish suitable arrangements to prepare for and meet such needs;
- (f) to make a positive and effective contribution to multi-agency early intervention support for children, young people, and their families to avoid the need for more intensive social care support;
- (g) to ensure that effective care planning and appropriate intervention is in place which protects children from harm, reduces the need for children to be in care unless absolutely necessary, and supports those in care;
- (h) to establish and operate arrangements based on best practice and innovation and to work in partnership with all agencies involved with children, young people, and their families to encourage and support children and young people to achieve positive outcomes; and
- (i) to establish, promote and encourage the development of collaborative working arrangements between individuals and organisations in the field of information, advice, guidance, and support to deliver high standards of social care, family support and youth offending services to children and young people.

The Chief Executive of SCF is the Executive Director of Children's Services (DCS) and therefore has professional responsibility for children's services in Slough, an integrated brief for both education and social care.<sup>1</sup> Children and their families do not care about artificial boundaries, and we must grow a 'one service approach' for Slough's children. Therefore, we have a shared Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and work closely to promote seamless services.

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<sup>1</sup> Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and for the Lead Member for Children's Services. DFE 2013

SBC holds SCF accountable for its performance through quarterly contractual monitoring meetings. Our Ofsted inspection in January 2023 identified that improvements to be made in this relationship and we are committed to working together in the best interests of children and their families.

## Our Current Challenges

SBC faces extraordinary financial challenges which are reflected in the Section 114 Notice and continued oversight and scrutiny by Commissioners appointed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). Inevitably these financial challenges affect the work of Slough Children First but despite these constraints SCF must also demonstrate that it provides services effectively and efficiently therefore evidencing best value for money. SCF is held to account by the Department of Education (DFE) appointed Commissioner who also scrutinises services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

There is a 'national cost of living crisis' and Slough's children and families are no exception to experiencing significant financial hardship and the consequential increased emotional burdens.

Children face the continued implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on their education and their mental and emotional wellbeing.

There are significant challenges for young people who have become more disengaged from services and are therefore more vulnerable to adults who seek to exploit them both criminally and sexually. We must focus on getting alongside our children and young people and work with our partner agencies to find ways to disrupt the adults who exploit them.

We are experiencing an increase in referrals relating to young people who are seeking refuge from their country of origin through the asylum system, and we must support them to recover from the trauma that they will have experienced. This includes working with schools and colleges to ensure asylum seeking young people's educational needs are met whilst also ensuring that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place where there is a dispute about their age.

The introduction to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care states that 'this is a once in a generation opportunity to reset children's social care. What we need is a system that provides intensive help to families in crisis, acts decisively in response to abuse, unlocks the potential of wider family networks to raise children, puts lifelong loving relationships at the heart of the care system and lays the foundations for a good life for those who have been in care. What we have currently is a system increasingly skewed to crisis intervention, with outcomes for children that continue to be unacceptably poor and costs that continue to rise. For these reasons, a radical reset is now unavoidable<sup>2</sup> However, implementing these changes may be resource intensive.

However, we believe that our newly appointed Executive Team, alongside the Company Board and the Council, are entering a year of opportunity in which relationships have improved and will mature over that time. This will facilitate a 'whole systems' approach towards providing services for Slough's citizens which has not been in place in recent years.

## Our One-Year Plan

Our Ofsted inspection in January 2023 identified several areas in which we need to make significant and sustained improvement, not least in the relationship between SCF and the company. Our response to that inspection was to put in place an **Immediate 12-week Plan** to show intent and make progress at pace. (Appendix 6) Subsequently we have built upon this

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<sup>2</sup> Independent Review of Children's Social Care

plan and produced a **Continuous Improvement Plan** (Appendix 7) which will support and monitor our journey to improve services for children and families.

We know that services provided by SCF will be re-inspected in the coming year to review the progress made since the ILACS Inspection in January 2023. It is our ambition to evidence, at that time, that services are much improved and being delivered to Ofsted's definition of a 'Good' standard.

We cannot achieve our ambitions without our fantastic workforce. We need to listen to and hear what our staff are saying to us, and feedback on how this has influenced our services. We have appointed our first dedicated Principal Social Worker.

## Our Priorities

- **Priority 1**

**Children and their families should be able to easily access Early Help and know where to go and who to speak to when they need it.**

Our early help offer has been developed in collaboration with partners, with a key focus on increasing the role of the Lead Professional across partners agencies to reach more children through the **right conversation** at the **right** time leading to the **right** service.

- **Priority 2**

**Education and learning are vital to ensure that our children have the best start in life and are empowered to go on to rich and fulfilling lives through work.**

SBC is the strategic lead for education in the local area with a duty 'to promote high standards and fulfilment of potential in schools so that all children and young people benefit from at least a good education.' (Education Act 1996). Education is the main route to success for young people as adults, as well as teaching them the skills they need to navigate the route they want to choose through life and to make a positive contribution to society.

This is of particular importance for children at risk of disadvantage, such as children missing education and where SCF has specific responsibilities such as looked after children and children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

- **Priority 3**

**Children in our care will have a stable place to live and our care experienced young people can access their own affordable homes.**

We believe that all our children have a right to grow up in a family home, and that for most children this is at home with their family. We recognise that sometimes families struggle and need some extra help at times of great difficulty to prevent families from entering crisis and potentially resulting in children coming into care.

We therefore will create an edge of care approach to provide direct services to support families to prevent crisis and during any difficult periods. In-so-doing we seek to prevent admissions to care because of family breakdown; or when a care admission is needed, that we support children to return home as soon as possible with the right help.

- **Priority 4**

**Children and their families will have effective support and care from a stable workforce. This will mean that children do not experience lots of changes of worker and they can develop a trusting relationship with someone who will help them and their family.**

We will continue to establish a culture in which staff feel connected to the organization and leadership, through our shared vision and visibility of leaders. We will move towards a workforce of permanent employees, particularly in the field of qualified social workers, although we are grateful for our agency staff members and their commitment to Slough. We will support the retention of permanent staff members through a Career Progression Pathway and wellbeing offer.

- **Priority 5**

**We will work with our children and young people to enable them to participate and shape services with us.**

We will seek to involve children and young people at all stages of our work i.e., co-production and consultation at strategic level, monitoring and reviewing services when they are in place, and ensuring individual voices are evidence in all decision-making. Nothing about me without me.

- **Priority 6**

**We will work in partnership with colleagues across the Council and all services that work with children, young people and their families. We believe that it is only together that we can make a difference. We value our relationship with Community and Voluntary Sector partners who know their communities well.**

Children, young people and families have access to a large and diverse range of community, voluntary and faith organisations who provide significant support to Slough residents. We will find opportunities to join up and support the families we are helping to access these services so that when we are no longer needed, this support will continue. This will enable the right support to be available as and when needed in a cohesive and planned way, avoiding multiple areas of duplication and changes in workers for children and families.

## Our Enablers

We are structuring the development of our services using the Local Government Association's seven enablers for children's services improvement<sup>3</sup>.

### Enabler 1 – Strategic approach

- Implement our vision and strategic plan ensuring that strategies take account of Slough's particular context.
- Respond openly and honestly to any external feedback including inspections.
- Evidence that we know ourselves the improvements we need to make.

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<sup>3</sup> Action Research into Improvement in Local Children's Services, LGA Spring 2016



## **Enabler 2 – Leadership and governance**

- Streamline our governance to ensure effective and professional governance.
- Ensure there is stable leadership in place at Board and Executive levels.
- Build a culture where everyone understands the impact of their decisions on outcomes for children and financial outcomes.
- Support the development of a 'High Support and High Challenge' culture.

## **Enabler 3 – Engaging and supporting the workforce**

- Stabilise the workforce across Children's Services by recruiting, developing and retaining highly skilled permanent staff. This includes 'growing our own'.
- Enhance the skills, knowledge and experience of the whole Children's workforce to better meet children's and young person's needs.
- Put in place a wellbeing offer which is highly visible to our existing workforce and for those considering joining Slough.

## **Enabler 4 – Engaging partners**

- Promote good relationships at operational and strategic level and support the effectiveness of the safeguarding partnership.
- Be outward facing, inviting and sustaining partnership involvement.

## **Enabler 5 – Building the supporting apparatus.**

- Develop a framework to track progress, audit quality and monitor improvements in practice.
- Aligning practice with our practice model to support good quality and consistent services delivered to children and young people.

## **Enabler 6 – Fostering innovation**

- Create a learning culture,
- Try out new ideas and initiatives to improve practice, evaluate them rigorously.

## **Enabler 7 – Judicious use of resources**

- Align business and financial strategic planning.
- Ensure we achieve the best value for money.
- Producing sound business cases for transformation including invest to save opportunities.

Comment(s) from staff

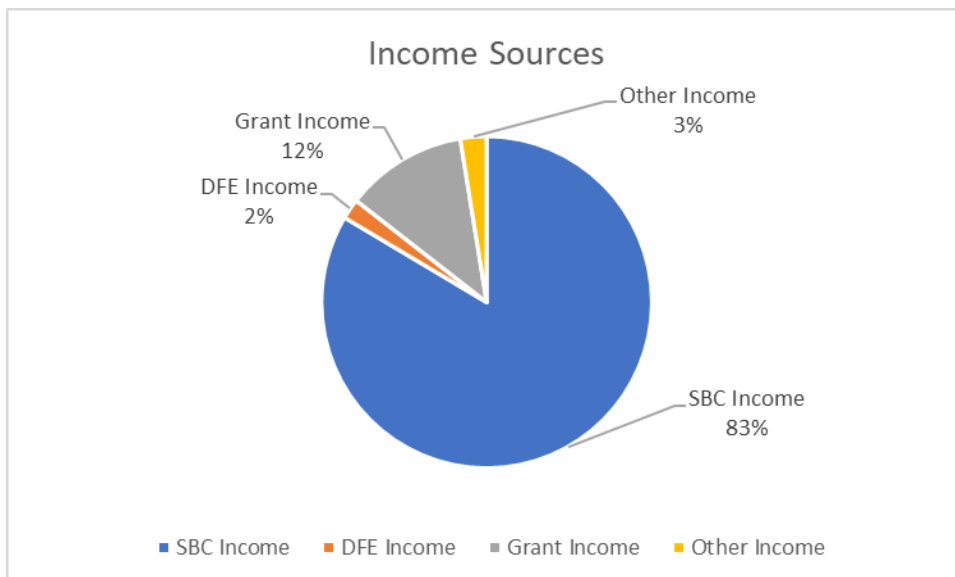
## Our Financial Plan

Our financial model reflects the activities required to achieve these priorities for our children and our aim is to deliver better outcomes for children by **doing differently for less** with a clear focus on improving practice.

The financial modelling shows a £4.4m funding requirement to break even in 2023/24, this includes £2.03m of inflation added to Slough Borough Council's (SBC) Income and a further agreed contribution to the Core Contract of £4.6m to £36.065m as agreed at Cabinet in February 2023.

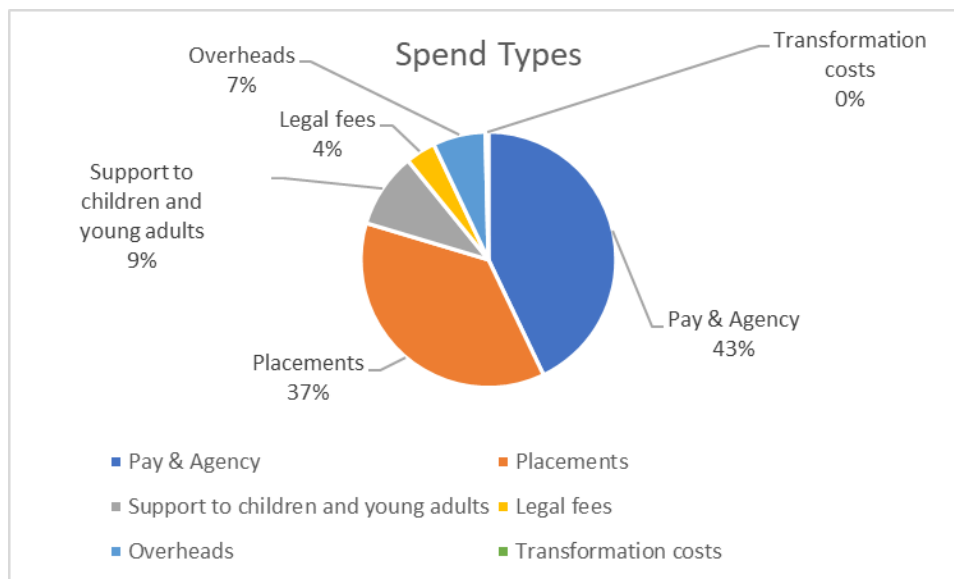
Savings of over £1 million from placement volumes and rates, staffing and legal fees are included in the plan.

Where our financial resources come from is shown in the pie chart below with income from SBC making up 83% (£36.17m) of all our funding.



The types of expenditure we have can be seen in the pie chart below, with the biggest categories of spending being salaries (43%) and placement costs (37%).

Of the total overheads' costs, 71% relate to recharges going back to SBC.



We have an increase in the complexity of needs, growth in children presenting to Slough seeking refuge from unsafe situations in their own countries, a cost-of-living crisis and rising prices. Our financial model reflects this and incorporates key activity needed in 2023/24 to realise benefits, as well as further phases of our plan, such as Family Group Conferencing and Family Hubs in later years.

Our modelling reflects **Priority 1** in Early Help through targeting a **5% reduction** in the number of families stepping up into statutory social care. This is by short- and medium-term funding for additional Targeted Early Help teams. In addition to these teams, the continuing development of partnership working (**Priority 6**) will mean that half of the children in need plans that close will be stepped down to Early Help teams and half to community partners.

Children who are being considered for care but have not entered it (defined as 'Edge of Care') will be supported with a specific Edge of Care team to support them to remain in their family home. This will **avoid entering care** alongside an **increase in the reunification** of children coming home from care (where appropriate).

With this support and the focus on **Priority 3** our **placement costs will start to fall**, particularly in the high-cost residential placements for those children with complex needs around Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Edge of care teams will also impact legal fees as they will also reduce as the volume of proceedings reduce.

Our in-house fostering service will continue to develop their support model and make Slough a great place to be a foster carer. Increasing their numbers and developing their specialist skills will help **avoid placing** with external fostering agencies also removing the margins we are charged by third parties - all driving greater **value for money**. We will target **six new carers** by the end of year 1 with further recruitment planned in future years.

Our spending on placements for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and Care Leavers is also expected to benefit from some commissioning initiatives aimed at targeting the rates paid and **driving better value for money**. This will be done through identifying multiple occupancy accommodation available for Semi-Independent and Independent living.

A stable workforce where Slough is an employer of choice is **Priority 4** for the company. Through successful international recruitment and our on-going ASYE programme, the ratio of permanent to agency social work staff is modelled at 77%: 20% with the remaining 3% factored for vacancies. This is based on our current data and in future years we expect to **improve**

**this by 1 percentage point** each year. The Company is working with Frontline to further grow our own sustainable and stable workforce. This has enabled the safe release of two managed agency teams earlier than we had originally thought. Those savings have allowed additional capacity to focus on improving practice and keeping caseloads at a manageable level.

**Our Cashflow**

This shows the movement of money in and out of our company and with the inclusion of the £2.03m + £4.60m increase in income from SBC in 2023/24 the cash balances remain positive throughout 2023/24. We assume there will be the settlement in Quarter 1 of £2.30m from outstanding invoices and in Quarter 2 that there will be two further in year requests for funding. One relates to 2021/22 of £0.72m assumed to be approved in June and paid in July, and the other request is for losses incurred in 2023/24 of £2.76m from rising demands, this assumes only 60% of losses approved through the process.

As the Company continues to operate with projected losses into 2024/25 the cash balances become negative in Quarter 2 2024/25.

	Mar-23	2023/24				2024/25			
		Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
<b>Cashflow summary</b>	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's
Cash inflow from income	3,877	14,983	17,090	12,582	12,843	12,879	12,730	12,808	12,658
Cash outflow from expenditure	(6,387)	(16,065)	(14,840)	(14,145)	(14,145)	(13,494)	(13,494)	(13,494)	(13,494)
Net cash movement in month	(2,510)	(1,082)	2,251	(1,563)	(1,302)	(615)	(764)	(686)	(836)
Opening cash at bank	5,069	2,559	1,477	3,728	2,165	864	248	(516)	(1,202)
Closing cash at bank / (overdrawn)	2,559	1,477	3,728	2,165	864	248	(516)	(1,202)	(2,038)

**Our Balance Sheet**

SCF's balance sheet shows the projected losses for 2022/23. It assumes the losses of £0.72m from 2021/22 will be covered by the in-year request (mentioned above) and paid in July 2023 and the recovery of 60% of 2023/24 losses.

The table below shows the projected movement on the projected balance sheet to March 2024, showing cash balances as positive with a reducing reserves position.

<b>Balance Sheet</b>	as at 31 Mar 2023	as at 31 Mar 2024
	£000's	£000's
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Debtors	6,860	4,316
Cash at bank and in hand / (overdrawn)	2,216	1,363
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>9,076</b>	<b>5,679</b>
<b>Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year</b>		
Total current liabilities	<b>(9,388)</b>	<b>(7,203)</b>
Net current assets / (Liabilities)	<b>(312)</b>	<b>(1,524)</b>
<b>Long Term Creditors - Receipts in Advance</b>		
Total long term liabilities	<b>(5,000)</b>	<b>(5,000)</b>
<b>Net Assets / (Liabilities)</b>	<b>(5,312)</b>	<b>(6,524)</b>
<b>Reserves</b>		
Income and Expenditure Account	<b>(5,312)</b>	<b>(6,524)</b>
<b>Reserves</b>	<b>(5,312)</b>	<b>(6,524)</b>



## Transformation Overview

Outcome: Supporting the workforce to improve and flourish



### SCF

The current 23/24 position is **£4.85m** over budget v the original forecast of **£4.9m**. The changes include

- Staffing reductions of **£476k** through the early release of the Innovate teams, the Business Support Review, improvements in the permanent /agency staff ratio, offset by additional costs from the peripatetic practice team, the Quality Assurance manager post and the Principal Social Worker post. The latter is a mandatory post but has not been in place or funded by SCF.
- **£123k** in placements reductions through 3 additional in-house foster placements
- However, the contextual safeguarding team and transformational posts Manager and Commissioner which had been removed were put back in by previous senior officers at circa **£450k**.

This means that SCF needs to avoid costs of **£4.85 million** over 2023/24 and as requested in the finance paper presented to CLT in April 2023, budget savings of **£2,226 million** in 2024/2025 - a total of **£7.076 million**. The rationale for the required amount to be saved in 2024/25 is that SCF draws on 38% of the overall council budget it is required to save 38% of the budget gap. However, it is important to note that a consultation process is in place to 'tupe' SCF's back-office staff into the Council. If this takes place the percentage of budget savings allocated to SCF should be reduced as there will be even less scope for savings to be made and the overall percentage of the overall budget will be less.

The reader should also note the Mutual Ventures review of the SCF Business Plan (December 22) in which they reported the following:

- **There is a significant risk that without additional well-targeted funding and well-thought-out improvement plans the service may slip back into 'inadequate.'**
- **Our (Mutual Ventures) financial analysis concludes that the SCF business plan underestimates the investment required over the period of the plan and accordingly under the proposed plan SCF would not be sustainable at current levels of funding.**
- **Our assessment of SCF's existing delivery capacity and capability found that SCF will need to strengthen its governance arrangements, business plan monitoring processes and benefits management discipline or further risk the delivery of proposed savings.**

To refer to the CLT paper which notes alternative approaches to identifying savings.

- **Sweating assets.** SCF operates outside of Observatory House. Additional bases are the contact centre for looked after children to have contact with their birth families and the short-breaks home for children with disabilities. Both are fully utilized however the buildings are SCF owned and they are required to fulfil statutory requirements.
- **Transformation.** The Company is on a journey of improvement and is planning to consider projects to better deliver services. These include an edge of care provision, based on the No Wrong Door Model, and collaboration with other authorities on placement provision. However, these are unlikely to deliver savings of any significance until 2025/26.
- **Benchmarking.** Noted below where relevant.
- **Targeting existing areas of high-cost pressure areas.** The main areas of spend are staffing and placements for looked after children and feature in the proposed savings.

- **Governance and oversight of external looked after placements** – a dedicated panel overseen by a senior manager will be in place to provide ongoing oversight and review of all children’s placements which are outside of our own resources.
- **Income and debt management:** SCF does not generate income or manage debt.
- **Partnership working and or external funding.**
  - Health contributions to placement costs need further exploration and we will work with an ‘expert’ to review and secure joint funding arrangements where possible.
  - A bid is being submitted for £350k of improvement money from the DfE to be spend by March 2024. It seems that in previous year(s) improvement money was used for day-to-day costs and the DfE have made it very clear that this must not happen again if our bid is successful. However, it may be able to offset money for improvement posts where the original plan was for the costs to come out of the staffing budget.

2023/24

£K	Comment	Risk
77	<b>Agency staff.</b> Reduce the number of agency social workers from 17 to 14 (5%) by recruiting permanent staff. Overall gain of 3 permanent social workers	
190	<b>Legal costs.</b> Legal services are provided by a Joint Legal Partnership hosted by Reading. There is concern that Slough’s current costs are heavily weighted towards commissioning Barristers and independent social workers. Discussions are taking place with legal services to safely decrease costs. (Current costs £2million per year. The highest across the legal partnership). This has been discussed with the lead lawyer and is seen to be an achievable savings target with a particular focus on practice improvement  <b>Reduction of legal fees requires a shift in culture and practice to reduce reliance on advice. However, improved practice in decision making is intended to reduce the overall number of children subject to proceedings</b>	
100	<b>Services for care experienced young people.</b> Practice improvement This relies on partnership with colleagues in Housing being able to provide housing options. Alternatively we would need to act as a guarantor or up-front rental costs to private let market. There may be some potential reputational risk if any property is damaged.  Risk that young people accessing private let may lose the ability to move into Housing Association , so we would need to provide a safety net to enable young people to present as homeless should their circumstances need this. (Suggest 2 year period).	
30	<b>Section 17.</b> To provide specific support to prevent children from needing to come into care, or to support children to return home  Any reduction of this budget may inadvertently increase placement costs	



<b>500 - 667</b>	<b>Reduction of 3 children/young people in external residential care - stretch target of 4 children</b>  Residential provision is in place for 28 children, 1 being for a child who is serving a custodial sentence.  Permanency Management Group and external placement panel would provide detailed oversight of any plans to support those children to move home or into foster care placements.	
<b>81 - 136</b>	<b>Return 3 children home from independent foster care.</b> Improved practice and management oversight. <b>Stretch target of 5 children</b>  Improved practice and oversight of new panel process will drive improvement and planning	
<b>20K</b>	<b>Improvement posts.</b> Current plans are to fund from SCF budget but if the DfE bid is successful they will be funded from grant monies  Conversion of commissioning lead role to permanent by month 6.	
<b>Total 998 - 1220</b>	<b>Overall risk</b>	

#### 2024/25

<b>£k</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Predicted Risk</b>
<b>100</b>	<b>Legal costs</b> (additional). Improved practice reducing applications to court and reduction of Independent Social Worker use. Reduction in legal application and improved practice to conclude proceedings more quickly. Current costs highest across the partnership.	
<b>550</b>	<b>Reduction of an additional 2 children and young people in external residential care.</b>  Full year based on £5500 achieved through improved practice	
<b>81</b>	<b>Reduction of three children from external fostering placements and reunified home</b>  Improved practice and oversight of external placements.	
<b>5</b>	<b>Section 17.</b> Additional savings  Further reduction on this budget may place a risk of increased care admissions or family breakdown	
<b>360</b>	<b>Reduction of agency staff from building Practice team</b>	

<b>Total 1096</b>	<b>Overall Risk</b>	<b>Medium risk</b>
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## Our Profit and Loss Account

Profit & loss account	Plan 2023/24 £000's	Plan 2024/25 £000's	Plan 2025/26 £000's
<b>Income</b>			
SBC Income	(36,068)	(37,545)	(38,286)
SBC other income	(100)	(100)	(100)
DFE Income	(853)	(168)	(168)
Grant Income	(5,142)	(5,267)	(4,337)
Other Income	(1,104)	(1,141)	(1,162)
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>(43,267)</b>	<b>(44,220)</b>	<b>(44,054)</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>			
Pay & Agency	20,439	20,081	20,448
Placements	17,564	16,557	15,496
Support to children and young adults	4,531	4,765	4,728
Legal fees	1,814	1,850	1,716
Overheads	3,188	3,210	3,227
Transformation costs	178	82	84
<b>Total revenue expenditure</b>	<b>47,713</b>	<b>46,546</b>	<b>45,700</b>
<b>Revenue (Surplus) / Deficit</b>	<b>4,447</b>	<b>2,326</b>	<b>1,646</b>

NB The £4.632m increase in contract growth was awarded as on going rather than as a one off. Previous versions of the business plan assumed all but the inflation element of it was a one off.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Our Governance

In response to a direction from the Secretary of State for Education, Slough Borough Council established Slough Children’s Services Trust in October 2015, to deliver its statutory children’s services.

In April 2021, the Trust was replaced by a company limited by guarantee and wholly owned by Slough Borough Council (SBC). SCF is a not-for-profit company providing children’s social care services including early help services and the Youth Justice Service under contract from SBC. The company has been focused on improving these services and achieving an Ofsted judgement of ‘Good’ or above.

As a wholly owned company Slough Children First has retained operational independence in the delivery of its services, and the Council as the sole owner has oversight, providing challenge and influence through the Company’s governance arrangements. There is a contract between the council and the company, which details those governance arrangements.

The Executive Director of Children’s Services (DCS) is employed by the Council and seconded to the Company as its Chief Executive. The DCS also has responsibility for Education services which includes services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

### 1.1 The Board of Directors

The Board is responsible for setting the strategy for Slough Children First; driving high performance and quality; ensuring that the contract objectives are met and promoting the interests of Slough’s vulnerable children and young people.

The Non-Executive Board Chair and Non-Executive Directors (NEDs), bring professional skills and expertise from different sectors whilst Executive Directors are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Company. All Board Members are registered as Company Directors with Companies House.

At of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2023 Members of the Board are

- **Chair of the Board:**
  - Paul Moffat (temporary appointment until mid-August 2023)
  
- **Non-Executive Directors:**
  - Nina Robinson
  - Raj Bhamber
  - Lesley Hagger
  - Steven Mason SBC Representative
  - Ketan Gandhi SBC Representative
  
- **Executive Directors:**
  - Chief Executive: [OBJ] Sue Butcher
  - Director of Operations (Children’s Social Care): Ben Short
  - Director of Finance: [OBJ] Vacant

Members of the senior leadership team and from specialist areas such as health and safety and staffing and personnel report to the Board and attend Board meetings as required.

## 1.2 Board Committees

The Board operates through committees to monitor progress in detail.

- **Audit and Corporate Governance (ACGC):**  
Chair            Nina Robinson and Steven Mason
- **Remuneration Nominations and Appointments Committee (RNAC),**  
Chair            Raj Bhamber
- **Quality & Practice Improvement and People Committee (QPIP),**  
Joint Chairs    Lesley Hagger and Ketan Gandhi

**Working Groups:** The Board may establish a limited number of working groups, when intensive scrutiny and/or additional Board level support is needed.

## 1.3 The Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

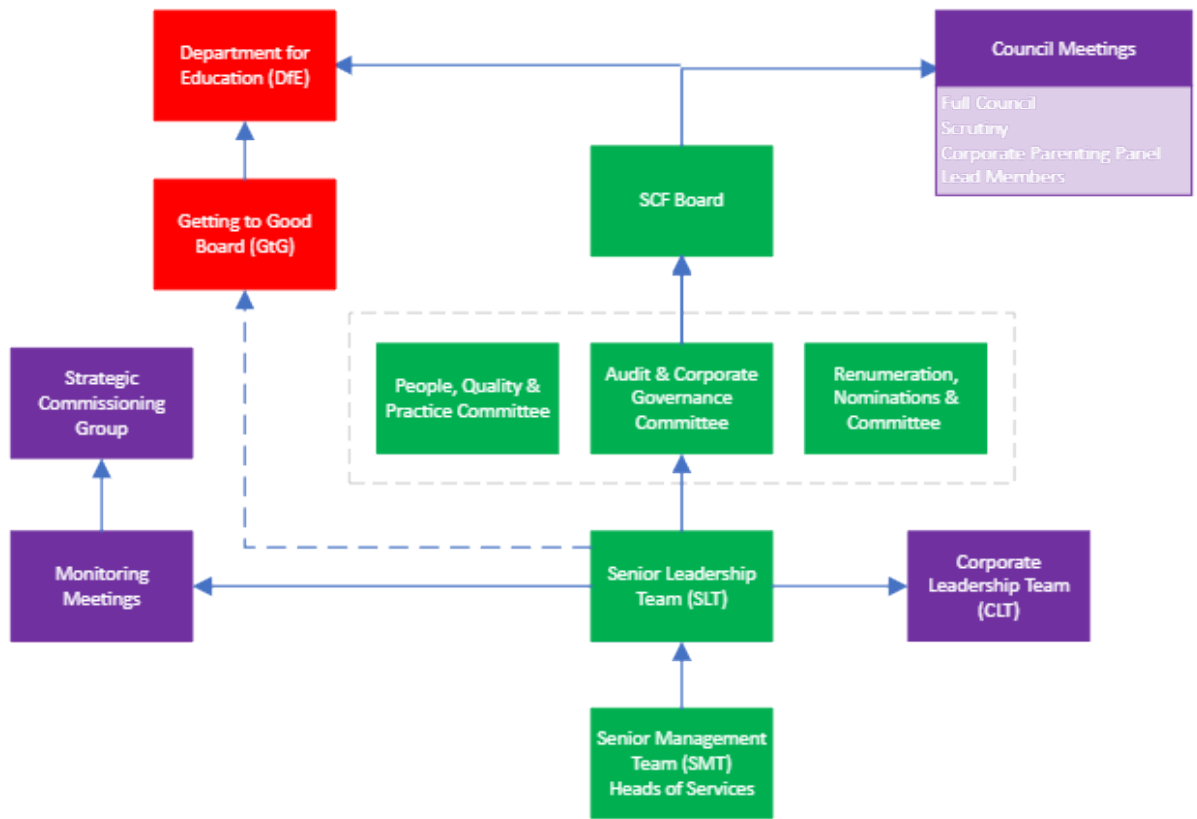
The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meets weekly to provide the strategic leadership, management and direction of the Company. It seeks to ensure that there is a focus on shaping and delivering the strategic priorities of the Company in as resourceful, efficient and effective a way as possible.

The membership is complemented by the Associate Director of Education and the Education Finance Business Partner to ensure that wherever possible services for children are delivered in conjunction with each other.

Membership as of 1<sup>st</sup> June comprises

- |   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| • Chief Executive/DCS:                            | Sue Butcher      |
| • Director of Operations (Children's Social Care) | Ben Short        |
| • Director of Finance                             | Vacant           |
| • Head of HR and OD                               | Kate McCorriston |
| • Business Planning Manager                       | Stephanie Clark  |
| • Associate Dir of Education                      | Neil Hoskinson   |
| • Finance Business Partner                        | Neill Butler     |

## 1.4 Governance Arrangements





# Inspection of Slough local authority children’s services

**Inspection dates:** 23 January to 3 February 2023

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

## What needs to improve?

- The scrutiny by senior leaders of the council and the governance arrangements between these leaders and Slough Children First.
- The impact of leaders and managers, including the corporate parenting board, on driving progress for all children.
- The participation offer and engagement of children and young people in the development and delivery of services.
- The quality of practice and the timeliness for achieving permanence.
- The impact of quality assurance processes to improve social work practice and, in particular, the quality of children’s plans.
- The assessment, planning and service provision for children in private fostering arrangements and for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds.
- The timeliness and oversight of placement with parents and connected persons arrangements.

The full report can be accessed [here](#)

## Appendix 3 – Our Demographics



### Pen portrait of our children and our service (31 March 2023)

Our aspiration is for children to be **Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving**

Number of children with a child protection plan 264

Number of employees

Gross budget £37m

Number of children in care 263

40 unaccompanied asylum seeking children  
45 foster care households – ?? placements  
Children adopted ??

Child breakdown by age  
Under 1  
1-4  
5-9  
10-15  
16-25

491  
Children in  
Need (with  
plan)

1,072  
Open  
children

260  
Care  
Leavers

## Appendix 4 – Our Commitment

To inform this Business Plan we asked colleagues in SCF and in the education directorate “What is their role was in making a difference to the lives of our children in Slough?”

Their responses demonstrate our whole Company commitment to delivering the priorities set out in this Business Plan

- Promoting and ensuring a good working relationship with Partners
- Supporting and empowering children and families
- Ensuring children are safeguarded
- Really and genuinely **listening** to the children
- Supporting our teams to be the best they can be
- Believing in a child’s potential
- Early identification and support to prevent escalation
- Advocating for our staff so they can advocate for their children and young people
- Quality assuring plans and ensuring they are progressed in timely way
- Recruiting quality and talented staff
- Ensuring every child has a school place/education setting
- Knowing how to piece things together
- To be accountable for everything we do
- Promoting permanence for children
- Having an effective early years service



## Appendix 5 - Our key performance indicators (KPIs)

Performance/Efficiency Indicators	Good to be
Early Help Assessments. SCF Lead Professional	
Early Help Assessments. Partner Lead Professional	
Contacts	
Referrals	
% of Re-Referrals	↓ <i>Low</i>
% Core Assessments completed on time	↑ <i>High</i>
% ICPC (Initial Child Protection Conference) timeliness (statutory measure by child)	↑ <i>High</i>
% of Children subject to CPP (Child Protection Plan) with all reviews within timescale	↑ <i>High</i>
CP (Child Protection) Visits undertaken on time	↑ <i>High</i>
% CLA (Children Looked After) visits undertaken on time	↑ <i>High</i>
% of CLA with their latest review within timescales	↑ <i>High</i>
Participation in CLA reviews	↑ <i>High</i>
CLA placed over twenty miles away	↓ <i>Low</i>
% Children seen on their own	
Placement Stability - short term	↓ <i>Low</i>
Placement Stability - long term	↑ <i>High</i>
Care Leavers EET (Education, Employment or Training)	↑ <i>High</i>
Care Leavers with a pathway plan (18+)	↑ <i>High</i>
Supervision	↑ <i>High</i>
% Agency social work staff	
% All staff turnover	
Financial Indicator	

## Appendix 6 - Our 12-week Improvement plan

# Slough Children's Services Immediate Improvement Plan

### Executive Summary

The purpose of this plan is to identify the key themes and areas for improvement arising from the recent Ofsted inspection (16 Jan – 3 Feb 2023) and ensure robust actions are in place to improve children's services in Slough. The timeframe is from April to June 2023 and is succeeded by the Continuous Improvement Plan in Appendix 7.

This plan is being used to monitor progress and provide assurance on the progress of the immediate improvement plan – this will be reported regularly to the SCF Board, Slough Borough Council and Getting to Good Board.

This plan is an evolving document and will change as we consult with and co-produce improvement priorities with children, young people, their families and our partner agencies.

A central and essential part of our plan is that it reflects the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people and these will be identified throughout the plan. We will look for opportunities for children and young people to participate.

### Improvement Plan

Using the 7 enablers for improving children's services, the following key themes have been identified for this improvement plan:

1. Strategic approach, leadership and governance
2. Engaging and supporting the workforce
3. Engaging partners
4. Childrens voice and influence
5. Practice and performance
6. Fostering innovation
7. Better use of resources

Objective	What Ofsted told us	Action	Intended Impact for Children
<b>Strategic Approach, Leadership and Governance</b>			
Good governance	<p>Funding is not agreed for some desired activities. There has been a lack of focus on planning to consider the whole of the child's journey and to ensure that there are sufficient finances to support all aspects of social work, intervention and support.</p> <p>The wider leadership has not addressed weaknesses effectively and leaders have not been sufficiently challenging or effective in prioritising and making the necessary improvements.</p> <p>The governance arrangements are cumbersome and impede those focused on improving children's outcomes for achieving their goals.</p> <p>Much senior leadership time has been focused on the Authority's financial challenges with an insufficient focus on children's experiences.</p>	Commission an independent diagnostic of the capacity of the system and its governance arrangements, to take forward the improvement plan. A set of recommendations and an action plan to achieve this to be completed and taken forward	Have in place a system which allows social worker, manager and leaders to focus on the services which make a difference to their lives
Clear strategic and management oversight	<p>The self-evaluation does not provide sufficient challenge to achieve improvements in set time frames.</p> <p>Key areas have not developed or improved sufficiently at pace. There is also little evidence of critical reflection on practice and the impact of practice on children and their families</p> <p>Leaders have been focused on compliance rather than the impact and quality of practice. The focus is now shifting but this is not embedded or seen consistently across case work or through feedback from children.</p> <p>There is a focus on strengths and insufficient consideration of the vulnerabilities.</p> <p>The environment has been one of high support and low challenge.</p> <p>The frequency, quality and impact of management oversight and supervision in progressing children's plans are inconsistent. there is much variability in the quality of management oversight and supervision meaning that cases are affected by drift and delay and some risks are unassessed</p> <p>Placements that have not been approved by panel lack subsequent senior management oversight and increased visiting or support.</p> <p>QA framework poor</p>	<p>A business case to secure funding to increase capacity to implement a revised QAF has been submitted</p> <p>A new QAF is to be developed and implemented, including an audit schedule to provide scrutiny into practice and support our SEF.</p> <p>Business case has been submitted to secure additional support from a senior manager to support the development of Corporate Parenting Board which has children at its heart and who are actively engaged in shaping this space. (Building Practice Lead).</p>	<p>Children will benefit from improved services as we know ourselves well, identify what we need to do better and have a system to make sure this happens</p> <p>Team managers can evaluate practice across the child's journey</p> <p>Create a culture of professional curiosity, challenge and improvement</p>

	Audit activity is completed in isolation but is descriptive rather than evaluative, focusing on compliance.		
Partners roles and responsibilities understood	The Corporate Parenting Board is underdeveloped, it is ineffective at demonstrating that children matter in Slough, that corporate parents fully comprehend their responsibilities and that they respond to children.	LGA review of Corporate Parenting Board	Ensure that leaders and partners are engaged and bring resources to their corporate parenting role to ensure that our children in care and care experienced young people have the best opportunity to have happy, successful, and healthy lives.
	<p>The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board is enthusiastic and child-focused however she is not being well supported by the wider strategic leadership to address children's needs</p> <p>PAs encourage young people to reach their potential in terms of education and employment but this could be further strengthened by the local authority supporting care leavers to access apprenticeship programmes.</p> <p>Professional relationships between the Council and Slough Children First have improved however the wider strategic leadership has not fully understood and embraced their collective responsibilities and accountabilities for Slough children.</p> <p>Strategic leaders at the highest level have not worked collaboratively or with determination to improve the experiences and progress of children who need care and protection.</p> <p>A refresh and review of the participation strategy is needed to ensure that all children and young people can provide their views and engage in future service development.</p>	Update the sufficiency strategy	We will identify opportunities to access accommodation for our children in care, as well as have clear workstreams to develop this space based on a clear understanding of the needs of our children in care.
<b>Engaging and Supporting the Workforce</b>			
Retention and stable workforce	<p>Changes of social worker have impacted on the progression of plans within care proceedings.</p> <p>Some children experience too many changes of social worker, and this impacts on quality of the relationship with the child and the timeliness and effectiveness of intervention and support to families.</p> <p>There continues to be some negative impact on children and their families who experience too many changes in workers involved in their lives.</p>	We will refresh our Recruitment pages with our workforce offer to support our recruitment of permanent staff	Reducing costs on expensive teams will mean that money can be better used on support and prevention services.
Structure fit for purpose	There has been some improvement in workforce stability. However, this is fragile.	A Principal Social Worker role will be established to lead our social work practice. This role will include the strengthening of our student offer, ASYE programme and career development pathways.	A stable workforce will reduce changes in social worker for children and families, reducing them having to tell their story over and over

		We will exit the costly Innovate teams by recruiting a temporary small team of agency staff internally and building our offer to recruit permanent staff	Increased ability for workforce development will support social workers to remain in Slough increasing awareness of the local context and town.
<b>Engaging Partners</b>			
Information sharing	There needs to be closer alignment of our SEND priorities across Social Care and Education	SEND WSOA6 – Social Care information sharing to inform EHCP plans – reporting to be in place around compliance and multi-agency audit of quality of plans and impact	Children will have quality EHCP plans to identify their needs and support in place for them
Partners supported to help in specific circumstances	<p>The numbers of children known to be at risk of FGM (female genital mutilation) and HPV (honour-based violence) and radicalisation are also very low; and the quality of information sharing is variable There has been insufficient education of partners to ensure that all are aware of the specific needs and risks associated with the variety of vulnerable groups.</p> <p>The quality of referrals from partner agencies is variable meaning the MASH team is required to gather additional information to inform decision making.</p> <p>Extensive development work has taken place but there is more to do within the partnership to ensure all agencies understand their responsibilities and are referring concerns as appropriate.</p> <p>The numbers of children known to be living in private fostering arrangements and the numbers of 16 and 17 year old homeless children are very low. There is much more to do to ensure that your responses to these children are effective, that risks and needs are fully assessed and that appropriate support and provision are provided.</p> <p>Dental Care is not always prioritised.</p> <p>The quality, timeliness and impact of return home interviews are inconsistent with these being less evident for your children in care than children living at home.</p>	Workshops to be arranged across the partnership, including awareness raising materials in relation to FGM and Honour Based Violence	A partnership which is educated in these complex issues will mean that children have the benefit of support from those who understand and know what to do to help keep them safe.
		Private fostering education across the partnership to support identification of children who may be privately fostered to ensure that referrals to access support are made to Social Care	Children who are privately fostered will receive the right help
		Regular MASH multi-agency audits to form part of the regular QA activity	Good quality referrals will help decisions about the right level of help to be made quickly, avoiding delays.
		Centralised list and understanding of CME	Good quality referrals will help decisions about the right level of help to be made quickly, avoiding delays.
Partnership working is integrated	<p>Early Help is under-developed</p> <p>A small number of (Strat) discussions lack attendance by key partners such as health and education. This affects the quality of information being considered as key information may be missing</p> <p>When concerns for Children in Need escalate within the assessment or intervention period, we have seen delay in some strategy discussions being held and then</p>	Early Help strategy to be agreed	We will be able to offer support to children and their carers who are privately fostered
		Additional Targeted Early Help teams to be recruited to	Help will be given when it is needed, it will be easy to access and help needs getting more complicated within families.

	<p>further delays in completing Child Protection inquiries and convening initial Child Protection conferences</p> <p>There are challenges in accessing specialist assessments. This can delay care planning and finding permanent placements.</p> <p>Permanency planning is improving, but there is more to do. Meetings are well attended by key professionals although their quality and impact remain variable. Most provide an update only and lack analysis rationale for decision making and SMART actions.</p> <p>There are a high number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in unregulated placements, many undergoing age assessments. This is due to a local context.</p>		
<b>Childrens Voice and Influence</b>			
Childrens voice heard and influences policy and practice	Children feel unable to influence and shape service provision and delivery.	Participation strategy to be updated	Children will know who senior leaders are and have direct access to them
	Children's voices are not heard or acted upon swiftly by senior leaders.	Engage a provider such as Care Leaders to review our current participation and support our aspiration for children and young people to influence services they receive	Children will directly shape and influence our decisions at all levels of the organisation
	Young people told us "They asked us, we tell them, they don't listen. So what's the point?"	Local Offer for Care Leavers to be updated	
	<p>There is limited evidence of IROs, visiting or having contact with children between reviews.</p> <p>Young people told inspectors they do not always have access to the internet in their accommodation and the local authority is considering this in the review of the local offer</p> <p>Care leavers and young people's participation on the corporate parenting board is underdeveloped and they don't have direct access to the corporate parenting board or senior leaders. It is therefore difficult to ascertain how they influence and shape service provision and delivery or how young people's views lead to improvements in services.</p>	Take findings from Peer Review to next stage of planning <sup>1</sup>	Children will see 'you said, we did' outcomes and know they are heard and action is taken
<b>Practice and Performance</b>			
Consistency in quality of practice	<p>There is too much variability in the quality of management oversight and supervision leading to drift and delay</p> <p>Care plans are variable in quality and they are not usually SMART or IMPACT focused.</p> <p>There are too many changes in social worker</p>	<p>A programme of practice learning workshops to be put into place for all staff to include:</p> <p>Plans and planning</p> <p>Management oversight</p> <p>Supervision</p>	Managers will support and challenge decision making in teams to make sure that children receive the right support.

		Pathway planning Permanence Chronology	
Agreements in place for all children	Children live at home with their parents where there is no placement with parent agreement.	Review mechanism for children living at home subject to placement with parents to be developed within a Permanence Monitoring Group framework.	A clear process is in place to review children's permanence arrangements, including supporting children to their permanence plan as soon as possible, including: Placed with parents Connected carers Adoption plans
Children live in stable supported homes.	Support when placements are fragile is not often provided quickly enough.	Refresh the placement stability and disruption process to provide clear practice guidance for teams so we offer support at the earliest opportunity to prevent breakdown and inappropriate increased placement costs	Children will not have to live in lots of different places which causes more anxiety and trauma for them.
Timely and appropriate support and plans that meet children's needs and safeguard	The provision of support for homeless 16 and 17 year olds needs strengthening	Practice guidance for homeless children to be revised, and the support they received to be evaluated via audit	Children who become homeless benefit from social work support which has clear practice guidance to support decision making for them.
Exploitation risks and safeguarding factors clearly understood	Contextual safeguarding does not have systems which are sufficiently robust to ensure that risk assessments are up to date and that agreed actions take place.	Review the Practice Framework and systems in relation to exploitation to ensure there is sufficient partnership responsibility and that there are clear lines of sight for our most at risk children	Children who are vulnerable to exploitation are supported through robust assessment and plans
Timely progress of pre-proceedings	Work in pre-proceedings needs urgent attention as some children are subject to pre-proceedings for far too long, leading to uncertainty for those children and their families	Revised ToR for legal gateway, including tracking mechanism and reporting to provide assurance that we are completing PLO in 12-16 weeks and reducing children in court for more than 26 weeks	Children benefit from early permanence decisions, where drift and delay is avoided
<b>Fostering Innovation</b>			
To be developed in the business plan and business cases	Edge of care Residential units Step-forward from residential to fostering	Staying Close bid submitted to DfE end of Feb for additional funding.	
<b>Better use of Resources</b>			
		Support to facilitate the immediate improvement plan, which has been costed and business cases submitted.	

		Further savings plans to be considered within sufficiency strategy and workforce development – focus on reduction of external placements, exit of innovate teams and workforce stabilisation.	
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## Appendix 7 – Our Continuous Improvement Plan

As defined in Appendix 6, this will immediately follow the initial 12-week improvement plan.

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
<b>Strategic approach, leadership, and Governance</b>			
Consolidate a clear Vision for Slough's Children's and engage with partners to work towards agreement on a shared vision and approach to the transformation of services for children and young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult with Staff in SCF</li> <li>Devise and agree Vision and Imagery</li> <li>This will be highlighted in the business plan and feed into service plans</li> </ul>	In line with our practice model we will have a shared vision to be prominent in all planning, policy and practice evidencing the golden thread between them. This will bring staff purpose together and enhance the focus on outcomes for children.	End of June 2023
Provide the supporting apparatus for improvement and transformation.	Ensure that key priority strategic actions have Programme and Project support by appointing a Business Planning Manager and Programme Support	Improvement and transformation is appropriately supported to ensure grip, pace, and delivery of improvement to support children	End of May 2023
Ensure there are sufficient resources to support practice improvement and carry forward sufficiency transformation work.	Resource, appoint and deploy a 'Building Practice' Lead to promote and support Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement	The provision of ongoing support and training and 'closing the loop' on audit findings, will improve practice and therefore outcomes for vulnerable children	End of April 2023
Implement robust strategic financial monitoring to identify emerging trends in demand and related cost-pressures to inform management action	Resource, appoint and deploy a 'Sufficiency lead' to lead the development and implementation of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a Sufficiency Strategy</li> <li>a Corporate Parenting Strategy,</li> <li>Permanency</li> </ul>	<p>An increased focus on permanency, will reduce drift and delay in achieving 'forever homes' for our children</p> <p>An increased focus on building local capacity in Edge of Care and fostering provision will support children to live with their families or ensure the availability of local foster placement avoiding 'at a distance' placements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In post May 2023</li> <li>Sufficiency strategy – to cabinet by August 2023 (via Senior Leadership Team and Corporate Parenting Panel)</li> <li>Corporate Parenting signed off August 2023</li> </ul>
Refresh the workplan of the <b>joint commissioning</b> group to reflect the ambitions of the joint commissioning strategy.	Develop forecasting and demand models to identify emerging trends and inform strategic planning and transformation work	Understanding patterns and trends enables planning of services to benefit children and families	End of November 2023
Implement and maintain clear lines of sight for SCF Leadership, Lead Member and Senior Managers into practice, supporting the development of a 'High Support and High Challenge' culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Launch the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF)</li> <li>Maintain a robust Quality Assurance, Audit Programme</li> <li>Improve the performance framework including developing a focused performance dashboard aligned with the improvement plan that drives the quality of practice and supports senior leaders in understanding the quality of practice</li> <li>Regular reports on practice to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting to Good Board,</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Children will benefit from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The scrutiny of Members and Officers who are better informed and more able to champion their needs.</li> <li>Clear lines of sight which will identify areas where practice improvement activity needs to be focused</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>QAF produced June 2023</li> <li>Performance Framework produced July 2023</li> </ul>

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
<p>Ensure senior managers have sufficient capacity and oversight of key decision-making processes and the timeliness and impact of outcomes for children.</p> <p>Create a system which supports a learning model for the whole child's journey to work across children's services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Senior Leadership Team</li> <li>○ Corporate Leadership Team</li> <li>○ Contract Monitoring</li> <li>● Business case to DFE to increase capacity at senior level for 6 months to support the delivery of QA and performance</li> </ul>		
<p>Put into place good corporate parenting for our children in care and care experienced young people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Take forward the recommendations from the Peer Review of Corporate Parenting and move into Task and Finish Group to develop a clear action plan with the new Lead Member,</li> </ul>	<p>Strengthen the oversight and challenge of Members</p> <p>Improve partnership working to ensure that we provide quality parenting or our children in care.</p>	<p>End of September 2023</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reset Corporate Parenting Panel structure and governance ensuring that all Members and Officers are clear on their role.</li> <li>● Identify Lead Officers and Member Champions for key Corporate Parenting themes</li> </ul>	<p>Children and Young People will have opportunities and support to shape the services they receive</p>	<p>End of September 2023</p>
	<p>Corporate Parenting training offered to all Members in accordance with their involvement with Children's Services</p>	<p>Children and young people will benefit from members being better informed about their corporate parenting responsibilities and the need to ask 'is it good enough for my child'</p>	<p>End of July 2023</p>
	<p>Take forward 'Protected Characteristic' for care experienced young people in slough</p>	<p>The introduction of a Protected Characteristic for Care Experienced Young People will ensure that their needs must be considered as a priority in political and strategic as well as practice decision making</p>	<p>End of December 2023</p>
<p>Involve Members and senior officers in Practice shadowing opportunities and Practice Weeks</p> <p>Implement a programme of ongoing training, development and coaching support for members building on local resources and wider regional and national networks including the LGA leadership programme</p>	<p>Develop a programme of Shadowing Practice opportunities for CEx, Lead Member, DCS, DSC and CP Champions – twice per year</p> <p>Plan attendance at practice week session for CEx, Lead Member, DCS, DSC and CP Champions.</p>	<p>Direct involvement in practice and learning supports improvement</p>	<p>End of June 2023</p> <p>End of July 2023</p>
<p>Produce a sufficiency strategy based on current demand and needs of our CLA population and forecasted demand</p>	<p>Develop and gain agreement for the Sufficiency Strategy and move into a Sufficiency Project Board with key workstreams e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● fostering,</li> <li>● edge of care,</li> <li>● accommodation for care experienced young people</li> </ul>	<p>When children and young people cannot live with their families there will be sufficient placements available to meet their needs near to their own communities. h.</p> <p>Provide good quality accommodation for care experienced young people with clear pathway to housing</p>	<p>End of August 2023</p> <p>Work streams to commence September 2023</p>

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
Strengthen the impact of the Youth Justice Board	Seek an LGA/ Peer review of Youth Justice and identify opportunities to improve the oversight of the Management Board  Inspection preparation and SEF to be completed through task and finish group	Children benefit from a service focused on their needs and oversight from a board clear on their role.	End of July 2023
Ensure governance framework drives improvement across the partnership with membership from multi-agency partners, Council leaders and elected members	Key strategic partners are members of the Getting to Good (G2G Board) and are enabled to provide high support and challenge to support the improvement of services for children. A G2G Board away morning to be arranged to strengthen the Boards role and oversight.	Services for children and improvements are well considered across the partnership to find collective opportunities	July – membership of G2G to be confirmed  September 2023 for away day/ half day
Develop a robust and effective framework for self-assessment and evaluation that is subject to ongoing continuous review to ensure it is providing the evidence necessary to accurately inform the authority of the quality and impact of Children's Services	SEF preparation framework to be aligned with our QA and audit programme to develop challenge sessions within Children's Improvement Group and SMT to regularly review our practice and update the SEF.	Children will benefit from a service which knows itself well and is able to learn from audit to improve practice and services.	Framework aligned with QA framework – July 2023
Improve and streamline the governance between Slough Children First and the Council	Business plan to be agreed between SCF and the Council based on service provision to children and families, including identifying realistic options to save money and invest to save approach.  Agree the monitoring arrangements between Council and SCF and the key indicator reports. Agree use of report format which is in line with reporting to other Boards so one report services all meetings to prevent additionality of reporting.	Clear overview arrangements between council and SCF provide a joined-up approach to practice and delivery allowing the focus to be outwards on delivery.	End of July 2023
Leaders will implement and demonstrate our practice model across the organisation  Develop communication strategy to ensure leaders are visible, staff are engaged and feel supported. We build a culture in which practice flourishes	Leaders will consistently demonstrate our model in practice. This includes how meetings are chaired, interaction with the workforce and across the partnership. Feedback will be received through staff surveys conducted throughout the year.  All practitioners and managers will demonstrate the practice model in their assessment and planning work.	A restorative, trauma informed and strengths based workforce will model this approach with families	Staff survey – September 2023 and then quarterly
<b>Engaging and supporting the workforce</b>			
Slough becoming an Employer of Choice and we further stabilise the Children's Services workforce by recruiting and retaining permanent staff.	Involve children and young people in redesigning our online recruitment profile to  increase footfall and applications to permanent roles. Young people will be involved in staff interviews and the recruitment process.	Children benefit from fewer changes in social worker which will prevent drift and delay in planning for their wellbeing.	Task and finish in place by June 2023 and revised page by August 2023
	Launch Slough's first Frontline Unit to support the permanent recruitment of Newly Qualified Social Workers		End of September 2023
	Complete and implement the Career progression Framework		End of August 2023

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
Enhance the skills, knowledge and experience of the whole Children's workforce to better meet children's and young person's needs  Produce and implement a comprehensive workforce strategy for the children's workforce driven by our improvement priorities	Undertake a skills gap analysis to inform a workforce training programme across frontline staff, managers and leaders.	Identifying areas for development will support practice.	End of August 2023
	All staff in Children's Services to have an annual appraisal and review to support their development and ensure that they are clear about their role in the Children's Services Improvement Programme.		End of July 2023
	Design a leadership development programme for leaders and managers at all levels of the system of support for children to progressively strengthen the quality of strategic and frontline leadership.  Work with Hampshire as SLIP partners to support Leadership programme	Children will benefit from an increased level of competence in management oversight	End of September 2023
Children's Services to directly contribute to the Getting to Good Board.	Support staff to set up a shadow Getting to Good Board	The improvement and delivery of services for children will be enhanced by the views the staff who work to support them and improvement their outcomes.	First meeting to be held by end June 2023 and thereon before each board.
Put in place a wellbeing offer which is highly visible to existing workforce and for those considering joining Slough	Put in place half day to focus on CPD each month for staff across Children's Services  Mental health and wellbeing check offer  Mental health first aiders in workforce  Staff feedback to be undertaken through a regular wellbeing survey on a quarterly basis	Increasing support to staff supports sense of wellbeing in work, reduce sickness and attrition intended to reduce changes in lead worker for children	Rolling September, December, March, June
Review expectations of home-based v office-based working including the use of Teams meetings and expected etiquette.	Put in place guidance regarding 'Teams' and face to face meetings – e.g. CLA review and PEPs		End of August 2023
<b>Engaging with partners</b>			
Agree clear and achievable strategic priorities as a partnership.  Social Care will work across the partnership to develop and embed local priorities, such as Supporting Reduction of childhood obesity, reducing Antisocial behaviour and support the implementation of the domestic abuse strategy	Put in place an escalation policy and process for partner where they want to raise concerns or compliments about practice including a reporting back mechanism	Good practice will be shared with the workforce to support improvement.  Practice which is not working for children will be addressed to ensure their needs are met and to identify learning.	End of September 2023
	Senior Managers will attend Safeguarding Partnership Board, Safer Slough Partnership, Childrens Health and Wellbeing Board – and others	Collaborative approaches to support children provide improved opportunity to help and make a difference	End of July 2023
Invite and sustain partnership involvement in the Getting to Good Board to develop a culture of 'High Support and High Challenge'	Strategic partners to be active members of the Improvement board to support challenge and support 'unblocking' of issues	Providing different perspectives supports creative thinking in delivery of services to improve children's experiences of support	End of September 2023
Identify opportunities to work alongside Community and Voluntary Sector; and faith leaders/ groups.	Regular liaison between DCS and DoSC with Leaders of community.  Leaders invited to lead sessions at practice week.	Children will benefit from services being informed and delivered by groups from their communities, and their faith groups. Services will be more relevant to their needs. More sustainable	End of September 2023

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
	Student and ASYE programme includes time with community organisations.		
Undertake regular multi-agency audits into key themes	Include multi-agency thematic audits with regular reports to SPB and G2G	Multi-agency audit provided opportunity to learn and develop better services for children	End of September 2023
Ongoing support and training around complex safeguarding issues	Regular training cycle for FGM, HBV, radicalisation and exploitation	A partnership which is educated in these complex issues will mean that children have the benefit of support from those who understand and know what to do to help keep them safe.	End of June 2023
Increase awareness of Private Fostering arrangements	Deliver Private Fostering training across the partnership to support identification of children who are privately fostered to ensure that referrals to access support are made to Social Care  Private fostering local awareness campaign.	A partnership which is educated in these complex safeguarding issues will mean that children have the benefit of support from those who understand and know what to do to help keep them safe.	End of June 2023  End of February 2024
MASH Partnership	Identify opportunities to increase partnership presence in the MASH		End of October 2023
Youth Justice	Include YJT in Children's Improvement Group and maintain audit programme to drive improvement in delivery of support to this cohort	Better support to those on the edge of offending, and clear support to reduce/ stop offending for those who have already committed crime.	End of June 2023
SEND	Tracking and escalation process to be in place to ensure that EHCP advice requests to be returned within one week, with good quality information	Information provided supports the right level of support identified via the EHCP plan	End of May 2023
Support for care experienced young people	Work across the partnership including housing, to deliver local offer.  Housing options for Care experienced young people will be improved and a local approach to private rental with a safety net will be developed	Care experienced young people will have access to a well understood local offer, including options for their own home.	End of December 2023
<b>Children's Voice and Influence</b>			
Ensure that Children and Young People have opportunities to shape the services they receive	Co-produce a Participation Strategy with Children and Young People.	Children will directly shape and influence decision-making at all levels of the organisation	End of June 2023
	Provide training to Corporate Parenting Panel and young people to support participation in a meaningful way	Children will directly shape and influence our decisions at all levels of the organisation	TBC
Provide apprenticeships for care experienced young people	Identify opportunities for apprenticeships and work experience placements across Slouch council and partner agencies	Young People will have a clear pathway into work opportunities	End of October 2023
Care experienced young people have clearly defined support	Provide targeted practice support to improve the quality of services to children and review impact	Care experienced young people will be clear about their entitlements.	End of June 2023
Care Leaving to become a Protected Characteristic		The needs of Care Experienced Young People are considered and prioritised in all decisions made by the Council	End of December 2023
<b>Practice and Performance</b>			
Clarify and strengthen the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) arrangements	Revise the policy and practice framework of MACE and relaunch to provide clear distinction between Operational and Strategic MACE	There will be a focus on Victims, Offenders, Locations and Themes to ensure children and young people who are victims	End of September 2023

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
		are supported and offending is subject to a programme of disruption.	
	Put in place programme of Workshops and Practice Learning sets, including staff feedback, to support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supervision and Management oversight</li> <li>Use of chronology to inform practice</li> <li>Plans and planning</li> <li>Case summaries to support direction of travel</li> </ul>	Children and families benefit from understanding what support they will receive and why; management grip and drive to ensure it happens and has impact and everyone is working to the same goal.	End of June 2023
	Our audit work tests impact of workshops on practice	Children's Services know themselves well	End of May 2023
Improve management oversight and touch-points to support driving and delivery of plans within the child's timeframe.	Practice standards for team managers supervision and oversight will be reviewed and measured through performance surgeries.	Management grip and oversight will drive plans for children to improve outcomes	End of September 2023
Increase the timeliness of decision making for Children	Initial Child Protection Conferences must take place within the statutory timescales – incremental target setting (70, 75, 80% consistency).  A clear process from the point of strategy meeting to ICPC will be in place and implemented across services.	Children and young people will feel safe and will not experience unnecessary drift and delay in safeguarding them and progressing their plans	70% by June 2023 75% July 2023 80% August 2023 85% September 2023
	Reduce emergency applications to Court by having clear senior manager oversight of all decision via legal gateway.	Children will not experience unnecessary drift and delay	End of June 2023
	Where needs may require legal intervention, this is done in a planned way and utilising PLO (Pre-Proceedings)	Children entering PLO will benefit from their wider family and network being explored to provide support, or to be a carer if they cannot stay at home. Children entering PLO will benefit from their wider family and network being explored to provide support, or to be a carer if they cannot stay at home.	End of June 2023
	We will reduce the number of children experiencing delay in their public law proceedings and conclude more cases under 26 weeks' by focusing on front-loading.  We will ensure that tracking is completed within the legal gateway process and that final care planning meetings are undertaken to provide a clear and rationalised plan for the child, including clarifying the support provided.	Children will not experience unnecessary drift and delay	Panel and tracking June 2023 Care planning process – August 2023
Permanence	Review mechanism for children living at home subject to placement with parents to be developed within a Permanence Monitoring Group framework.	A clear process is in place to review children's permanence arrangements, including supporting children to their permanence plan as soon as possible, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Placed with parents</li> <li>Connected carers</li> <li>Adoption plans</li> </ul>	Was May – push to end June 2023
Data	Develop 'self-serve' access to live data and annex A information – PowerBI	Live data supports practice	

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
Practice Standards	Revise all practice standards and ensure that a central library and toolkit is available (Tri-X as example). Provide access to partners to our practice standards.	Social workers have clear practice standard to ensure a minimum standard of support and service	End of October 2023
IRO's and CP chairs through their oversight will support consistency, challenge and a focus on the child's needs and voice.	Relaunch the Dispute Resolution Management policy	IRO will have clear footprint and scrutinise plans which are not working or are delayed	End of July 2023
	Mid-way monitoring will be in place for each child with the IRO providing a clear oversight and challenge to the plan, which is written in the child's record to show why and what happened.	Clear IRO footprint and supporting the quality and delivery of plans	End of July 2023
Safe space for care experienced young people	Provide a pop-in space for care experienced young people to be scoped and found	Care experienced young people will have access to a space in which they can access support, spend time with others or access the internet.	End of October 2023
LADO will provide scrutiny and oversight where professional issues have been raised.	LADO policy and process will be reviewed and an audit of LADO work scheduled into the Audit cycle as part of dip sampling,		End of November 2023
Children are supported by right team to meet their needs.	Review and amend the case transfer policy to support there will be good practice and timely arrangements in place for children transferring between teams, there will be handover arrangements and case work will be completed to a good standard	Children will receive the right support based on their needs	End of September 2023
Children subject to child protection plans are reviewed to avoid drift and delay.	A Child protection challenge panel will be implemented to Review Child Protection Plans open for over 12 months to provide additional review point specific to supporting driving the plan to meet the child's needs.	Drift and delay is avoided for children subject to plans for long periods of time	End of September 2023
Adoption plans are progressed for children where this is appropriate	We will strengthen early permanence considerations through legal gateway and RAA sitting on panel  When a plan of adoption has been confirmed the progression of achieving that plan is closely scrutinised by Permanence Monitoring to progress the plan as soon as it can be	Children achieving their adoption plan is achieved as soon as possible avoiding drift and delay	End of September 2023
<b>Fostering Innovation</b>			
Identify opportunities to locate social work teams in the Early Help space	Locate Frontline unit in Early Help to provide opportunity for early support and brief intervention to prevent needs escalating.	In line with the Ind Review, strengthen early help for families to prevent needs escalating	End of October 2023
Edge of Care	Identify opportunities to create edge of care support within the Borough – No Wrong Door, MST, FFT etc.	Support children to stay at home by preventing family breakdown	End of October 2023
Mockingbird	Explore introducing second Mockingbird constellation		End of October 2023
Pre-birth pathway	Scope out demand in pre-birth space and update local protocol.  Identify partnership opportunities – pre-birth forum - to increase support to expectant parents' and wider families. Support permanence where significant safeguarding concerns are present.		End of September 2023

Objective	Action	Intended impact for children	Timescale for delivery
	Ensure Adoption Workers sit in legal gateway.		
Court Work Progression	Explore option for court work progression manager to increase oversight of care proceedings, improving grip and reducing drift and delay	Reduce drift and delay in achieving a permanence decision	End of September 2023
Review operating model to provide locality/team around school model and frontload help and support.	Review demand and forecasting and review current operating model effectiveness. This is with a view to 'front-loading' and providing support earlier on; and reducing changes in social workers for children and families	Reduce changes in worker Provides support early on	End of October 2023
Family led decision making to avoid escalation of risk and improve safe planning for children and making permanence decisions as early as possible.	Develop and launch a Family Group Conference model of approach to engage, support and promote family-based arrangements to address identified needs, risks and circumstances and ensure there is robust decision making for children entering care	Family led decisions support children to remain within their family or close network where possible	End of January 2024
Strengthened oversight of children vulnerable to exploitation.	The MACE arrangements will be reviewed across the partnership to strengthen operational and strategic oversight.  The current team structure for exploitation will be reviewed to identify opportunities to put in place an exploitation and Missing coordinator to strengthen oversight of vulnerable children.  Missing from home process reviewed and updated.  Risk assessment tool and oversight of exploitation reviewed, updated and d.	We will improve our understanding of children at risk and themes so that we can provide support and strengthen disruption to keep children safe.	MACE arrangements – July 2023  Team structure – December 2023  Processes and tools – July 2023
Judicious use of resources			
Living with financial means	Deliver against the Slough Children First Business Plan		End of March 2024
Oversight of all external placements	External placement panel in place to regularly review all external placements with a view to identifying step-forward and reunification options.	All children will have regular scrutiny of their plans to ensure that they don't end up 'stuck' in residential care if their needs are better met by fostering or returning home	End of June 2023
Reduce overall spend in Joint Legal Team space which has arisen because of high demand	Put in place gatekeeping to reduce reliance on legal to provide care planning advice and decisions, ensuring that they can advise on a well-articulated and considered plan. (Social worker is the expert)	Social work teams provide clear plans for children which are considered and achieve permanence	End of March 2024
Independent assessments in PLO cases	Explore options to create a 'bank' of ISW's to complete work.  Explore Court Assessment Team (CAT) options internally to reduce legal spend	Locating assessments in the local area means that children benefit from assessments completed by those who know the Borough and local resources to provide the best offer of support	End of October 2023
Reduce managed teams	Put in place plans to exit the remaining innovate team	Children will have stability of teams working in Slough	End of September 2024
Improved oversight of the child's journey to identify drift, avoid high-cost placements and support children to live in appropriate accommodation.	Review current panel process, chairing arrangements and implement revised TOR and scope for Legal Gateway, Permanency Management Group and high-cost placement panel		End of August 2023





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**Slough Borough Council**

<b>Report To:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Date:</b>	17/07/2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Early Help Partnership Strategy
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Paul Kelly
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Sue Butcher
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Donna Briggs
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Key Decision:</b>	NO
<b>Exempt:</b>	NO
<b>Decision Subject To Call In:</b>	YES
<b>Appendices:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Early Help Partnership Strategy</li> <li>2. Overview of consultation and feedback</li> <li>3. Early Help System Guide 2022-23</li> </ol>

**1. Summary and Recommendations**

- 1.1 This report sets out the purpose and expected impact of the newly developed Early Help Partnership Strategy and provides an overview of the implementation plan in order that the partnership delivers a cohesive approach to early intervention and prevention for children, young people and families across the Borough.
- 1.2 Co-produced by partner agencies, accepted by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and presented successfully to Slough Wellbeing Board, the strategy aligns with Slough Borough Council's vision for the future, for all children to thrive. Starting from the premise that all families need some help sometimes, the strategy highlights the importance of children and families getting the right help at the right time.
- 1.3 The strategy is presented to Cabinet to formally approve the strategy, to provide comment and to support its intention and implementation.

**Recommendations:**

Cabinet is recommended to:

Approve the adoption and implementation of the Early Help Partnership Strategy which will be overseen and implemented by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board (Appendix 1)

## Reason:

It is necessary for Slough to improve its approach to early help support for children, young people and families through proactive, preventative partnership working to improve the life chances of our residents. An improved co-ordinated approach to early help will reduce the requirement for more costly specialist services over time and enable our communities to build resilience and self-efficacy.

## Commissioner Review

This report has been received by Commissioners and any specific comments will be reported to Cabinet.

## 2. Report

2.1 The Early Help Partnership Strategy sets out our collective vision to share knowledge and resources to support children, young people and families who need help as soon as they need it, to prevent problems escalating.

2.2 The strategy feeds directly into all of Slough Borough Council's priorities (2022-2025) in the following ways:

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

2.3 The delivery of a multi-agency early help offer through shared responsibility, will have a direct impact on the pressures placed on directly delivered local authority services as partners agencies will be better placed to support children, young people and families within universal, community services and Faith groups. As the needs of families are met earlier and they are empowered to make positive change, this will support families with the **right help, at the right time in the right place** and will prevent family situations worsening and needs becoming more significant where significant and costly services are needed (such as care arrangements). This approach supports our early help and prevention plan to reduce reliance on council services and identifies collaborative partnership approaches to supporting children and families in their communities.

(ii) An environment that helps residents live more independent, healthier and safer lives

2.4 Central to the Early Help partnership strategy is an approach which will ensure residents can find support more easily and increase their use of universal services to meet their needs before issues arise to build independence and self-efficacy.

2.5 A cohesive and shared early help offer will help us to build an improved picture of the early help needs of children, young people and families by bringing together services under a shared vision. Children and families will benefit from help being available at the earliest stages within their communities. Through this we will be able to proactively work towards improving key areas of need, which will include health and social support in line with identified shared outcomes.

(iii) A borough for children and young people to thrive

2.6 The vision for children and young people from our Early Help Strategy speaks directly to this third priority; and the future priority to support children and young people to thrive. This approach is collaborative and brings on board partners, including our Community and

Voluntary Sector. Across the partnership we will cover all aspects of children's lives – from early years health and development, to the complexities and challenges which can come from navigating teenage years and early adulthood. Incorporating all thresholds of need from universal, through to targeted support, the strategy supports the importance of being active and having fun as fundamental to developing positive relationships which are crucial to overall wellbeing.

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

2.7 Specific areas identified within the Corporate Strategy in relation to preventative help via family hubs and working collaboratively with schools are set out within the delivery plan for the Early Help Strategy. Breaking the cycle of poverty and striving for generational change are at the heart and purpose of working in a preventative way, to build on the resilience and resources of each generation of families.

### **Options considered**

**Option 1:** Accept EH Partnership Strategy in full.

**This is the recommended option** particularly following the support received from partnership boards namely the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and the Slough Wellbeing Board.

**Option 2:** Reject EH Partnership Strategy

Given that this is a partnership strategy partner agencies are likely to continue to progress the strategy. However, the lack of support from the Council as a lead partner is likely to hinder progress and indicate a lack of commitment to supporting children and families at an earlier stage **This is not recommended**

**Option 3:** Agree specific aspects of the EH Partnership Strategy.

Cabinet may choose to identify and accept only certain aspects of the strategy. Work would then need to be undertaken to assess if the strategy remains viable in these circumstances. **This is not recommended.**

### **Background**

2.8 As a partnership we collectively agree that we want the best for all children, young people and families. The development of a common vision and shared principles for our new Early Help Strategy is key to our approach if we are to work in partnership towards this common overarching goal.

2.9 Young people and parents have told us that they want Early Help services to be easily accessible, enabling self-referral and to offer flexibility in providing the right support before problems get bigger. The delivery of the Early Help offer needs to be built on positive relationships where there is mutual respect, and children, young people and families feel heard, unjudged and encouraged to make positive changes in their lives.

In developing this strategy we listened to our children, young people, families and partner agencies, to develop the vision and related principles for our Early Help Strategy:

2.10 In the past 4 years, early help has been considered by stakeholders as a service delivered directly by the Local Authority, rather than a multi-agency offer and approach. The updated Early Help strategy provides a clear, collective vision about Early Help being

all of our responsibility and gives a clear commitment to children and families in our community.

2.11 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care provides us with further opportunities to develop our partnership response to early help for children, young people and families, from prevention through to targeted support. This and the review by the National Panel into the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes have led to wide ranging recommendations being made to the Government and will feature significantly in the national development of early help services going forward.

2.12 Directed via the Children and Young People's Partnership Board, a Task and Finish Group was set up in November 2022 to focus on developing our new Early Help Strategy, with key statutory partners included at both and strategic and operational level. As part of the strategy development, we consulted with a number of stakeholders (professionals, parents/carers and young people) to develop our common language for early help and the principles that underpin the strategy (Appendix 2)

2.13 In September 2022, the Council's People Scrutiny Panel set up a task and finish group reviewing Slough Children First's (SCF) business plan with a particular focus on workforce strategy. The finalised report was presented to Cabinet in February 2023 and contained recommendations to the wider partnership, the Council and SCF. The recommendations included recognising the importance and value of the wider "children's workforce", with a need to develop a shared language and performance metrics to measure outcomes as well as embed a multi-agency partnership approach to supporting families impacted by the cost of living pressures and a multi-agency partnership focus on early help and prevention.

2.14 The Early Help Partnership Strategy was presented to Slough Wellbeing Board on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023 as it aligns to Priority One: Starting Well. The Slough Wellbeing Board supported the principles and wider approach. In additional, Early Help has been identified as the first priority in Slough Children First's emerging Business Plan for 2023-26.

### **3. Implications of the Recommendation**

#### *3.1 Financial implications*

3.1.1 The strategy seeks to improve the alignment of multi-agency service delivery in order to pool resources and budgets by identifying priority areas and reducing duplication and demand on more costly statutory services in the longer term.

3.1.2 Slough Children First will continue to deliver Targeted Early Help, with the current additional cost of delivering the service (in budget) at £419k leading to an anticipated 5% reduction in children and young people requiring targeted support, instead receiving support earlier on across the partnership. We anticipate that this continued investment will support our ambition to reduce the escalation of children's needs and thus reduce the flow through to statutory teams. This will support a future reduction in workloads in the safeguarding services and ensure our Targeted Early Help provision is in line with the expected changes under the National Review of Social Care in the next 2-3 years.

3.1.3 We do not anticipate the impact of the strategy to reduce costs until year 3, at which time we will seek to identify efficiencies across the system start to be realised before year 3 due to the need to support partners to hold Early Help plans and some initial challenges

in recruitment. Additional funding was sought in 22/23 for 2 additional Targeted Early Help Teams to achieve a reduction in unexpected high caseloads across statutory and targeted services, with future year funding factored into the Business Plan process from 23/24 and beyond.

## 3.2 *Legal implications*

3.2.1 Section 10 of the Children Act 2004, sets out the requirement for each local authority to make arrangements to promote co-operation between the authority, each of the authority's relevant partners (police, probation, youth offending team, health agencies and schools and colleges), and such other persons or bodies who exercise functions or are engaged in activities in relation to children in the local authority's area, as the authority considers appropriate. The arrangements are to be made with a view to improving the wellbeing of children in the authority's area so far as being related to (a) physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing, (b) protection from harm and neglect, (c) education, training and recreation, and (d) the contribution made by them to society and (e) social and economic wellbeing.

3.2.2 Section 11 of the 2004 Act requires the local authority, health bodies, police, probation, youth offending team and other prescribed bodies to make arrangements for ensuring their functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and that any arrangements provided by another person pursuant to arrangements made by that body in the discharge of those functions are provided having regard to that need.

3.2.3 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 provides statutory guidance stating that local organisations and agencies should have in place effective ways to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs of individual children and families. This confirms that providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Effective early help relies upon local organisations and agencies working together to identify children and families who would benefit from early help, undertake an assessment of the need for early help and provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family focused on activities to improve the outcomes for the child. Local authorities should work with organisations and agencies to develop joined-up early help services based on a clear understanding of local needs. This requires all practitioners, including those in universal services and those providing services to adults with children, to understand their role in identifying emerging problems and to share information with other practitioners to support early identification and assessment.

3.2.4 The Government has published a toolkit to assist local strategic partnerships responsible for early help systems. This guide has been produced jointly by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Department for Education (DfE). This defines early help as the total support that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse. The guide has an early help vision centred around the role of the workforce, communities, family voice and experience, leaders and data and was used as part of the initial self-assessment process which informed the development of the strategy (Appendix 3)

## 3.3 *Risk management implications*

3.3.1 There are a range of risks associated with this work which predominantly centre around:

- Lack of engagement from partners
- Lack of clarity on measurement on KPIs and/or benefits

3.3.2 Mitigation is continuing through external workshops, information sharing and coordination of approach to ensure shared ownership. Some of these mitigations are already in place, others will take time to implement and embed. All risks and mitigations will change and develop over time and the current position will need to be continuously assessed.

3.3.3 Reporting of significant risks will be managed through the CYP Partnership Board and will be a standing item on each agenda.

### 3.4 *Environmental implications*

3.4.1 None identified

### 3.5 *Equality implications*

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

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

3.5.2 The protected characteristics are:

- Age;
- Disability;
- Gender reassignment;
- Marriage and civil partnership;
- Pregnancy and maternity;
- Race;
- Religion or belief;
- Sex; and
- Sexual orientation

3.5.3 The Early Help Partnership Strategy seeks to reduce inequalities by ensuring the availability of a services to those in need within Slough, therefore all current and potential service users will be positively impacted, as they are likely to receive the right support the first time round.

3.5.4 Identification of need and specific outcomes linked to vulnerable groups and those with protected characteristics will be part of the next stage of work in the detailed implementation plan to support the strategy, which will inform the equality impact assessment

### 3.6 *Procurement implications*

3.6.1 None identified, though the partnership may later identify procurement or commissioning opportunities which would then be considered as appropriate.



### 3.7 *Workforce implications*

3.7.1 Implications for the workforce are deemed to be positive through building multi-agency networks of support that enables all partners delivering services to children, young people and families in Slough to do so in a joined-up way, sharing responsibility and risk in order to improve outcomes. The multi-agency workforce will work less in silo's and instead develop collaborative approaches to addressing need, enabling access to more specialist or experienced colleagues.

3.7.2 Additional support, training and tools will be available to support all partners in their roles within delivering effective early help and in the longer term, caseloads are expected to reduce within statutory services.

### 3.8 *Property implications*

3.8.1 None identified.

## **4. Background Papers**

4.1 There are no relevant background papers

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Strengthening Families  
Strengthening Communities

Slough Early Help Partnership Strategy  
2023-2025



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# Welcome to our Early Help Strategy

We are pleased to introduce our Early Help Partnership Strategy; Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities which sets out Slough's vision for early help services and the action we will take to ensure a robust and effective early help offer is in place for children, young people and families in all communities and neighbourhoods across our town.

This follows on from our original Early Help Strategy 2019 - 2021 and takes consideration of the changing context for children, young people and families who require additional support and reflects the strengths and ambitions of our partnership developments across the town over the past 3 years.

Put simply, this strategy lays out how we will use our collective knowledge and resources to support children, young people and families who need help. Our aim is to provide help as early as possible preventing escalation and supporting children, young people and families to achieve better outcomes. In this context, our strategy must remain dynamic to reflect the changing needs of families, communities and partnerships as they evolve.

Local authorities, under section 10 of the Children Act 2004, have a responsibility to promote inter-agency co-operation to improve the welfare of children (Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018).

Our belief is that our early help offer has to be developed in collaboration with partners, with a key focus on increasing the role of the Lead Professional across partners agencies to reach more children through the **right conversation** at the **right time** leading to the **right service**.

Direct accessibility for children, young people and families to support services across the partnership spanning universal to targeted support is crucial in empowering and enabling stronger families and communities in Slough.

Our early help offer will lead to better life chances for children, young people and families, whilst reducing the demand on statutory intervention over time. Everyone needs some extra help sometimes and we want to make sure that families can seek support without fear or challenge.

This renewed strategy sets out our commitment and drive to work with communities and families to improve outcomes for our children and young people.

We know that everyone needs some extra help sometimes and want to make it as easy as possible for children and families to get that help when they need it.

In Slough, we have a wide range of voluntary and community groups who provide lots of help, and we will work alongside them through our early years and school settings, as well as our social care space to make sure that our children receive the right help, when they need it and that it makes a positive difference to their lives.

## **Strategic statutory partner sign up to be requested**

- **DCS/CEX SCF – Sue Butcher**
- **SBC CEx – Stephen Brown**
- **TVP Police Commander – Lee Barnham**
- **Health Lead - TBC**



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

# Our Early Help Vision and Principles

As a partnership, we collectively agree that we want the best for all children, young people and families.

The development of a common vision and shared principles for our new Early Help Strategy is key to our approach if we are to work in partnership towards this common overarching goal.

Young people and parents have told us that they want early help services to be easily accessible, enabling self-referral and to offer flexibility in providing the right support before problems get bigger.

The delivery of the early help offer needs to be built on positive relationships where there is mutual respect, and children, young people and families feel heard, unjudged and encouraged to make positive changes in their lives.

In developing this strategy, we listened to our children, young people, families and partner agencies, to develop the vision and related principles for our Early Help Strategy, aligned to Slough Borough Council's Corporate priorities:

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



**Happy**



**Safe and loved**



**Thriving**

In order for us to deliver an effective early help offer to children, young people and families, our key principles underpin our strategy;

- Early help is all of our responsibility
- Early help support will be easy to get
- Early Help starts with a strong universal offer for families
- Information about what support is available is shared with children, young people and families
- Right conversation + right time = right service
- As a partnership we will endeavour to be proactive not reactive
- Relationship and strength-based practice is key to how we interact with children, young people and families
- Whole family collaboration and empowerment is important – we work with families and don't do to families
- Partnership work is the key to success through a robust 'Team Around' approach
- A resilient workforce is needed to build resilience in families



# Local and National Context

We have seen a changing society in the last few years significantly impacted by the global pandemic and financial crisis.

This has had a significant impact on the issues facing families, as well as disrupting the provision of services to children and families.

This strategy reflects those challenges and refreshes our offer.

We acknowledge that there have also been significant opportunities and a strengthened sense of collective responsibility and a renewed commitment to working together across services.

The financial impact of the rise in food and fuel increases the risk of poverty and disadvantage and is seen as a significant issue facing children, young people and families today.

The financial context for Slough has continued to be a challenging one, with a Section 114 being declared by the Council in July 2021.

Commissioners are in place to work with the Council to ensure it can regain financial stability. It has therefore been more necessary than ever for us to work collectively to share resources across partners agencies and provided a great opportunity to ensure our systems join up to strengthen our early help offer.

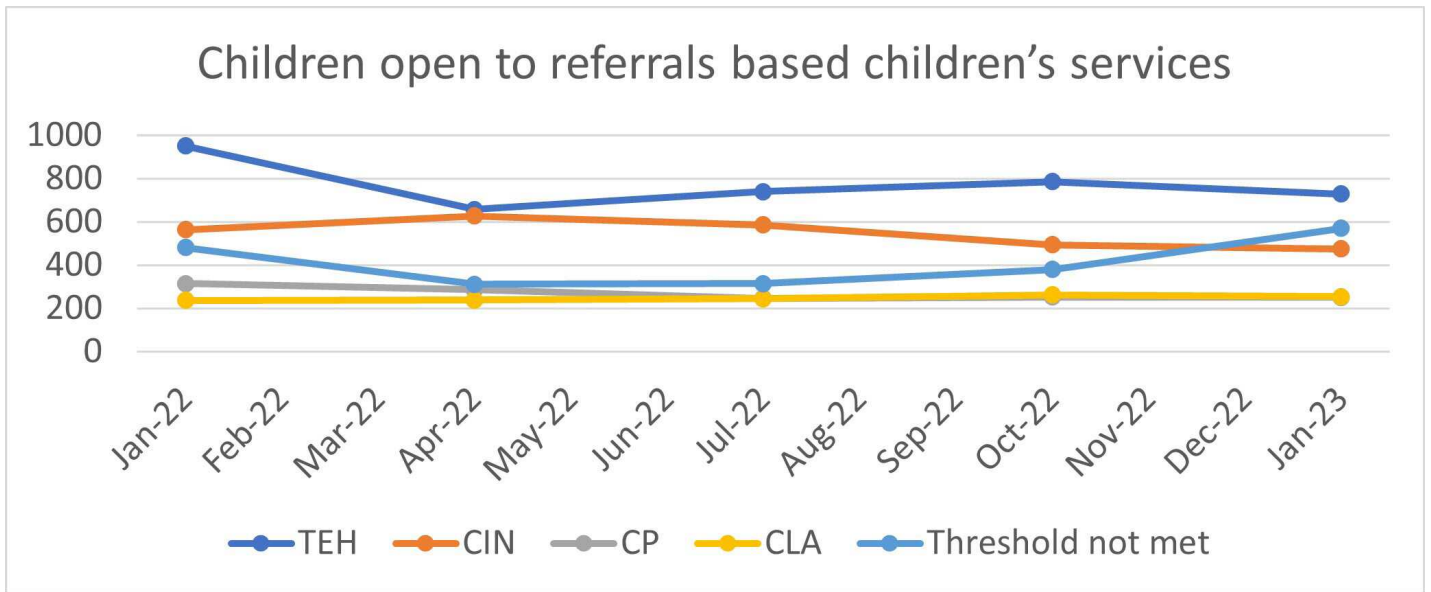
The independent review of children's social care provides us with further opportunities to develop our partnership response to early help for children, young people and families, from prevention through to targeted support. This and the review by the National Panel into the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes have led to wide ranging recommendations being made to the Government and will feature significantly in the national development of early help services going forward.

The local context of Slough varies significantly to our neighbouring Local authorities, with levels of deprivation, geography, government funding and service transformation programmes, all being contributing factors Slough has the second youngest population in the country, high levels of deprivation and we serve a diverse population

who speak 150 languages. There continues to be a shift from issues of intra-familial harm to extra-familial harm. Many of the reasons why children and families require early help or support from social care continue to be broadly the same in Slough, but with increased prevalence and complexity being seen.










- **Societal factors:** Increased numbers of families experiencing food, fuel and hygiene poverty, as well as housing issues, due to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis
- **Parental factors:** Substance misuse, poor parental mental health, and domestic abuse
- **Child development:** Insecure bonding and attachment, speech and language delay, unmet SEND needs
- **Physical health:** High levels of obesity, poor oral health, shorter life expectancy, Type 2 diabetes
- **Children's mental health:** An increase in poor mental health amongst children and young people and challenges accessing services in a timely way
- **Extra-Familial Risks and Harm (EFRH):** Radicalisation, child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, serious youth violence, peer on peer abuse, trafficking, and modern slavery.





The chart above shows the number of children open to referrals based children's services over the past 12 months and those that were referred to the Front Door in Slough but were not provided a direct service.

Through an improved early help offer, we would expect to see reductions in referrals to the Front Door by offering support to children, young people and families when needs first arise.

 <p><b>158,500 people</b> 3rd most densely populated town in the UK</p>	 <p><b>25% aged below 16</b> 2<sup>nd</sup> youngest population in the UK</p>	<p><b>64% of our residents are from ethnic minority groups - the most diverse local authority outside London</b></p> 
<p>In 20/21, over <b>40%</b> of our children lived in low income households (before the cost of living crisis)</p> 	<p><b>63.5% of households</b> in Slough are a single family households (36% with dependent children)</p> 	<p>Obesity levels in our children at Reception and Year 6 are above national local levels</p> 
<p><b>27.3%</b> of Slough's residents do not use English as a main language</p> 	 <p><b>Violent and sexual assault crimes</b> are the highest in our town</p>	<p>Children are less active in Slough than in other areas of the UK</p> 

# Our Early Help Journey So Far

Understanding what works for children, young people and families in Slough has been a significant part of our journey over the past few years.

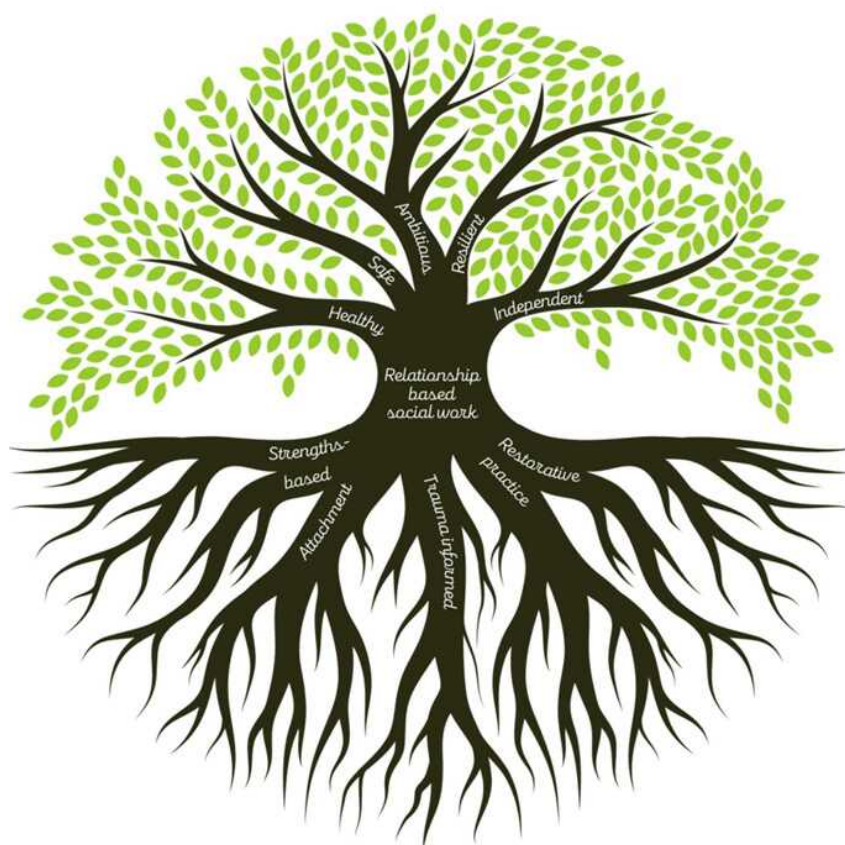
As a multi-agency partnership, we have worked hard to strengthen integrated working in a number of key areas of need for children and young people, including neglect, exploitation, parenting, mental health, domestic abuse and educational issues.

Although we have much to do to improve the quality and consistency of our multi-agency early help offer, we have made positive steps in the past 12 months to solidify the foundation on which to build our new strategy.

As part of our ongoing strategy development and action plan we will measure the impact of these developments for children, young people and families.



The quality of support and interventions provided across the children's partnership will be guided by the 'Slough Approach', our practice framework for how we will work with vulnerable children, young people and families requiring help and support from our services.



**Relationship based** - Relationships are the means through which we work collaboratively with children, families and partners to establish a shared understanding of what needs to be done, and by whom, for the concerns about a child's wellbeing to be resolved.

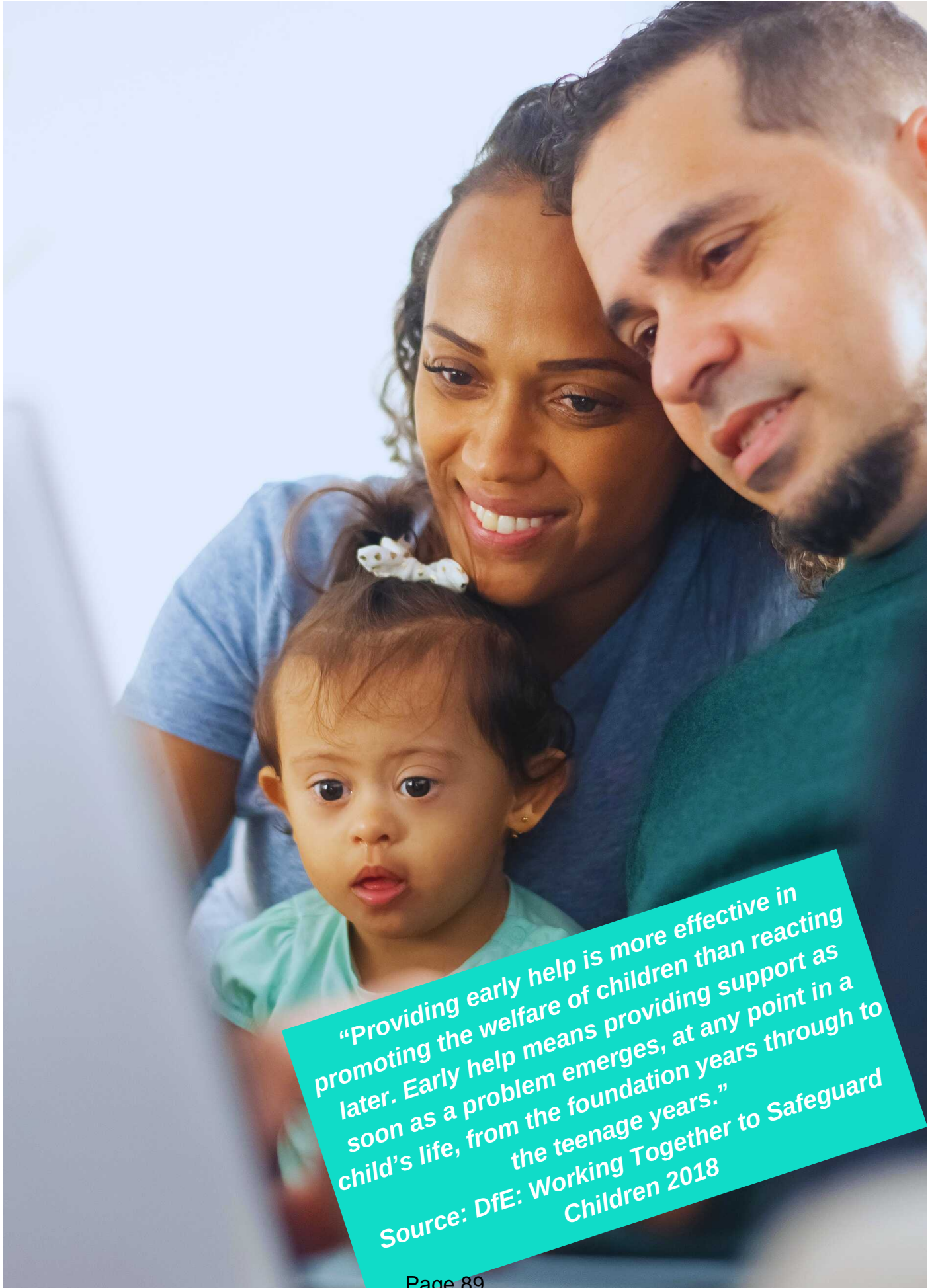
**Strengths based** - Conversations to be about the strengths of individual and families rather than deficits, enabling positive narratives about potential for change, while being clear about 'what we are worried about'. We work with people, supporting their own goals and respecting families' attempts to navigate the complexities of family life.

**Attachment theory** - Emphasising our need to engage in intimate relationships, seeking safety and protection from parent/carers when faced with threats of danger, loss and adversity. Early experiences shape our narratives and sense of ourselves and others' as well as ability to cope with stress and regulate emotions. Attention to disruptions in these connections can help to understand risk while repair can contribute to safety.

**Trauma informed** - Our practice framework identifies and addresses experiences of trauma in the lives of all family members to reduce the negative impact and encourage resilience, embedding safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment.

**Restorative practice** – We will work with families to help build and maintain healthy relationships, resolve difficulties, and repair harm where there has been conflict, promoting a sense of community, understanding, social responsibility and shared accountability.

## Developing a Common Language for Early Help



“Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child’s life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years.”  
Source: DfE: Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018

The provision of early help is an approach which relies upon organisations and agencies working together to provide the right support at the right time to children, young people and families.

The delivery of our early help offer includes local authority services (education, housing, social care), health services, police, community and voluntary sector organisations and faith groups working alongside children, young people and families to improve their situations and build a positive future.

In our model (below), all levels of support prior to statutory and specialist services make up our early help offer.

**Universal support** – The basic provision of services available to all children, young people and families, enabling self-access and meeting general needs e.g. school education, GP, maternity care.

**Additional support** – Needs require more than the support of universal services or a single agency, requiring collaboration and a plan of support to prevent a situation getting worse e.g. school attendance issues, housing issues, low mood.




**Targeted support** – Additional support through a plan developed as part of a Team Around the Child and their family process doesn't improve the situation and/or complex and multiple needs require an early help assessment and multiple agency response via an intensive support plan.



# Early Help Priorities

The National Supporting Families Framework offers us a clear set of outcomes that meet the aims of the partnership and enable us to identify common priority areas of required support for families.

As a partnership, we have identified key priorities from the framework which we believe will have the most significant positive impact on children's lives at an early help level of intervention.

 <p><b>Helping children to be happy</b></p>	 <p><b>Ensuring children feel safe and loved</b></p>	 <p><b>Supporting our children to thrive</b></p>
<p>Decrease in harmful parental conflict and improved family relationships</p> <p>Unsupported young carer now supported, including with change in caring circumstances</p>	<p>Expectant or new parent's capacity for positive, effective parenting is improving</p> <p>Parents / carers demonstrate improved, positive parenting (e.g., improved parent / child interactions; positive attachment etc.)</p> <p>Reduction in abuse or neglect for children and young people</p> <p>More children are in emotionally and physically safe environments</p> <p>Reduction in number of children and young people at risk of exploitation</p> <p>Domestic abuse incidents in homes where there are children reduce</p> <p>Adults are able to reduce/abstain from substance use and understand the risk / impact of the substance use on the family and children and is able to promote safety and implement actions to reduce harm</p>	<p>Children's developmental needs are met, allowing them to make progress at a pace that is suitable for them</p> <p>Increase in number of children with sustained attendance over 90%</p> <p>Improved engagement with education, employment and training (e.g. pupils no longer on report, reduction/no detentions, reduced fixed term exclusions, increase in young people who are EET)</p> <p>Young person no longer involved in crime or demonstrates significant reduction (more than 50%) in incidents of crime</p> <p>Family feels able to manage their finances and/or debt is being managed or has been resolved</p>



"Relationships are the means through which we work collaboratively with children, families and partners to establish a shared understanding of what needs to be done"



# Delivery Plan Overview

Successful delivery of our Early Help Partnership Strategy requires us all to work together to build on our positive foundations towards a proactive, more accessible early help offer for children, young people and families.

We have outlined how we aim to do with our partners and stakeholders over the next two years, with more details in our Early Help Partnership Strategy Action Plan.

## Year 1 - 2023/24

EH1	Partner agencies to take on lead professional role where additional support is required for children and families or where continued support is identified through step down to the community.
EH2	Develop practice standards within Targeted Early Help Service which consistently feed into quality assurance processes and ensure children, young people and families are receiving the best support.
EH3	Multi-agency refresh of thresholds in Slough with a focus on early help where additional and targeted support is required via the Safeguarding Partnership.
EH4	Raise awareness of early help and prevention services, increase access to universal provision for children, young people and families where they are empowered to seek support and find solutions when issues initially arise.
EH5	Build a Team Around the School approach to support where common issues occur in schools, to add resource and expertise at the earliest point, ensuring impact for the majority of children at a collective level.

## Year 2 - 2024/25

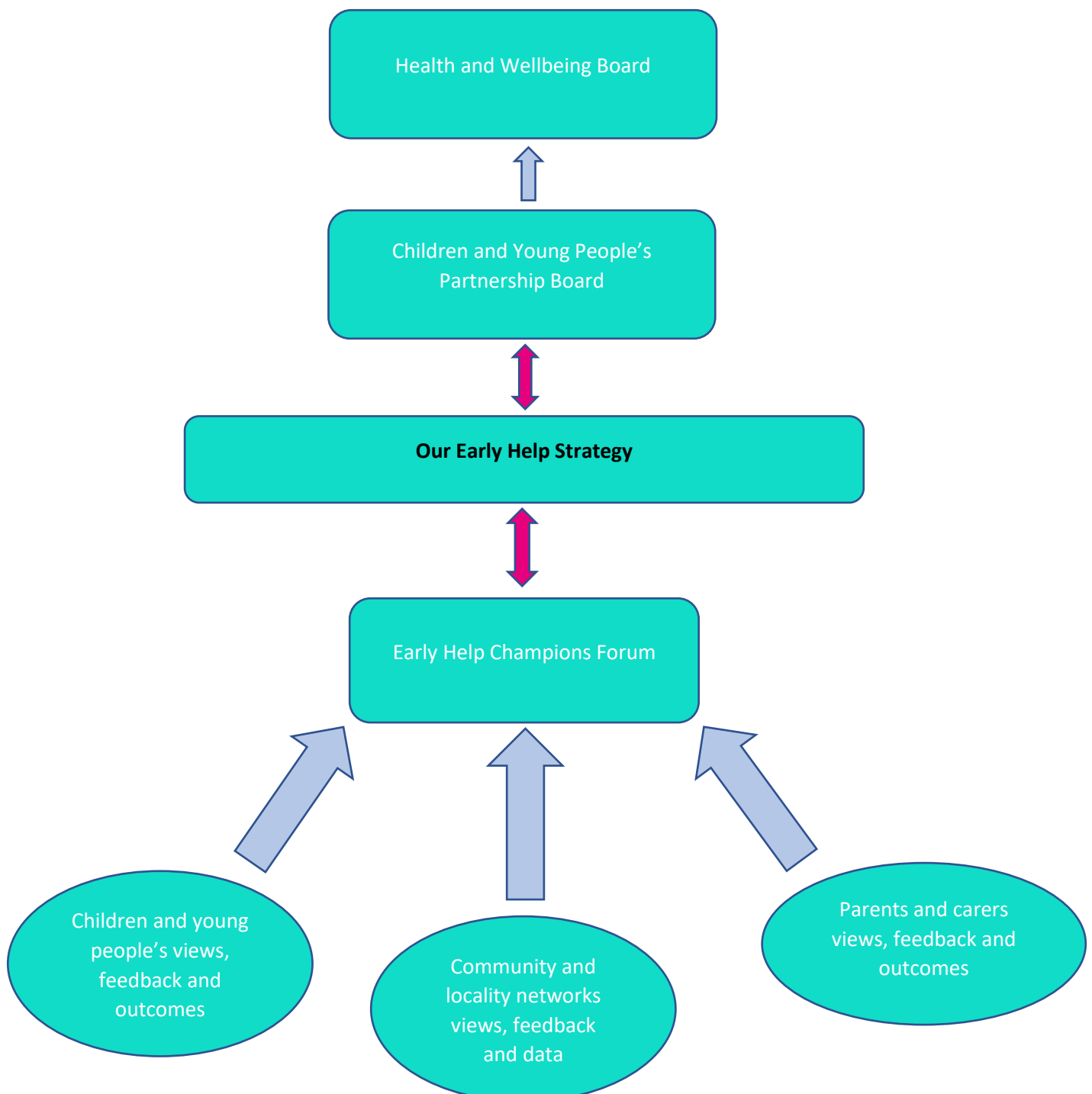
EH1	Early help outcomes for children are captured across the partnership via the portal system and feed into the Strengthening Families Programme.
EH2	Slough Approach practice framework is implemented across the partnership.
EH3	Early help practice standards and quality assurance processes are embedded into multi-agency practice and audit processes to inform and develop quality of practice and outcomes for children.
EH4	Development of family network meeting offer to support and empower families to hold the needs of the child at the centre and seek solutions within their own resources.
EH5	Co-ordination of early help networks in localities, linked to communities and local resources (family hubs, community hubs) where multi-agency support is provided and holistic interventions provided.

# Governance Arrangements

The delivery of Slough's Early Help Strategy has been endorsed by our Multi-agency Children and Young People's Partnership Board who will continue to monitor our early help offer and subsequent outcomes for children, young people and families.

The board feeds into the Local Authorities Health and Wellbeing Board, where strategic agreement will require final agreement at the Health and Wellbeing Board and will then be reviewed on an annual basis by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board.

We will seek to consult regularly on our early help offer with children, young people, families and professionals at both a strategic and operational levels, which along with data and changing local context, will support review and subsequent developments of our strategy.





**“We will seek to consult regularly on our early help offer with children, young people, families and professionals at both a strategic and operational levels.”**



## Overview of collated feedback from children, young people and parents/carers

In order to start the conversation with key multi-agency partners around the development of a revised Early Help approach to supporting children, young people and families in Slough, an initial meeting and further workshop was held with Strategic Leads to undertake a self-assessment, utilising the Early Help System Guide. Further work was then undertaken with the Early Help Champions Forum (operational group) to gain their views and insight into how Early Help was working in Slough. The Early Help System Guide reflects the consultation undertaken with partners as key stakeholders (see Item 4.1)

A Task and Finish Group was set up to develop the new Early Help Partnership Strategy for Slough. As part of their role, members of the group undertook some low level consultation and gathered feedback from children, young people and parents/ carers on their understanding of Early Help, what their experiences were and how they would want an Early Help Service to work for them.

### Children and young people

34 children and young people were consulted with through a group based session with Together As One and ICB, individual views from pupils at St Joseph's School and individual views from children and young people currently supported via the Targeted Early Help Service.

Overall, it was clear that the term 'Early Help' didn't resonate with the majority of our children and young people, with some believing this meant 'Early Years' and was only about supporting young children. However, when asked of they knew what a Family Support Worker or a Youth Worker did, they understood these roles and how they can provide additional and targeted support. Many of the children and young people asked, were able to name trusted adults they could go to if they needed help, with the majority highlighting school roles such as Teachers and Pastoral Support.

Children and young people were able to express what they wanted from 'Early Help' once this term was clear. Here are some examples of what they told us;

*'Early Help means that children like me that get into trouble or problems for different reasons, get help from people like you, before it becomes a bigger problem and becomes serious'*

**Young person open to Targeted Early Help**

*'(Early Help is) prevention or a cure'*

**Young person at Together as One**

*'Giving us help to fix our issues'*

**Young person at Together as One**

*'The vibe or relationship would make me work with the person, I judge people on how they act and speak to me. If I don't like them, I wont talk or work with them'*

**Young person open to Targeted Early Help**

*'Before the serious organisations get involved'*

**Young person from Together As One**

*'Help before problems get bigger'*

**Young person at St. Joseph's School**

*'Don't stereo-type me or judge me'*

**Young person from Together as One**

*'Schools need to promote other services better'*

**Young person from Together as One**

### **Parent and carers**

10 parents and carers who had received support from Targeted Early Help were asked about their experiences in accessing and receiving support from when they first sought help or when they were referred. The majority of parents/carers understood the concept of early help in the context of the targeted service they were receiving which would be expected as they were service users, however, some reflected on the need for better accessibility to support.

Some examples of what parents/carers told us;

*'If early help was not available from my family support worker, I would not have been able to get the support from the school in the way that I did'*

*'There needs to be more information and contact details on how to access early help'*

*'I didn't know where to go for support. I spoke to the doctors and didn't feel listened to or that they helped me. I think if others had taken the time to help I would have known earlier what support was out there'*

*'You have been approachable and I don't feel judged. I feel you are the first person to have taken time to find out what the difficulties are. I feel you want me to achieve'*

*'Early Help can prevent getting involvement from social care which was very important to me. Otherwise, I would will feel like a failure'*

*'Now I understand what Early help is . For me it means breaking the cycle. Early Help come in to help us to give children the childhood they should have had'*

*'I feel more advertising out there is needed. Images of the change that can happen. People don't know how much help is out there to support a family'*

The feedback received from children, young people and parents/carers have been key to us building the principles of our strategy to ensure we are delivering early help support in the way that our children, young people and families need. Recognising what has worked for them and what they feel would work better are key to us getting our offer right for Slough.

# Supporting Families - Early Help System Guide

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## Purpose of This Guide

### **Purpose of This Guide**

The Early Help System is not a single service. It is a network of services, processes and interactions that aim to help children, young people and families at the earliest opportunity. Improving this system requires clarity of what success looks like, shared across a range of partners, and informed by the voices of managers, practitioners and families.

This is the second iteration of The Early Help System Guide. This second version outlines a national vision and descriptors for a mature Early Help System that is shared by DLUHC and DfE. It has been widely consulted upon across other government departments and local areas and is based on what is working around the country. It is a living tool that will adapt as new and better ideas are implemented.

The Guide is intended for the local strategic partnership responsible for the Early Help System. It aims to provide a framework for local workshops, partnership conversations and strategic planning and to support prioritisation. The Guide provides a self-assessment tool to support discussion, reflection and action planning against key areas that influence the effectiveness of Early Help. It does not dictate what needs to be done; but is a dynamic tool designed to focus the system on common goals, and progress towards these. Your reflections with partners and communities on the Early Help System Guide should lead to an improved local early help strategy which, in turn, will help your local partnership improve families' outcomes and reduce demand on acute services.

The Guide is designed to help you use local and research evidence to deliver an effective approach to early help. It asks you to consider what organisational and community data you use to understand your current position, as well as which evidenced-based interventions and practices you use to support families across the partnership.

## Background and Context

This Guide has been produced by the national Supporting Families programme (formerly the Troubled Families programme) within the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in partnership with the Department for Education.

Since 2012, the programme has been supporting and challenging local areas to transform services and systems to achieve significant and sustained outcomes for families facing complex challenges and problems. The programme promotes a whole family approach and has been evaluated as successful in improving outcomes. The programme invests significant resource into local areas in order to support the transformation this Guide sets out.

The Supporting Families programme places a specific expectation on all areas to use the Guide to self-assess the maturity of the Early Help System and to identify priority descriptors to work towards. More detail on this can be found in the Supporting Families programme Guidance.

## System transformation: Supporting Families, Family Hubs and Start for Life

During the budget 2021, the Government announced increased investment in the Supporting Families programme alongside new investment to transform Start for Life and family help services by creating a network of Family Hubs, investing in tailored breastfeeding services, infant and parent mental health, parenting programmes, and establishing a clear Start for Life Offer in half of upper tier local authorities.

Supporting Families drives high standards of continual improvements to local partnership working and data use, while funding intensive keywork support for those families facing multiple complex problems. Family Hubs are one way of delivering the Supporting Families vision of an effective early help system.

Where Family Hubs exist, they provide a single access point – a 'front door' – to universal and early help services for families with children of all ages (0-19) or up to 25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), with a great Start for Life offer at their core. Family Hubs involve co-location of services and professionals to make it easier for families to access the services they need, including Start for Life services, and this can include both physical locations, outreach support and virtual offers. Many services offered in a Family Hub network will be for families who do not need intensive, whole-family Lead Practitioner support; however, hubs will ensure seamless access to a whole-family Lead Practitioner where needed.

Supporting Families' outcomes align with the Best Start for Life vision of achieving good early years outcomes for babies and young children, and practitioners, services and families all benefit from expanded core services which ensure that children have the best possible start in life.

Many local authorities have already adopted hubs as their leading model of delivery with the help of Supporting Families funding. These programmes can be entirely complementary and together they form a strengthened local family help and support offer, led by the Department for Education, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Department for Health and Social Care working in close partnership across government.

## How to use this Guide

This guide provides the key descriptors of a mature Early Help System. It is a self-assessment and planning tool, the outcome of which should lead to a clearer and shared understanding of the current maturity of the Early Help System in an area and what steps need to be taken to progress. This could form the basis of a refreshed Early Help Strategy in a local area and a plan for implementation.

The guide contains:

Contents	Description	Section
The Early Help vision	A summary of our vision for the Early Help System of support for families.	Section 1
The Early Help system	A diagram demonstrating which services have a role to play in the Early Help System.	Section 2
The workforce table	A table which defines the likely role of different types of practitioners from different agencies in the Early Help System. The contents of this table were developed with local areas and relevant Government Departments.	Section 3
The self-assessment scoring system	An outline of how to use the 0-5 scoring framework.	Section 4
The self-assessment descriptors	Structured as five sections focussing on family voice and experience, workforce, communities, leaders and data.	Section 5-9

## Conducting a self-assessment

There are a number of different ways the self-assessment can be conducted:

- 1. A series of multi-agency workshops** – using the themes in the guide as a structure, workshops could explore different perspectives on what is working well and what needs to improve linked to each descriptor. Evidence from family feedback along with population, cohort and family level outcome measures should be used to inform discussion.
- 2. Individual interviews with stakeholders from different agencies and services** – this approach could yield more insightful responses from individual stakeholders, the results of which could be used to draft the self-assessment with stakeholders, or used as one of the evidence sources for a multi-agency workshop.
- 3. Peer review** – a number of stakeholders from 2 areas may wish to work together to complete the self-assessment to enable benchmarking and comparison of activity and progress.

The Guide can be used by any partnership to assess and plan for maturity in the Early Help System.



## 1. The Early Help vision

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### **The Early Help vision (Plain Text)**

Early Help is the total support that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse.

#### **Family voice and experience**

1. There are well established mechanisms to gather and act on feedback from families and engage people with lived experience in service design, governance and quality assurance.
2. Families say they know how to navigate local services and how to get help.
3. Families who have several needs say they know who their lead practitioner is, that all their needs were considered individually, and as a whole, and they only needed to tell their story once. They also say all the professionals work together to one plan in a team around the family.
4. Families say that those that helped them listened carefully, cared about them and told them about their strengths.
5. Families say that the help they have received addressed all their problems and they are better connected to their own support network and local community.

#### **Workforce**

1. There is a professional family support service. Whole family working is the norm for all people-facing public services through a shared practice framework. And early help is seen as everyone's responsibility.
2. Public services work together in place based or hub-based working where partners are integrated virtually or physically, based in the community with a common footprint.
3. We invest in our workforce with a workforce development plan to embed the shared practice framework and there is direct support for professionals to improve their practice through a quality assurance framework.
4. The response to different presenting needs are aligned or integrated to ensure there is always a whole family response.

#### **Communities**

1. We are improving the connectivity between voluntary and community sector activity, family networks and formal early help activity.
2. Our relationship with community groups and voluntary organisations embodies a culture of valuing the contribution of all.
3. We are building capacity in communities and harnessing the talent of parents, carers and young people with lived experience to help one another.
4. We are shifting decision making about local services and facilities towards families and communities.

#### **Leaders**

1. There is a senior strategic group accountable for the Early Help System and the partnership infrastructure evidences a focus on early help, whole family and whole system working.
2. Our system is balanced, so that more appropriate support is provided for children and families earlier to avoid unnecessary or costly statutory intervention in the children's social care system.
3. Partners have agreed a shared set of measures at family, cohort, demand and population level, including quality of practice and family voice, which collectively represent the effectiveness of the Early Help System.
4. There is a culture of using evaluation and evidence to inform development of the Early Help System.

#### **Data**

1. There is a senior strategic group with representation across the partnership, which is accountable for developing and driving the use of data for the whole Early Help System.
2. All data feeds are shared safely and robustly across the partnership, brought into one place and used to identify family needs.
3. Case management systems are accessible to all partners working with families and allow us to quantify all issues affecting the family and report on all issues and outcomes in a quantifiable way.
4. Working with our strategic partnership group we are developing innovative approaches to the use of data. We are using technological solutions to match data, present information to family workers and strategic boards and analyse these data to prevent the escalation of needs.

## 2. The Early Help system

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### The Early Help System (Plain Text)

The Early Help System available to children and their families is made up of three types of services that combine in different ways to form a local area's Early Help offer to its citizens. These are universal services, community support and acute and targeted services.

**Community support includes** Family and friends, local places and environments, online support services, voluntary, faith and community services, local members of the community and local businesses

**Universal services includes** Post-16 education, schools, early years settings, family hubs, children's centres and youth centres, GP surgeries, libraries, maternity services, specialist public health or community nurses and community co-ordinators

**Acute and targeted services includes** Family support, social care, accident and emergency departments, allied health professionals, mental health services, special education needs support services, jobcentre plus, school attendance and exclusion support, domestic abuse services, alternative provision, housing services, police, probation and prison services, family court and family court advisory services, substance misuse services, fire and rescue, youth offending and targeted youth services.

## 3. Multi-Agency Workforce

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A strong Early Help System is made up of many different types of practitioners and services who operate as one. This table attempts to define the likely role of different types of practitioners in the Early Help System. The contents of this table were developed with local areas and relevant government departments. We recognise this is not a complete or exhaustive list, and the identified roles may have different names. This should be seen as a 'minimum' level of activity for how workforces should operate, for example how often they may act as lead practitioner. The lead practitioner (defined along with other aspects of whole family working in the family voice section) should always be the right person for the family at the right time, with the family having a say in who they are. In some circumstances specific professional groups or VCS organisations may have greater involvement as lead practitioner or as part of the team around the family following needs or risk assessment or because of specific contracting arrangements. The grouping terms relate to how often these workers would likely act as lead practitioner (e.g. frequent) and what role they have in whole family working (e.g. modelling)

Use this table to assess the current status of activity within your local workforce

## 4. The self assessment

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This self-assessment section is structured as five sections focusing on family voice and experience, workforce, communities, leaders and data. Areas should work as a partnership to identify on average their score for the individual descriptors, what is working well and the evidence that shows this, and plans for what will be prioritised next.

### **SCORING SYSTEM:**

## 5. Family voice and experience

### 5.1 - Family engagement: We have well established mechanisms to gather and act on feedback from families and engage people with lived experience in service design, governance and quality assurance.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Feedback from children, young people and families is regularly received by Early help providers and Slough Children First and will continue to be sought directly as part of the Early Help and Social Care processes through the Targeted Early Help Team including Targeted Youth Support and wider children's services such as the Exploitation and Youth Justice Service. This feedback is captured as part of initial assessment to understand the lived experiences, TAF processes and when work with a family is being concluded and/ or transferred to another service.
- Range of ways that children, young people and families can provide feedback including survey monkey, directly to professionals, through outcome star, online and hard copy feedback forms about 'your experience' and suggestions boxes in community spaces such as Children's Centres. In addition to this, there are opportunities with a number of partner services for focus groups, workshops and the inclusion of children and young people in processes such as interviews of key roles within services.
- Forums for children and young people including the Children's Council and Young Inspectors, provide the perspective of children and young people about services and feed into the Children and Young People's Partnership Board so that their experiences are understood and impact on future planning.

What are you prioritising next?

- There needs to be a whole system approach to capturing feedback from service users, enabling collation to inform strategic service design. Currently much of the information is held at individual service level unless a TAF approach is being utilised.
- Consistency of approach to capturing feedback, linked to identified aims and objectives with CYP Plan and EH strategy
- Develop mechanisms for capturing the voice of those who may not have accessed help through choice or lack of accessibility and those where they may have been dissatisfied with a service, through analysis of Corporate complaints at a system wide level
- Commissioning of services will be influenced by the voice of children and their families and will be an integral part of the offer

### 5.2 - One Lead Practitioner: We have evidence that families say they know who their Lead Practitioner is and they have a good relationship with them.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- The co-ordination of the Team Around the Family approach in Slough is an integral part of Early Help support provided for all families
- Referral is through a single point of contact, consent is sought and an onward referral to the Targeted Early Help service is identified as an appropriate action to meet the needs
- Once an allocated Lead Professional is identified from the Targeted Early Help Family Support Team, a holistic Early Help Assessment is completed with the family, a plan is co-produced, and a regular review of the plan via TAF meetings is followed. Records are maintained on our EHM system.
- Feedback is regularly sought from families open to support from Slough Children First via 'Your experience' cards
- Early help Surgeries in place for partner agencies to support around managing the Lead Professional role and multi-agency support via the TAF process
- We use the outcome star for distance travelled

What are you prioritising next?

- Introduction of portal system to enable capture of Lead Professional role within the community
- Review of EH strategy to clarify and enhance the role of Lead Professionals within the overall Early Help System
- Multi-agency training and development of Lead Professional role in line with portal system roll out
- Increased responsibility of multi-agency professionals to undertake LP, enabling family choice in Lead Professional roles based on relationship strengths

**5.3 - One assessment: We have evidence that families say the assessment process considered their needs individually and as a whole, their views were reflected throughout the process and the assessment meant they told their story once.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

3

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- The Early Help Assessment sets out 3 key areas which impact on the lives and outcomes of children and young people; Child development and wellbeing; Parenting capacity and relationships; and Family and environmental factors including community influences. The assessment takes the strengths and challenges into consideration for all family members as an expected standard. Chronology and historic information known are taken into consideration as part of the assessment. All EHA's are recorded on the EHM system as part of the set process map.
- The aim is to ensure that the child and their families only tell their story once
- Direct voice of all children, young people and parents/ carers are captured following direct work to understand the relationships and dynamics within the family, what is working and well and what areas need to be focussed on

What are you prioritising next?

- Improving analysis of information to develop working hypothesis and professional curiosity as part of the assessment process
- Consistent use of Genograms to support mapping and visualisation of family relationships to aid analysis and assessment
- Increased regularity of utilising Ecomaps where appropriate to explore wider community impacts and influences
- Lead Professionals to undertake EHA's in the community

**5.4 - One family plan: We have evidence that individuals and families say their needs are reflected in one family plan which the whole team around the family work to. Families and professionals agree outcomes together.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

3

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Holistic action plans are developed in partnership with the whole family and professionals as part of the initial assessment process and reviewed through the Team Around the Family process
- Identified actions for all are clearly recorded as part of the record keeping on EHM, with clear records of completed actions and updates, with the plan used as an active, evolving document for the period of intervention
- The use of outcomes star provides a clear picture of the incremental improvements for children and families, with evidence of step down to community partners from the internal Early Help Service.

What are you prioritising next?

- Lead Professionals within the community to co-ordinate delivery of family plans
- Increase ownership of action plans with children and young people, to empower them to impact positive change in their lives, developing skills for resilience and sustaining change in the future
- Strengthen description of exit strategies and contingency plans

**5.5 - One team around the family – we have evidence from families about how well services work together to co-ordinate support to meet the needs of their family.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- A Lead Professional who co-ordinates the EHA and TAF process is identified following referral to the Targeted Early Help service, which is clearly documented on the EHM system
- The Lead Professional primarily from Slough Children First takes the lead in managing communication between all parties and families are aware of who is involved

What are you prioritising next?

- Clearer accountability for wider TAF professionals, reducing focus on Lead Professional to ensure action is taken through a refreshed Early Help strategy and related workforce development plan

#### 5.6 - Access to support: We have evidence that families say they know how to navigate local services and how to get help.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

1

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Family Information Service website is hosted by the Local Authority, covering all services including the voluntary sector
- Reconfiguration of the Family information Service website 'Slough 4 You' following feedback and focus groups within the community, improving navigation and accessibility
- Communications plans delivered through LA and wider partners as agreed through strategic and operational boards based on local knowledge and emerging need e.g. support with finances; risk indicators of child exploitation; support for DA victims
- Social Prescribers working in GP surgeries supporting access to wider community support in relation to family needs

What are you prioritising next?

- Enhancement of the FIS to enable increased self service with an updated service directory which is inclusive
- Development of family Hubs to provide direct access within the community to support services for children , young people and families at a universal early help service level
- Update Slough's Local offer to identify gaps in accessible services and inform future planning

#### 5.7 - Sustainability: We have evidence that families say their needs including underlying issues have been addressed. They will be better equipped to cope when support from services ends because they have identified their own support network and feel connected with their local community and the support network it provides.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Family and environmental factors are explored as part of Early Help Assessment to identify key sources of support
- Initial contact with families by the Targeted Early Help Team explore current services and professionals providing support
- When appropriate families are signposted and engaged with community assets

What are you prioritising next?

- Introduce Family Network Meetings as part of Early Help process where a wider network of support is identified
- Increasing the knowledge of all practitioners through the enhancement of FIS
- Development of the Family Hubs as a locally accessible resource to support families

## 6. Workforce

### 6.1 - The workforce in our area operates effectively to deliver whole family working and is aligned with the levels set out in the workforce table (section 3 above or page 11 of the published document).

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Partners are actively included in delivering the Team Around the family approach, with those identified with the workforce plan involved to a greater or lesser extent, in line with the suggested frequency and input
- Effective whole family plans and multi-agency work are evidenced through TAF meeting records, progression of holistic family plans and recorded outcomes for individual families
- Multi agency practitioner training regarding working together to safeguard children is open to all groupings of the workforce and accessed by voluntary sector partners as well as statutory partners as evidenced in the safeguarding partnership annual report

What are you prioritising next?

- Lead Practitioner roles need to be reflected across all multi-agency partners, with expectations and responsibilities made explicit through the renewed EH strategy
- The Keeping Children Safe in Education group has recently been re-instated to bring together members of the workforce to prioritise whole family working

### 6.2 - Early help is understood and seen as everyone's responsibility across the partnership of services working with children, adults and families. We have a shared culture and set of core principles that underpin the wider Early Help System.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Local partnership work is developing out of children missing (in) education and a review of LSCPR's over the last 4 years has helped the workforce identify Early help as everyone's business across agencies, however this is at an early stage of development and focused on one area of vulnerability
- Our Early Help Champions approach enables us to regularly network with a wide-range of multi-agency partners, upskilling them to recognise and work in a preventative way, building networks across services and ensuring this learning is fed into whole organisations

What are you prioritising next?

- Development of a Slough-wide training and communication plan which reaches across Multi-agency Public Services within the Local Authority. Our strategy will support Early Help system to improve their knowledge in this area and recognise the role they play in early help with families
- Utilising the Slough Children and Young People's forum to drive the necessary cultural and system changes

### 6.3 - We have a shared practice framework and locally agreed processes for professionals in partner agencies working across the wider Early Help System which is known, understood and consistently used.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- A Practice Framework 'The Slough Approach' has been developed which focusses on Relationship based practice across Children's Services as the core strand, which is underpinned by 4 further approaches; Trauma informed; Attachment theory; Restorative Practice; Strengths-based approach. Training for Children's Services practitioners is being rolled out across cohorts of professionals with a current plan to deliver a trauma informed whole school approach across the Primary and Secondary phase.
- Multi-agency training delivered via the Safeguarding Partnership has relationship based practice as a core element of all learning objectives

What are you prioritising next?

- 'The Slough Approach to be embedded as part of the renewed Early Help strategy across all partners and services
- Increasing access to training opportunities for the whole Children's Services sector, with a view to deliver more widely in the longer term across other departments including housing
- The re-established Keeping Children Safe in Education group has identified transitions for children as a key area for an early help focus
- Embedding the practice framework across the whole system

**6.4 - We have a multi-agency workforce development plan based on workforce development needs, to help embed the shared practice framework and culture. This equips the workforce with appropriate levels of understanding and skills to enable early identification of and response to family needs and the implementation of a whole family approach.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

3

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- A multi-agency workforce development plan is in place across Children's and Adult's services via the Slough Safeguarding partnership and is accessible to all online. Priorities are identified via a range of means including audits, SPR', professional feedback, intel and emerging needs identified through JSNA and other data sources
- Through our partnership work we have been able to identify an increasing need to focus on earlier intervention, this has led to development of multi-agency tools developed in response to specific theme, recent examples being the children's wellbeing tool
- Individual agencies are supporting each other to use these tools through delivery of workshops

What are you prioritising next?

- Wider promotion of tools and resources to services beyond the immediate children's and adults services to include front facing services within the community assets e.g. faith groups, housing associations

**6.5 - We know the quality of early help practice across professionals listed in the workforce table. We directly support professionals in our partnership to improve their practice, including around whole family working, through a quality assurance framework, e.g. through audit, supervision and guidance.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Early Help Advisory role supporting partners, providing monthly surgeries open to the whole workforce
- Early Help Champions identified and meeting regularly as evidenced by minutes and regular attendance
- Regular programme of multi-agency audits led by the Safeguarding Partnership based on thematic issues, which identify areas of learning and feed into the multi-agency training plan
- Robust internal processes are in place for supervision, auditing, dip-sampling and record keeping

What are you prioritising next?

- Further focus on developing a system wide quality assurance framework
- Thematic focus of next multi-agency audit on Early Help
- Support partners agencies to develop their QA processes which will contribute to the system audit

**6.6 - We have a model of place-based or hub-based working in the community with a common footprint. Partners are integrated either virtually or physically in e.g. family or community hubs. The model helps underpin the principles of whole family working.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- As a geographically small but complex Local Authority, we have many well established relationships across partners, with many able to network through regular multi-agency partnership meetings which improves communication
- Local data and feedback from local residents has highlighted specific areas where additional support and resources have been needed which has led to the development of specific area projects, bringing together a number of services across the partnership e.g. Chalvey Can project

What are you prioritising next?

- Development of a specified number of children's centres into Family Hubs in 2023 to offer co-ordinated local services for 0-19 (upto 25 with SEND) and whole family support

**6.7 - The response to different presenting needs (pathways) are aligned or integrated to ensure there is always a whole family response. This could take the form of a 'team around the school' approach where all relevant professionals work together to anticipate and respond early to for example school engagement, mental health or special educational needs of children and young people in the school.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- The recognition of the increasing needs of emotional and mental health support for children and young people has been responded to by introducing mental health support teams in 26 of Slough's schools to offer additional support and form a more holistic service for children and families
- Work is in place with the educational Psychology service and virtual school, along with a wide range of other local authority services to develop a whole school approach to Trauma

What are you prioritising next?

- Keeping Children Safe in Education group using case studies to understand pathways and develop whole family response
- A focus on Emotionally Related School avoidance, to identify specific interventions that can be delivered as part of the Team Around the family approach
- Implementation of our Written Statement of Action to improve our services for children with additional needs
- Ensuring that there is a graduated approach for early identification of children's needs



## 7. Communities

**7.1 - Public services partner closely with voluntary and community groups to maintain up to date information about local community assets, community groups, voluntary sector support and faith groups and have made this information accessible to local staff and residents e.g. through a website.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

3

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Family Information Service offers a directory of service for local residents to access. Recent reconfiguration of the website has enabled better accessibility with a dedicated space for children and young people and a professionals area for Lead Professionals, including access to tools and resources
- Regular monitoring in place to identify levels of access to key areas of information, informing where local need may be highest and where families are accessing self help
- Social prescribers are present in GP surgeries, supporting the local community to access a range of services through signposting and referrals

What are you prioritising next?

- Marketing of FIS website, and to increase awareness, self-service, and monitoring the effectiveness and impact on children and families
- Build links with faith and community groups through localities team to promote access to services through Whatsapp and social media groups, expanding reach to include some of our more 'hard to reach' families
- Utilising the effective 3rd sector umbrella groups to enhance the reach and impact of service

**7.2 - Our relationship with community groups and voluntary organisations embodies a culture of valuing the contribution of all, prizes creativity, collaboration, and local solutions; alongside quality and inclusivity. We are building a culture and system where our communities understand that everyone helps to deliver a whole family approach.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Through the strategic localities plan, the vision for working with our local communities has been strengthened and enabled focus on key projects which meet local need as identified through a range of data, intel and community feedback.
- Projects focussed in key communities where need has been identified are seeing an improvement in services working with communities to respond to their needs. This has included the work between local police, community safety team, youth services and residents to reduce anti-social behaviour and to build a better understanding of marginalised groups within those areas.
- We have seen success in the use of sport and physical activity alongside motivational coaching delivered in local communities as a tool to improve connections between families with the wider community whilst also improving health outcomes.

What are you prioritising next?

- Access to data and outcomes from key community projects to further understand how we better engage with our communities, informing the wider Early Help strategy
- Work with community and voluntary sector to deliver holistic family support

**7.3 - We are building capacity in communities and making the most of the refreshed sense of community which grew through COVID-19 . We harness the talent and contribution of parents, carers and young people with lived experience to help one another.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Community groups are feeling empowered to contribute positively to the community and deliver much needed services to families. There has been a significant increase in new groups setting up around the family needs including Activity and Food Funded projects, new parent and toddler groups, small community groups and primary schools.
- Young Health Champions are now in place across a number of Slough schools, offering peer support to others who may be struggling with emotional and mental health needs

What are you prioritising next?

- Development of a plan through collaboration between Family Hubs and Slough CVS to support parents and young people interested in delivering support services within the community to identify areas of opportunity and provide initial support to develop the skills and knowledge required.
- Support the development and harness the volunteers who were mobilised through Covid 19 pandemic
- Working alongside children, young people and families to build resilience and self-help safely at a community level.

**7.4 - We are improving the connectivity between voluntary and community sector activity, family networks and formal early help activity.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

1

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Health agencies and partners such as social prescribers who are working on a holistic approach around improving health inequalities and recognising the whole family approach to better and improved health

What are you prioritising next?

- Further enhancement of the JSNA to ensure more granular detail of the local needs
- Development of Family Hubs to provide a point of co-ordination between services, communities and families – offering support within each locality and development of programmes of delivery informed by local need

**7.5 - We are shifting decision making about local services and facilities towards families and communities.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- JSNA and other local data feeds into service design and delivery at an individual service level, with increased join up seen between services via local partnership working. Thematic planning demonstrates this
- Feedback from Resident Forums, Young People's Forums and Carers Forums are feedback through a number of mechanisms across services but often in response to service design and delivery, rather than co-production

What are you prioritising next?

- Ensure the design and delivery of Early Help is explicit in co-production strategies across partner agencies
- Develop frictionless information and data sharing

## 8. Leaders

### 8.1 - There is a senior strategic group accountable for the Early Help System and the partnership infrastructure evidences a focus on early help, whole family and whole system working.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- The Senior Strategic Children and Young People's Partnership Board has oversight of outcomes across Children's Services and feeds into the Wellbeing Board, taking accountability for the early Help strategy
- Well established multi-agency relationships via the Slough Safeguarding Partnership have enabled key areas of focus led by task and finish groups to co-ordinate and deliver a whole system approach to key areas of such as Child Exploitation, Children Missing Education and Domestic Abuse. We have seen increased changes to systems, process and service design as a result of these key multi-agency groups which continue to develop based on identified local need
- Increase in focus on need for Early Help and Preventative services through Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Rapid Reviews
- The vision for a robust Early Help system is central to Strategic and Corporate plans across Slough Borough Council and Slough Children First

What are you prioritising next?

- Reinvigoration of current Children and Young People's partnership Board to focus on the development of a new Early Help Strategy which sets the expectation for whole family, whole system working across agencies
- Further work required to ensure Well-being Board focuses on driving the children's agenda
- Senior system leaders developing a commitment to focus on the impact of poverty on children and families

### 8.2 - Our system is balanced, so that more appropriate support is provided for children and families earlier to avoid unnecessary or costly statutory intervention in the children's social care system.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Review of current needs of children and families, along with increasing pressures on statutory services, has led to a refreshed vision for the continuum of care for children. This incorporates the development of Family Hubs, increased investment on the Family Information Service and Local Offer and the reorganisation of the current Early Help service to deliver more targeted interventions.

What are you prioritising next?

- Progression of Children's Services Business Plan as part of an invest to save model to ensure early intervention and help
- Development of a new Early Help Strategy which sets the expectation for whole family, whole system working across agencies

### 8.3 - Partners have agreed a shared set of measures at family, cohort, demand and population level, including quality of whole family practice and family voice, which collectively represent the effectiveness of the Early Help System. The performance against these measures shows that outcomes for families are improving.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

1

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Measurement of outcomes and related to individual children and families where Slough Children First are the Lead Professional is well documented and evidenced, with outcomes criteria fully embedded into Liquid Logic Systems
- Internal Performance Board in place to support and challenge data and performance linked to outcomes for children and families where Slough Children First is the Lead professional
- Input from all partners involved in supporting the family via a Team Around the Family approach feeds into identified outcomes, co-ordinated by the Lead Professional

What are you prioritising next?

- High level KPI's to be agreed in line with Early Help Strategy and Outcomes Framework with the expectation for all partners to contribute to a shared set of measures
- Roll out of Children's Delegation portal to enable multi-agency partners to feed into current internal Liquid Logic systems to ensure impact of interventions can be systematically measured
- The re-established Keeping Children Safe in Education group has identified transitions for children as a key area for an early help focus

**8.4 - There is a culture of using evaluation and evidence to inform the development of the Early Help System and the quality of whole family working. Where appropriate to local and individual needs, evidence-based services are used.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Individual child and family level outcomes with the ability to report to show impact on specific groups within the community
- Evidence informed group based delivery in line with local and individual needs is increasing following a reduction during Covid, with improved processes for capturing impact on children and families
- Single agencies are able to evidence impact from their service delivery

What are you prioritising next?

- Co-ordination and collation of evidence of impact from across multi-agency service delivery to evidence collective impact and inform further development needs across the Early Help system
- Improved analysis of cohort/ group impact and outcomes based on specific characteristics as identified through multi-agency data, local knowledge and intel

**8.5 - Working towards a shared culture, principles, practice framework and set of processes within the Early Help system is a standard feature in all commissioning processes and decisions.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Services are commissioned by individual partners responding to children and family's needs identified at the time of commissioning, adhering to the procurement, monitoring, and review processes of the host organisation
- Contracts are reviewed but not in the context of the overall Early Help System

What are you prioritising next?

- Agree standards and principles for future commissioning of early help services
- Effective joint commissioning of evidence informed interventions, informed by the needs analysis, from locally based providers where appropriate, with contracts which are regularly monitored and managed

## 9. Data

### 9.1 - We have regular data feeds from all parts of the partnership to support whole family working. These are open feeds and underpinned by strong data sharing agreements.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Here in Slough we have agreed to the updated terms in the Digital Economy Act (DEA). We have attempted to in the past establish regular data feed with our partners and are in the process of identifying what type of data we require from them. The DEA will allow us to remove potential obstacles in terms of legislation. This action will be one of our key descriptors as we look to bring back data feeds from our partners. The setting up process will involve data managers from across services as well as Information Governance Officers to ensure there is no 'red tape' preventing or blocking the sharing of information.
- We have existing data feeds from our services within the local authority where we will embed with Supporting Families data to create a holistic internal data picture, at the moment shared data is being used for statutory reporting purposes only.
- We are also talking and looking to partner with Reading Council over their 'Better Together Project' based on the Data Accelerator Fund. The project will aim to provide support to families with a range of needs, changing lives and services for the better. It will help us in Slough to transform the way public services work for/ and with families to take an integrated 'whole family' approach.
- This will lead Slough to having a centralised data source for multiple systems which are able to translate data in bulk giving a rich picture to social care using a highly scalable BI User Interface.
- This will improve our data matching individuals across multiple systems into inclusive record. It will help in relation to Family Building – familial relationships used to build cliques/ families for related individuals living at the same address.
- There is currently a plan to increase investment in the IT infrastructure which will allow for better communication between systems used within the local Authority as a key starting point

What are you prioritising next?

- Identifying staff, departments and services we wish to work with as we look to open our data feed process. Identifying key data leads from our partners and local services and to outline and explain why data sharing will be beneficial to all services when it comes to our families and their needs.
- Longer term plan for a localised 'flag' system which would support front facing teams to recognise family needs and link with relevant professionals to ensure holistic family working across all services

### 9.2 - Our case management system allows all partners to securely access all relevant cases and record whole family assessments.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

2

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- In house practitioners/ professionals/ keyworkers are able to view our case management system and are able to record/ complete C&F and EHA assessment. MASH responses are also fed into the assessment giving a more accurate picture of the whole family and their needs, and the history of interventions. One caveat is that most services only specialise in working with individuals and therefore are not concerned with the needs of other family members because the nature of their speciality may not extend to the needs of others. Therefore the keyworker in Social Care of Early Help will have an overview of issues prevalent in the family and disseminate actions to services who are able to work with adults and/or CYP leading to successful outcomes.
- These outcomes are fed into our case management system by the keyworker once a service notifies them usually by email.
- We are looking to advance this method of contributions and feeding through development of a 'Delegation Portal' which will allow our multi agency partners to access, assess and address support needs of vulnerable children. In addition, we will be able to utilise the Delegation portal to obtain feedback on outcomes for children and families supported by wider early help services within the community, providing us with a richer picture of support and need within Slough.

What are you prioritising next?

- Testing and completion of the delegation portal as well as taking into account feedback from partners and ensuring that Supporting Families has a large presence in the final version

**9.3 - Our case management system allows us to record all issues affecting the family and outcomes in a quantifiable way and run reports on these.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

3

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Our Outcome Plan is embedded into EHM and ICS systems at various points of the intervention in order to take account of changing family circumstances and interventions
- For EHM the indicators/ headline criteria are part of the Early Help Assessment (EHA) where the allocated worker is asked to identify the prevalent issues identified following completion of the EHA. At this point the allocated worker is also asked to list the current school attendance for each child – in order to determine if there is an issue or not (in line with our current indicators in our Outcome Plan). Updates and progress made with the family, adults, child or children on the case is captured on the case notes with evidence of direct work, forms, reports (internal/ external) uploaded to the case.
- At Case Closure the outcomes of the issues identified at the EHA are presented to the allocated worker asking them if the outcomes were achieved or not and to add the evidence which has made sustained and significant progress against each identified outcome.
- This template is replicated on ICS however the headline criteria is also available in various other stages such as the C&F assessment, Referral, Core Group Meeting and the Closure Record – this is to take into account the complex nature of statutory cases whose pathway to closure can vary.
- All cases close to closure have management oversight and sign off by senior staff ensuring that the outcomes achieved have made sustained and significant progress, continuous employment/ progress to work and that these outcomes are effective and lessens the chance of a regression or re-referral.
- We were able to produce reports on caseloads and outcomes which enabled us to give a rich picture of the families we work with, including geographical data as well as other demographic information. However this was more for in house purposes and needs to be widely shared once improvements are made.

What are you prioritising next?

- Re-building the reports and embedding the new Outcomes Framework changes going live in October into our case management systems and using Supporting Families data more effectively to assist at senior level in terms of planning and understanding the needs of families.

**9.4 - We have an effective data governance board that is accountable for our progress on data transformation. It supports us and our partners to unlock and resolve issues with data sharing and direct how we use data both for performance and analytics and how we consult on system changes that would impact across the partnership. Data are used by the partnership to support resourcing, planning, whole family working and early intervention. An identified member of the Children's Services Senior Leadership team has responsibility for driving forward actions from this board.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

1

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- We did have an existing data governance board however these never progressed or developed to the point we wanted it, largely due to not receiving the suitable data from partners due to certain variables not being recorded and lack of buy in long term. We did receive data from services within the council and Children's services which are now used for performance and reporting overall for the council and Children's services. The data we currently have is able to feed into those reports mentioned previously. We will use the previous infrastructure, (ToR, Action Plan etc) and upgrade it to create a new Data Governance Board.

What are you prioritising next?

- Increasing Strengthening Families presence in the Slough Borough Council (SBC) and Slough Children First (SCF) Analyst Network which is in its infancy with long term plans to involve more data analysts from other services. Overall aim of this meeting is to have a better understanding of what we're all working on and how we can support each other and share good practice. This would involve clearing up any roadblocks towards data sharing and tools being used to enhance performance and analysis.
- Re-establish effective communication with the Performance Team in SCF where performance is being analysed and performance is being monitored and is driving planning towards our service being more proactive. We will look to appoint a representative at senior which will help gain more influence from a data perspective.

**9.5 - We have a system that allows us to pull together all data, analyse these data and ensure practitioners can see results.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

1

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- We are producing analysis which is monitoring the output of keyworkers in Early Help and monitoring the outcomes achieved at the end of case closure. We have yet to produce analysis that practitioners are able to view as we need to determine how the data will be used by practitioners. At the moment our whole family assessments identify the family need with partners feeding in and being informed by the keyworker of the progress made, this seems to be working well and with the addition of the portal will allow partners greater scope and insight into the working being done with families as this data will be extractable which will enable it to be analysed.

What are you prioritising next?

- Obtaining the data feeds from partners which will assist us greatly in starting to capture and use their data in line with ours creating a rich picture of our families. This will be done in line with the ongoing work with the 'portal'

**9.6 - We are using data to inform performance across the Early Help partnership, demand and resourcing (including commissioning), operational delivery and workforce development.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

1

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- Existing reports are being produced which do help inform areas what more can be done around resourcing, operational delivery and workforce development. The advantages of using data to help make informed decisions at senior levels is an issue the local authority is on board with. Current reports generated do help highlight/ point out areas of improvement as well as identify gaps in areas we are lacking which helps understand current methods of working and issues around corporate structure. We do appreciate more input is required from a Supporting Families stand point which is why we're in early stages of creating a report that uses key data criteria from the programme and feed into the wider reporting arena. The aim is to produce a detailed analysis report for senior staff to sit alongside once for keyworkers.

What are you prioritising next?

- Identifying what key Supporting Families data is required to feed into regular performance reports that will inform senior leadership and building a database where that data can be extracted from.

**9.7 - We have developed innovative analytical products. This could be needs analysis, place-based analysis, individual or family level risk analytics, apps or systems to improve information available to practitioners and partners, quantifying qualitative case notes or other documentation or any other product or system that has changed/improved our ways of working.**

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Self-assessment score - Answer 0 to 5 – see scale above

1

What is working well and what evidence do you have?

- For Strengthening Families to get to this level of maturity we will need to focus on the previous questions and ensuring that a framework is in place in terms of creating analytical products. There is already existing analytical products available across the local authority and children social care (Slough Children First) which is being used to evaluate services, keyworker performance and identify areas of improvements or identify areas of concern which allow the service to understand the issue and therefore how to improve it. These reports need to be embedded with Strengthening Families data however we are planning our own report to sit alongside the reports currently being disseminated.

What are you prioritising next?

- Our descriptors 1, 2 and 3 which will set us on the pathway to developing analytical products in line with Supporting Family gauging the effectiveness of whole family working and the various facets within which will help the way we work.

## 10. Earned Autonomy criteria and eligibility - for information only

This section is to communicate the minimum thresholds for each descriptor that need to be met before the national team may invite you to apply for Earned Autonomy status. This has been published in the Earned Autonomy prospectus.

### Early Help System Guide descriptors used for Stage 1 (for both prospective and existing EA areas):

#### Family voice and experience:

Family engagement - We have well established mechanisms to gather and act on feedback from families and engage people with lived experience in service design, governance and quality assurance.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Minimum score:

#### Workforce:

The workforce in our area operates effectively to deliver whole family working and is aligned with the levels set out in the workforce table (section 3 above or page 11 of the published document).

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Minimum score:

#### Workforce:

We have a shared practice framework and locally agreed processes for professionals in partner agencies working across the wider Early Help System which is known, understood and consistently used.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Minimum score:

#### Leaders:

There is a senior strategic group accountable for the Early Help System and the partnership infrastructure evidences a focus on early help, whole family and whole system working.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Minimum score:

#### Leaders:

Partners have agreed a shared set of measures at family, cohort, demand and population level, including quality of whole family practice and family voice, which collectively represent the effectiveness of the Early Help System. The performance against these measures shows that outcomes for families are improving.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Minimum score:

#### Data:

We have regular data feeds from all parts of the partnership to support whole family working. These are open feeds and underpinned by strong data sharing agreements.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Minimum score:

#### Data:

Our case management system allows us to record all issues affecting the family and outcomes in a quantifiable way and run reports on these.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Minimum score:

#### Data:

We have an effective data governance board that is accountable for our progress on data transformation. It supports us and our partners to unlock and resolve issues with data sharing and direct how we use data both for performance and analytics and how we consult on system changes that would impact across the partnership. Data are used by the partnership to support resourcing, planning, whole family working and early intervention. An identified member of the Children's Services Senior Leadership team has responsibility for driving forward actions from this board.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Minimum score:

#### Data:

We have developed innovative analytical products. This could be needs analysis, place-based analysis, individual or family level risk analytics, apps or systems to improve information available to practitioners and partners, quantifying qualitative case notes or other documentation or any other product or system that has changed/improved our ways of working.

(Please click on the 'i' icon for more information)

Minimum score:



## 11. Selection of descriptors

All areas are required through the Supporting Families programme to choose three specific descriptors they want to work on and progress during the coming year. Areas should use the following methodology to choose the three descriptors:

If the area is **data model 2** or below, **choose ONLY descriptors from the data section**;

If the area is **data model 3**, **choose one descriptor from the data section and two from the servicedescriptors** (family voice and experience, workforce, communities, leaders).

If the area is **data model 4** or above, **choose ONLY service descriptors**.

After applying this methodology, areas are free to choose any descriptor across the 5 sections (family voice and experience, workforce, communities, leaders and data). You can select more than one from individual sections of interest if preferred.

If you need to reference the full descriptor explanation or associated guidance in order to make your selection, these can be found in the relevant sections above (**Section 5 - Family voice and experience, Section 6 - Workforce, Section 7 - Communities, Section 8 - Leaders and Section 9 - Data**)

Slough's data model (as submitted in the September 2021 data survey):

**Here is a reminder of the different data models:**

**Data Model 1: Manual** – Receiving data from other partners which is stored in separate files, and which is unmatched to case management systems. The local authority Supporting Families Outcome Plan is not quantified and there is no reporting from the case management system to keyworkers.

**Data Model 2: Basic** – Some data sources are brought together in basic data software, which is used to match and store data, identify families who may need support and to monitor progress. The Supporting Families Outcomes Plan is embedded in the case management system and receives manually inputted reports on outcomes and key indicators.

**Data Model 3: Building blocks** – Bringing most data sources together including early help case management data. The data is visible to keyworkers in a spreadsheet or form which is only provided once or twice during a case.

**Data Model 4: Early maturity** – Using a data warehouse or data lake where data is accessible to workers automatically in the case management system and which is updated when new feeds are received. More advanced data system software is used with automated matching and calculation of whether Payment by Results outcomes are met is built in. There are likely to be some open feeds.

**Data Model 5: Mature** – Data warehouse or data lake model as in the early maturity model but where primarily open feeds are used and where data is used to conduct needs analysis.

**Data Model 6: Advanced** – Sophisticated data model with open feeds as in the mature model, but where the system has been expanded beyond Supporting Families services and includes whole children's services or whole of council solutions.

Do you think that Slough's data model has changed since you submitted the data survey in September 2021?

Descriptor one

Descriptor two

Descriptor three

## 12. How the DLUHC will use the Early Help System Guide self-assessment submissions

The central team will use the EHSG self-assessments and chosen priority descriptors in the following ways:

1. Areas who have scored highly on individual descriptors may be approached for information around the practice in place, for this to be shared with other local areas. This could be developed into national good practice material to be linked to the individual descriptors.

2. Areas who have chosen the same priority descriptors will be supported to come together in action learning sets to support one another with the development of their work. The beginning of these action learning sets will be facilitated by the national team but handed over to local areas to support continued networking and learning.
3. The narrative text that areas submit in their EHSg self-assessments will be analysed by the national team to inform support and challenge conversations with local areas.
4. The analysis of the narrative will also be used to understand common areas for development and inform national policy making.

If you require further information, please contact [families.team@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:families.team@levellingup.gov.uk)

### 13. Permission to share

---

As a result of our partnership working with specifically DfE on the programme, we will share the full results including narrative with DfE.

**Please acknowledge that you understand that your Early Help System Guide scoring, the self-assessment content and your chosen priority descriptors will be shared with DfE:**

To enable and encourage peer support and joint planning of development activity, we would like to share the scoring (not narrative) for each descriptor and the chosen priority descriptors from each area with all SF Co-ordinators during July 2022.

**Please confirm that you are happy for your Early Help System Guide scoring and chosen priority descriptors to be shared with Supporting Families Co-ordinators to enable networking, joint planning of development activity and peer support:**

Yes

To facilitate joint working across Government, we would like to share the scoring (not narrative) for each descriptor and the chosen priority descriptors from each area with Other Government Departments.

**Please confirm that you are happy for your Early Help System Guide scoring and chosen priority descriptors to be shared with Other Government Departments:**

Yes

**Slough Borough Council**

<b>Report To:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> July 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) updated Policy and Use
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Cllr Muvvala, Lead Member for Public Protection, Customer Service, IT and Young Futures
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Stephen Taylor, Monitoring Officer
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Garry Tallett - Group Manager
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Key Decision:</b>	YES
<b>Exempt:</b>	NO
<b>Decision Subject To Call In:</b>	YES
<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 – RIPA Policy and Guidance.

**1. Summary and Recommendations**

- 1.1 To seek approval of the updated RIPA policy and guidance which covers covert surveillance and the acquisition and disclosure of communications data.
- 1.2 To update members on RIPA applications and activity during 2022/23.

**Recommendations:**

Cabinet is requested to:

- a) Resolve that the revised policy and guidance be approved,
- b) Note the RIPA applications and activity during 2022/23, and
- c) Authorise the Monitoring Officer to update the Policy as may be required, in consultation with the Lead Member, to reflect either changes in the Authorising Officers or relevant legislation.

**Reason:**

1. The Covert Surveillance and Property Interference Code of Practice issued by the Home Office requires that our RIPA Policy is subject to annual review and submitted to Elected Members for approval.

2. While the use of covert surveillance is rare and the use of an agent, informant or officer working undercover is very rare it is essential to ensure that the council can fully carry out its investigative and enforcement statutory powers and duties to protect residents and local businesses from the detrimental impacts of crime.
3. Similarly, the use of communications data to gather intelligence is rare but can be vital to identify and pursue persons involved in criminal activity, such as fraud, which can cause very significant financial harm and distress.
4. The legal duty requires Members to review the policy and provide assurance that the council has the appropriate safeguards and processes in place to ensure compliance with the Code of Practice.

## **Commissioner Review**

Commissioners have reviewed this report and have no specific comments to add.

## **2. Report**

### **Introductory paragraph**

- 2.1 The Code of Practice sets out a legal requirement that a council reviews its RIPA Policy annually and submits the policy to elected members for approval. While this does not directly align with any single corporate priority, it does underpin the council's operational effectiveness by providing our investigators with the tools needed to carry out their duties and responsibilities.
- 2.2 In addition to the operational need, the policy review provides assurance that the council is complying with RIPA legislation and provides the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) with the necessary assurance that the council is operating within the legal parameters set out in legislation.

### **Options considered.**

The review of our RIPA Policy is a legal requirement to ensure that the council is compliant with Code of Practice. The options are:

**Option 1** – Members **approve** the RIPA Policy – this is recommended as we have a legal duty and need to be compliant.

**Option 2** – Members do not approve the proposed amendments in their current form – this is not recommended as the amendments have been drafted with a view to the council compiling with its statutory duties. In addition, the forthcoming IPCO Inspection may deem us to be non-compliant.

### **Background**

- 2.3 The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) came into force in 2000. Both the legislation and Home Office Codes of Practice that support the Act strictly prescribe the situations and conditions under which councils can use their RIPA powers. All authorities are required to have a RIPA policy and procedure that they adhere to in using their RIPA powers.

- 2.4 The updated policy and the associated procedures are intended to ensure that investigations undertaken by the Council are conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Act and the amendments to guidance. RIPA ensures that when the Council needs to use covert investigation techniques, which by their very nature may otherwise be in breach of the Human Rights Act (HRA) and European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), they are placed on a legitimate footing and that appropriate controls are put in place to ensure that the activities are properly controlled and monitored. It should be noted that these powers are only available in more serious cases and where other investigative methods are not appropriate or have been unsuccessful.
- 2.5 RIPA allows Local Authorities to carry out Directed Surveillance (surveillance of an individual/s for a specific purpose without their knowledge), use a Covert Human Intelligence Source (use of informants or undercover officers) and access communications data (obtaining subscriber information of a telephone number or internet user etc.) provided the investigatory activity is lawful, necessary, proportionate and non-discriminatory.
- 2.6 The requirements of the ECHR, HRA and RIPA impact on all officers of the Council who undertake investigatory, or enforcement activities. This policy requires that all officers undertaking investigative activities only do so in accordance with the requirements set out by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and the associated guidance. Officers last received training on the use of RIPA in 2020, just before Covid lockdown and further training will be given on the refreshed policy, following its approval by cabinet on the 17th July 2023.
- 2.7 The Council's use of its RIPA powers is subject to annual reporting to, and triennial inspection by, the IPCO. The Council received its most recent inspection by the IPCO on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020.
- 2.8 While the IPCO did not make any formal recommendations, as in previous inspections, there were some minor amendments suggested to the Council's RIPA policy and the Council have ensured that these amendments are reflected in the 2023 Policy refresh as follows:
- I. The Inspector provided updated guidance on the acquisition of communications data to reflect legislative changes arising from the implementation of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (IPA).
  - II. The Council was reminded of the importance of ensuring that designated officers maintain their level of training.
  - III. That guidance was provided to staff within the relevant social media policy (a copy of the guidance was emailed to the Inspector who suggested that links to the relevant paragraphs of the revised codes of practice would be helpful);
  - IV. That staff have not used covert profiles or pseudonymous accounts to conduct internet or social media enquiries; and
  - V. That all activity is recorded to provide an audit trail which will withstand external scrutiny.
- 2.9 The IPCO contacted the council on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023, informing us that we are required to submit a self-assessment of RIPA and it was agreed that this be done

by the 31st July 2023. The IPCO inspector wants confirmation on the following areas, and the council's response is set out below each of the requirements -

- a) Any Areas of Non-Compliance identified at your last inspection have been remedied.

*Council Response – None identified since the last inspection.*

- b) Your RIPA Policy is subject to annual review and submitted to your Elected Members for approval (please advise when this was most recently revised and shared with Members).

*Council response – The Council last reported to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020 - [AGENDA ITEM \(slough.gov.uk\)](#) [Minutes Template \(slough.gov.uk\)](#). The 2020 policy refresh did not go through Cabinet or Audit and Corporate Governance Committee, as it did not contain any significant changes. The 2023 Policy was reviewed by Cabinet on the 17th July 2023.*

- c) Training, both initial and ongoing for key officers, plus awareness training for all staff, is provided (please provide dates since the last inspection)

*Council response - The council has provided officer training on the following dates,*

- i. 30/10/2017 – RIPA training provided by LAFOJE Limited*
- ii. 10/12/2018 – RIPA fraud Awareness Training and RIPA quiz*
- iii. 22/10/2019 – RIPA authorising Officer (Core Skills) Training, Bond Solon*
- iv. 16/01/2020 – RIPA training delivered by HB Law*
- v. Further training is proposed for Authorising Officer July 2023 – by HB Law*
- vi. RIPA Awareness training for Senior managers and Heads scheduled for July/August 2023*

- d) A Central Record that meets the requirements of the relevant Codes of Practice is in place.

*Council response -The Council's Central Record is stored electronically, shared with the SRO and the RIPA Co-ordinator. This is kept up to date by the Group Manager for Public Protection in the role of Authorising Officer. In addition to the electronic record, the council retains a hard copy of authorisations (as per the document retention policy). This folder is kept secured at Observatory House (HQ).*

- e) You have a named SRO in place, as well as designated Authorising Officers.

*Council response – Our SRO is our Monitoring Officer, and we have a number of designated Managers as authorising officers as referenced in the Policy.*

- f) You have policies and training that appropriately cover the potential or actual use of social media as part of investigations/enforcement activities.

*Council response – Social Networking is covered under section 6 of our RIPA Policy. The training also picks up the use of social media/networking sites.*

- g) The potential (for inadvertent, unauthorised) use of such media is actively monitored by managers.

*Council response – Managers have received training in this regard and the officers responsible for RIPA will receive refresher training in the summer 2023.*

*Staff awareness briefings are also planned, and will specifically refer to the impact of social media.*

- h) If you own/manage a town centre CCTV system, that this is operated and appropriately managed in line with RIPA considerations, including when used by third parties such as the local police.

*Council response – The Council RIPA Policy covers CCTV use and links to the Council's CCTV policy [untitled \(slough.gov.uk\)](#). We are currently reviewing the Council's CCTV policy in light of cabinet approval to transfer all public space camera equipment and monitoring to Thames Valley Police - [Agenda for Cabinet on Monday, 27th February, 2023, 6.30 pm \(slough.gov.uk\)](#)*

- i) You are aware of NAFN and how access to communications data is managed through OCDA.

*Council response – NAFN is covered in the policy and council officers comply with the lawful processing of data through the Office for Communications Data Authorisations.*

- j) Your Council has recognised and adheres to the Safeguards outlined in the relevant Codes of Practice in relation to its retention, review and destruction of material obtained using covert powers.

*Council response – The Council adheres to the safeguards outlined in the Codes of Conduct, as per the Council's document retention policy <http://insite/media/4101/retention-schedule-sbc.pdf>*

And to confirm if the council has,

- Used the powers since the last inspection, or plan to use them imminently (or can envisage doing so following the formation of a new investigative/enforcement team or strategy).

*Council Response – one RIPA Authorisation was granted on the 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Officers carried out investigations, commencing on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021, in accordance with the authorised notice. Officers assessed the viability and proportionality of this action and carried out a review to assess if this was still required. Due to the impact of Covid restrictions, the surveillance was stopped on the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021. This was noted in the case log and reported to the then RIPA co-ordinator.*

- If you have used the powers, please provide an electronic copy of the relevant applications and authorisations for my review when you reply to this letter.  
*Council response – documents have been supplied to the IPCO Inspector.*

### **Proposed amendments**

- 2.10 The current policy was reviewed during the 2020 IPCO inspection. The policy was broadly approved by the Inspector and the suggested amendments have been duly made and are set out at Appendix 1 with the proposed amendments shown track changed.
- 2.11 The purpose of this policy refresh is to incorporate changes since 2020 and has been updated to reference the updated Codes of Practice issued by the Home Office. Examples which were not relevant to the work of Council officers are to be

removed. The role of elected members in section 18 has been updated and the designation of Authorising Officers has also been updated to reflect staffing changes.

### **Authorised Officers**

2.12 Due to the turnover in staff the list of authorised officers needs to be updated. The following posts will be responsible for RIPA in the 2023 policy -

- a) CEO – Head of Paid Service and Senior Executive Officer
- b) SRO – Monitoring Officer
- c) RIPA Coordinating Officer – Group Manager Community Safety, Housing Regulation and Enforcement
- d) Authorising Officer – Group Manager Community Safety, Housing Regulation and Enforcement
- e) Authorising Officer – Corporate Fraud Manager

## **3 Implications of the Recommendation**

### *Financial implications*

3.1 There are no new financial implications because of this policy update.

### *Legal implications*

3.2 The Covert Surveillance and Property Interference Revised Code of Practice issued by the Home Office pursuant to section 71 Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 provides guidance to local authorities. The guidance states Members should review the Council's use of RIPA and set the Council's policy at least once a year.

### *Risk management implications*

3.3 This Policy and forthcoming training will mitigate the risk of staff breaching codes of practice.

### *Environmental implications*

3.4 None

### *Equality implications*

3.5 As there have been no RIPA authorisations in the last 12 months, there is no equality impact and an assessment is not needed

### *Procurement implications*

3.6 None

### *Workforce implications*

3.7 Training is to be provided for authorising officers and managers whose staff would use surveillance for information gathering.

### *Property implications*

3.8 None

## **4 Background Papers**

None other than as referred to in the report



**SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000**

**(RIPA)**

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**COVERT SURVEILLANCE POLICY  
AND PROCEDURAL GUIDANCE**

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**July 2013**

**[Version 65 update – ~~February 2020~~June 2023]**

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## **Note**

This Policy has been revised as a result of The Investigatory Powers Act 2016

CS / COP = Covert Surveillance Code of Practice (August 2018)

CHIS / COP = CHIS Code of Practice (~~December 2022~~August 2018)

## 1. Introduction to RIPA

1.1 RIPA is an acronym for the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. RIPA was introduced to ensure that Surveillance and certain other intelligence gathering complies with the European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), importantly Article 8 which provides:-

*i) Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence*

*ii) There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic wellbeing of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.*

1.2 It should be noted that Article 8 is a qualified right. If the right to respect for one's home private and family life is interfered with it has to be proportionate and in accordance with the exceptions in paragraph (ii).

1.3 Part 2 of RIPA provides a statutory framework that is compliant with the ECHR and provides guidance when using specified Surveillance techniques. It also introduces standards that apply to the police and other law enforcement agencies. Local authorities are classified as public bodies as their functions include the investigation of certain crimes. For example, the Council as a local authority investigate and prosecute:

- (a) fraud;
- (b) consumer protection offences (such as the sale of counterfeit and unsafe goods);
- (c) noise nuisance; and
- (d) non-compliance with planning enforcement notices.

These are just some examples of the myriad areas of enforcement the Council undertakes.

1.4 The Council can only use the provisions of RIPA in three areas - the acquisition and disclosure of communications data, the use of Directed Surveillance and covert human intelligence sources - for:-

**'the purpose of preventing and detecting crime or preventing disorder'**

1.5 The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance with regard to the use of Directed Surveillance, Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) and the acquisition and disclosure of Communications Data under RIPA. Covert Surveillance under RIPA requires internal authorisation as well as Court approval to reduce the risk of the information gathered being found to be inadmissible in court and/or expose the Council to liability for breach of Article 8.

1.6 The Investigatory Powers Act 2016 established the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO). This organisation provides oversight of the use of investigatory powers by public authorities. The Council is subject to regular inspections by IPCO.

1.7 Codes of Practice have been drawn up by the Home Office and these are referred to at Appendix 1 but are not reproduced. They can be inspected at the Home Office website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ripa-forms>—[2https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ripa-codes](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ripa-codes)

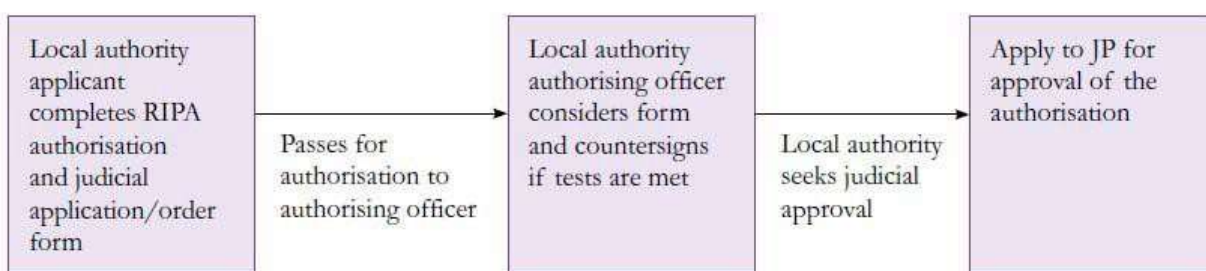
1.8.1

1.8.1.8 Advice Guidance may also be obtained from the Home Office Codes of Practice on “Covert Surveillance and Property Interference” dated August 2018 and “Covert Human Intelligence Sources”, both dated December 2022August 2018, and the “Acquisition and Disclosure of Communications Data” dated March 2015.

1.9.1.9 This document applies to all Council staff and workers and to all contractors employed by the Council (all relevant Council contracts will include a term that this Policy and Guidance are to be observed by any contractor operating on behalf of the Council). Further it is important any Council officers satisfy themselves of the competence of any contractor to comply with RIPA and this Policy.

1.10.1.10 From 1 November 2012 all authorisations and renewals under RIPA need court approval before they can come into effect. Such approval must be sought from a Justice of the Peace in the Magistrates’ Court. The overall process is outlined below:

#### **DIRECTED SURVEILLANCE / CHIS (COVERT HUMAN INTELLIGENCE SOURCE)**



## **2. Key Terms**

Key terms are defined and expanded upon here. These terms are capitalised throughout the document to indicate they have been defined in this paragraph.

### **2.1 “Authorising Officers”**

Persons who have been trained to the appropriate level should be nominated as Authorising Officers. It will be the responsibility of these officers to

consider all RIPA applications and to grant or refuse authorisations, as appropriate. These Officers are central to the integrity of the process and it is vital that they understand their responsibilities being ultimately responsible to the Courts for the proper application of RIPA and this policy when considering requests for authorisation.

Under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources) Order 2010 the prescribed officers are "Directors, Heads of Service, Service Managers or equivalent". Appendix 2 sets out the Authorising Officers for the Council.

However, when knowledge of Confidential Information is likely to be acquired or when a vulnerable individual or juvenile is to be used as a CHIS only the Head of Paid Service can authorise the relevant activity (or, in his or her absence, the person acting as the Head of Paid Service).

Authorisations (and renewals of authorisations) only come into effect if and when approved by an order of the Magistrates' Court (see Appendix 3).

Amendments to the list in Appendix 2 are to be agreed by the **RIPA Senior Responsible Officer**/~~RIPA Monitoring Officer~~ (also defined in Appendix 2).

### 2.3 "Crime Threshold Test"

Directed Surveillance can only be used to prevent or detect criminal offences that are either:

- punishable, whether on summary conviction or indictment, by a maximum term of at least 6 months' imprisonment or
- an offence under:
  - section 146 of the Licensing Act 2003 (sale of alcohol to children);
  - section 147 of the Licensing Act 2003 (allowing the sale of alcohol to children);
  - section 147A of the Licensing Act 2003 (persistently selling alcohol to children);
  - section 7 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 (sale of tobacco, etc, to persons under eighteen).
  - Section 91 of the Children and Families Act 2014 (purchase of tobacco, nicotine products etc. on behalf of persons under 18)
  - Section 92 of the Children and Families Act 2014 (prohibition of sale of nicotine products to persons under 18)

This means, at the start of an investigation, Council officers will need to satisfy themselves that what they are investigating is a criminal offence falling into one of the above categories.

~~For investigations that do not meet the above criminal offence thresholds advice must be sought from the RIPA Coordinator on the potential use of a non RIPA process.~~

### 2.4 "Collateral Intrusion"

Collateral Intrusion is where the investigation is likely to unexpectedly interfere with the privacy of individuals who are not covered by the authorisation. Applications for authorisation should include an assessment of the risk of any Collateral Intrusion.

## 2.5 “Confidential Information”

This has the same meaning as is given to it in sections 98 to 100 of the Police Act 1997.

It consists of matters subject to legal privilege, communications between Members of Parliament and another person on constituency matters, confidential personal information, or confidential journalistic material:

- Legal Privilege - includes both oral and written communications between a professional legal adviser and his or her client or any person representing his or her client, made in connection with the giving of legal advice to the client or in contemplation of legal proceedings and for the purposes of such.

Communication and items held with the intention to further a criminal purpose are not matters subject to legal privilege.

- Confidential Personal Information

*“Personal information”* means information concerning an individual (whether living or dead) who can be identified from it and relating--

- (a) to his physical or mental health, or
- (b) to spiritual counselling or assistance given or to be given to him.

*“Confidential Personal Information”* means personal information (as defined directly above):

- (a) which a person has acquired or created in the course of any trade, business, profession or other occupation or for the purposes of any paid or unpaid office, and which he holds in confidence, and
- (b) communications as a result of which personal information--
  - (i) is acquired or created as mentioned in paragraph (a), and
  - (ii) is held in confidence.

- Confidential Journalistic Material - includes material acquired or created for the purposes of journalism and held subject to an undertaking to hold it in confidence, as well as communications resulting in information being acquired for the purposes of journalism and held subject to such an undertaking.

Extra care should be taken in cases where the subject of the investigation might expect a degree of privacy or where Confidential Information is involved.

Officers should be aware of the requirement for authorisation whereof such Confidential or privileged Information is likely to be acquired can only be authorised by the Head of Paid Service. Advice should be sought from the Senior Responsible Officer and if any doubt to seek legal advice.

## 2.6 “Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS)”

Under section 26(8) of RIPA a person is a covert human intelligence source if s/he establishes or maintains a personal or other relationship with a person for the covert purpose of facilitating:

- (a) obtaining information;
- (b) providing access to information to another person; or
- (c) disclosing information obtained by the use of or as a consequence of such a relationship.

Surveillance by a human intelligence source is covert if:

- it is carried out in a manner calculated to ensure that persons who are subject to Surveillance are unaware that it is or may be taking place;
- if a relationship is established or maintained and then conducted in a manner calculated to ensure that one of the parties is unaware of the purpose; or
- any information obtained and disclosed is disclosed in a manner calculated to ensure that one of the parties to the relationship is unaware of the use or disclosure in question.

## 2.7 Covert Surveillance

Covert Surveillance is defined, under s26(9)(a) as “Surveillance which is carried out in a manner calculated to ensure that the persons subject to the Surveillance are unaware that it is or may be taking place”, and is categorised as either Intrusive or Directed.

## 2.8 Directed Surveillance

Directed Surveillance is defined in section 26(2) of RIPA as Surveillance which is covert, but not intrusive, and undertaken:

- (a) for the purposes of a specific investigation or operation;
- (b) in such a manner as is likely to result in the obtaining of Private Information about a person (whether or not one is specifically identified for the purposes of the investigation or operation); and
- (c) otherwise than by way of an immediate response to events or circumstances the nature of which is such that it would not be reasonably practicable for an authorisation to be sought for the carrying out of the Surveillance.

Directed Surveillance involves the observation of a person or persons with the intention of gathering Private Information to produce a detailed picture of a person's life, activities or associations. It does not include entry on or interference with property or wireless telegraphy (which the Council cannot do under RIPA), but may include the use of photographic and video equipment (including the use of CCTV).

## 2.9 "Intrusive Surveillance"

Intrusive Surveillance is defined in section 26(3) of RIPA as covert Surveillance that:-

is carried out in relation to anything taking place on any residential premises or in any private vehicle; and involves the presence of an individual on the premises or in the vehicle or is carried out by means of a Surveillance device BUT Surveillance is not intrusive ( but may still be directed) if it:-

- (a) is carried out by a vehicle tracking device (s26(4)(a)); or
- (b) involves the consensual interception of mail or telecommunications for which there is no interception warrant (s26(4)(b)); or
- (c) involves a Surveillance device observing residential premises or a private vehicle, which device is not fitted in the premises or vehicle and which device does not consistently provide information of the quality and detail that would be obtained if the device was actually present on the premises or in the vehicle (s26(5)).

**A local authority officer cannot be authorised to conduct Intrusive Surveillance.**

## 2.10 Interference with Property

Legal advice must be obtained in relation to the installation of surveillance equipment on private property to ensure that an officer does not inadvertently commit trespass

## 2.11 Core Functions of the Council

The 'core functions' referred to by the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (C v The Police and the Secretary of State for the Home Office IPT/03/32/H dated 14 November 2006) are the 'specific public functions', undertaken by a particular authority, in contrast to the 'ordinary functions' which are those undertaken by all authorities (e.g. employment issues, contractual arrangements etc.). A public authority may only engage the 2000 Act when in performance of its 'core functions'. The disciplining of an employee is not a 'core function', although related criminal investigations may be. ~~The protection of the 2000 Act may therefore be available in relation to associated criminal investigations so long as the activity is deemed to be necessary and proportionate. For example A police officer claiming compensation for injuries allegedly sustained at work is suspected by his employer of fraudulently exaggerating the nature of those injuries. The police force of which he is a~~



~~member wishes to conduct covert surveillance of the officer outside the work environment. Such activity may relate to the discharge of the police force's core functions as the police force may launch a criminal investigation. The proposed surveillance is likely to result in the obtaining of private information and, as the alleged misconduct amounts to the criminal offence of fraud, a directed surveillance authorisation may be appropriate.~~

## **2.11 "Judicial Approval"**

The approval of Local Authority Authorisations under RIPA by a Justice of the Peace sitting in the Magistrates' Court (see Appendix 3)

## **2.11 "Private Information"**

This includes, "in relation to a person", any information relating to his or her private or family life.

Aspects such as gender identification, name, sexual orientation and sexual life are important elements of the personal sphere protected by Article 8. The Article also protects a right to identity and personal development, and the right to establish and develop relationships with other human beings and the outside world and it may include activities of a professional or business nature. There is, therefore, a zone of interaction of a person with others, even in a public context, which may fall within the scope of "private life". It may be the case, therefore, that a person's private life may be concerned in measures affected outside a person's home or private premises. A person's reasonable expectations as to privacy are a significant though not necessarily conclusive factor.

## **2.12 "Surveillance"**

Includes (under s48(2):

- (a) monitoring, observing or listening to persons, their movements, their conversations or their other activities or communications;
- (b) recording anything monitored, observed or listened to in the course of Surveillance; and
- (c) Surveillance by or with the assistance of a device.

### 3. Directed Surveillance

#### 3.1 General

- 3.1.1 In general terms, Directed Surveillance is planned covert Surveillance which could not be classed as Intrusive Surveillance. To fall into the category of Directed Surveillance, the Surveillance must be undertaken for the purpose of a specific investigation or operation in a way likely to obtain Private Information about a person (otherwise than by immediate response to events). If Surveillance takes place as an immediate response to an event, no authorisation is required. Directed Surveillance is essentially Surveillance carried out in a manner calculated to ensure that the person who is the subject of the Surveillance is unaware that it is, or may be, taking place. Thus for example plain clothed trading standards officers attending a car boot sale to generally observe for sale of counterfeit material, and then observed such a sale would be acting as an immediate response to events and would not be considered to be Directed Surveillance. However if they attended the car boot sale acting on intelligence that a specific trader was selling illegal goods and then proceeded to “target” that trader and observe them then that is likely to be considered “Directed Surveillance”.
- 3.1.2 Directed Surveillance can only be used if authorised in accordance with this Policy and only then after the authorisation has been approved by an order of the Magistrates’ Court
- 3.1.3 Directed Surveillance can only be used to prevent or detect criminal offences that meet the Crime Threshold Test
- 3.1.4 During the course of an investigation the type and seriousness of offences may change. The option of authorising Directed Surveillance is dependent on the offence under investigation meeting the Crime Threshold Test. Providing this is the case, an application for authorisation or approval can be made. However, if during the investigation it becomes clear that the activity being investigated does not amount to a criminal offence or that it would be a less serious offence that does not meet the threshold the use of Directed Surveillance should cease. If a Directed Surveillance authorisation is already in force it should be cancelled.
- 3.1.5 Directed Surveillance will be authorised against a specific offence which meets the threshold, and the type and the timing of the deployment of the Surveillance will always reflect this.

#### 3.2 Further points on Directed Surveillance

~~3.2.1 A dog warden, who happens to see a dog fouling offence being committed, would not be said to be undertaking Directed Surveillance in the RIPA sense. To be planned Surveillance, there needs to be a specific purpose or investigation. (It’s also unlikely this offence would meet the Crime Threshold Test.)~~

3.2.23.2.1 If an investigating officer responds to an immediate event this would not be Directed Surveillance. If the officer subsequently planned a follow-up visit for the specific purpose of carrying out observations this would be classified as Directed Surveillance and would require authorisation.

3.2.33.2.2 Directed Surveillance is usually undertaken by means of an individual officer watching or recording the person while they undertake or are suspected of undertaking the prohibited activity. It can also include an officer making a test purchase from a person when the transaction is captured on a recording device that may be worn by the officer. It is not necessary for the recording to be visual; an audio recording only would also be classed as Directed Surveillance. Evidence can also be gained by way of photography.

3.2.43.2.3 Hidden cameras in a public place or targeted CCTV also constitute covert Surveillance. In such circumstances a CCTV camera is trained on a specific person or a spot at a particular time in order to observe the activities of a particular person or group of persons. That being said, where CCTV is used in the monitoring of public areas in an overt way i.e. clearly signposted and just happen to catch a criminal act, this would **not** be classified as covert Surveillance.

3.2.53.2.4 RIPA covers local authorities; therefore any contractor, employee or worker of the Council is covered. It does not include local authorities acting on information that is received from members of the public acting on their own volition. Officers should use this information to carry out their own investigation. Officers should not encourage the member of the public to continue providing further information, as they may unintentionally engage them as a Covert Human Intelligence Source (CHIS). ~~For example, neighbours filming nuisance activities across the road behind their net curtains and then giving the tape to Environmental Health for action or as evidence without being actively recruited to do so does not require authorization. However, such activity should not be encouraged by officers, as the neighbour may unintentionally act as a Cover Human Intelligence Source (CHIS).~~

3.2.63.2.5 A public authority may only engage RIPA when in performance of its 'core functions' – i.e. the 'specific public functions', undertaken by a particular authority, in contrast to the 'ordinary functions' which are those undertaken by all authorities (e.g. employment issues, contractual arrangements etc) see *C v The Police and the Secretary of State for the Home Office* – IPT/03/32/H). The disciplining of an employee is not a 'core function', although related criminal investigations may be.

3.2.73.2.6 More details are set out in the Council's relevant employment policies.

### **Examples of Directed Surveillance by local authority investigators**

- (a) a recorded test purchase such as a suspected pirate DVD or counterfeit goods being purchased from a market trader.
- (b) the training of a CCTV camera onto a particular trading premises to establish who opens and closes the premises each day.
- ~~(c) observing of persons suspected of serious or serial benefit fraud to see if they are going to and from a place of work~~
- ~~(c) following of a person suspected of dangerous waste dumping.~~
- ~~(e) the taping of nuisance tenants (to measure the level of sound) by Housing Officers or contractors engaged by them for the purposes set out in the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003. However, this is normally carried out overtly by advising the subject via letter or notice in advance in which case an authorisation would not be applicable~~

**Activities such as the test purchasing of alcohol and cigarettes by underage persons need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.**

### 3.2.83.2.7 Examples of what does not constitute Directed Surveillance:

- “Hot spot targeting” e.g. licensing officers standing on a street to monitor private hire cars plying for hire illegally where this is not part of a planned operation, or Surveillance on a fly-tipping ~~or a dog-fouling clear up.~~
- Overt CCTV or Surveillance by way of an immediate response to events.
- ~~Overt investigations, e.g. an Environmental Health Office Benefits Officer visiting a person to make enquiries and declaring their status and intention or Environmental Health Officers declaring their status and intention.~~

#### **4. Covert Human Intelligent Sources (CHIS) URGENT ADVISE MUST BE SOUGHT AS FROM THE RIPA COORDINATOR IF CHIS IS BEING CONSIDERED**

4.1 A CHIS is a person who establishes or maintains a personal relationship or other relationship with a person in order to covertly obtain or disclose information (Section 26 (8) (a) to (c) of RIPA). The code of practice recognises CHIS as agents, informants or officers working under cover. In the case of a local authority a CHIS would normally be an informant or an officer working under cover.

4.2 As with covert Surveillance, a CHIS would not be a member of the public who volunteers information to the local authority, such as a person who complains that they purchased food past its use-by date from their local supermarket. In this case the relationship between customer and provider is too remote. It should also be considered that the information may well be given secretly confidentially and may not be revealed to the defendant as it may be deemed to be sensitive in accordance with the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996. It should also be borne in mind that an informant may well be providing regular information during an investigation, and if requested to continue to do so will be a CHIS whereas a member of the public complaining is usually a one-off incident and will not be a CHIS.

~~4.3~~ The rules of evidence permit investigators to use ruses to gain information provided that the person is not persuaded into committing an unlawful act that they otherwise would not have committed. For example trading standards officers may masquerade as members of the public when visiting a car dealer and may pose questions that a prospective customer might well ask and in doing so may well gain information. In such cases this officer would be a CHIS as they would be deemed to be an officer working under cover and could be seen to be seeking to gain a person’s trust. An officer who merely goes into a shop and purchases an item without engaging in dialogue except for, ‘how much?’ and ‘thank you’, would not be a CHIS. Although in this circumstance the officer is working under cover, they are not seeking information from that person or intending to gain that person’s trust. ~~In extreme situations, trading standards officers and police have gone under cover and worked in establishments to gain information.~~

#### 4.4.3

4.5.4 It should be noted that an officer who attends a premises and identifies him/herself and then either carries out a statutory inspection or has entered in pursuance of a warrant of entry issued by a court, is not a CHIS. There is nothing covert about their visit.

4.6.5 The use and/or conduct of a CHIS must be authorised internally (see paragraph 7 below). Further, such an authorisation can only come into effect once approved by an order of the Magistrates’ Court (see Appendix 3).

## Additional Considerations when using a CHIS

4.74.6 If a CHIS is a juvenile or a vulnerable person the authorisation can only be given by the Chief Executive ( as Head of Paid Service) (see Appendix 2).

4.8 Furthermore, the Council must have arrangements in place for ensuring that there will be at all times a person holding a position or office within the Council who will have day to day responsibility for dealing with the CHIS on behalf of the Authority. This will include the CHIS's security and welfare. They are known as a "Handler". In addition to this person, the Council must also ensure that there will be at all times another person who will have general oversight of the use made of the CHIS ( known as a "Controller"). It is suggested that the former is the officer having responsibility for the general management of the case and the latter is the appropriate Authorising Officer.

4.8A It is particularly important that before authorising use of a CHIS, that the Authorising Officer ensures that a risk assessment has been carried out with respect to an risk to the security and welfare of the CHIS, and others who may be foreseeably affected by the operation. This extends to the assessment of any risk that may exist after the cancellation of the authorisation and must include the management of any requirement to disclose the existence or identity of the CHIS in any subsequent legal proceedings.

4.8B As the CHIS activity continues the remit of the authorisation and the risk assessment must be kept under regular review, this is the primarily the responsibility of the "handler". Any activity outside of the authorisation and / or any need to extend the remit must be reported to the Authorising Officer. If the remit needs to be extended then this can only be done via judicial approval.

4.8C A CHIS may be authorised to use or have a covert recording device on their person. This is generally permissible subject to the usual considerations of proportionality. A CHIS wearing or carrying a surveillance device does not need a separate directed surveillance authorisation, provided the device will only be used in the presence of the CHIS. However, if a surveillance device is to be used other than in the presence of the CHIS, directed surveillance authorisation should be obtained where appropriate, together with an authorisation for interference with property, if applicable. See the Covert Surveillance and Property Interference Code of Practice.

4.8D There must be a centrally retrievable record of CHIS authorisations containing only:

- a) The name, or the code name, of the Unique identifying reference of the CHIS
- b) Dates of the authorisation / renewal and cancellation of the CHIS
- c) Whether the CHIS is "self-authorised" ( which is very unlikely in the circumstances of a local authority)

These records must be held for 5 years from the date that the authorisation ends.

4.9 Separately other records must be held with reference to the individual authorisation. The officer in charge of maintaining a record of the use of a CHIS must also, at all times, record the following particulars as specified by the Secretary of State:

- (a) The identity of the CHIS.

- (b) The identity, where known, used by the CHIS.
- (c) Any relevant investigating authority other than the authority maintaining the records.
- (d) The means by which the source was referred to within each relevant investigating authority.
- (e) Any other significant information connected with the security and welfare of the CHIS.
- (f) Any confirmation made by the Authorising Officer for the conduct or use of a CHIS that the information in paragraph 5 above has been considered and that any identified risks to the security and welfare of the CHIS have, where appropriate, been explained to and understood by the CHIS.
- (g) The date when and the circumstances in which the CHIS was recruited.
- (h) The identities of the Authorising Officer and the officer who applied for the use of the CHIS.
- (i) The periods during which those persons have discharged those responsibilities.
- (j) The tasks given to the CHIS and the demands made of him/her in relation to his/her activities as a CHIS.
- (k) All contacts or communications between the CHIS and a person acting on behalf of any relevant investigating authority.
- (l) The information obtained by each relevant investigating authority by the conduct or use of the CHIS.
- (m) Any dissemination by that authority of information in that way.
- (n) In the case of a CHIS who is not an undercover operative, every payment, benefit or reward and every offer of a payment, benefit or reward that is made or provided by or on behalf of any relevant investigating authority in respect of the CHIS's activities for the benefit of that or any other relevant investigating authority. This is not the usual practice of the Council.

4.10 In addition the records or copies of documents required by paragraph 7.6 of the CHIS/COP should be retained for 5 years.

4.11 The intention is that adequate records must be kept in such a way that the CHIS is safe from discovery by the subject(s) of the investigation and safe from any harm which could result from a disclosure of information. Further, it is meant to keep in the open any money or benefits paid to the CHIS who is not employed by the Council. See paragraph 12.5 for further requirements in relation the use of a CHIS.

## 5. Necessity and Proportionality

5.1 When engaging in covert Surveillance, including use of a CHIS, the most likely Article of the ECHR to be breached is Article 8 referred to in paragraph 1.1 above. This is a qualified right and can be interfered with, if:

- (a) the aim of such interference is **necessary** for the purpose of preventing and the detection of crime or preventing disorder (see paragraph 7.2 below); and
- (b) the covert activities are **proportionate** in the circumstances of the particular case.

5.2 The Authorising Officer must be satisfied that the use of covert surveillance is necessary for one of the purposes specified in section 28(3) of RIPA. In order to be satisfied, the conduct that it is aimed to prevent or detect must be identified and clearly described, particularly if it is questionable whether serious crime criteria are met. ~~Often missed is an~~The authorisation form will record the explanation of why it is considered necessary to use the covert techniques requested

5.3 Proportionality is a key concept of RIPA. ~~It is often poorly articulated.~~ An authorisation should demonstrate how an Authorising Officer has reached the conclusion that the activity is proportionate to what it seeks to achieve; including an explanation of the reasons why the method, tactic or technique proposed is not disproportionate (the proverbial 'sledgehammer to crack a nut'). Proportionality is not only about balancing the effectiveness of covert methods over overt methods but of explaining why the particular covert method, technique or tactic is the least intrusive. It is insufficient to make a simple assertion or to say that the 'seriousness' of the crime justifies any or every method available. It may be unacceptable to advance lack of resources or a potential cost saving as sufficient ground to use technological solutions which can be more intrusive than a human being. This critical judgment can only properly be reached once all other aspects of an authorisation have been fully considered.

The following elements of proportionality ~~had been~~should be fully considered:

- balancing the size and scope of the operation against the gravity and extent of the perceived mischief
- explaining how and why the methods to be adopted will cause the least possible intrusion on the target and others
- that the activity is an appropriate use of the legislation and the only reasonable way, having considered all others, of obtaining the necessary result, and
- providing evidence of other methods considered and why they were not implemented.

5.3 Covert Surveillance should therefore be used as a last resort.



## 6. Covert surveillance of Social Networking Sites (SNS)

- 6.1 The OSC Procedures and Guidance 2016 states: The fact that digital investigation is routine or easy to conduct does not reduce the need for authorisation. Care must be taken to understand how the SNS being used works. Authorising Officers must not be tempted to assume that one service provider is the same as another or that the services provided by a single provider are the same.
- 6.2 Whilst it is the responsibility of an individual to set privacy settings to protect unsolicited access to private information, and even though data may be deemed published and no longer under the control of the author, it is unwise to regard it as “open source” or publicly available; the author has a reasonable expectation of privacy if access controls are applied. In some cases data may be deemed private communication still in transmission (instant messages for example). Where privacy settings are available but not applied the data may be considered open source and an authorisation is not usually required. Repeat viewing of “open source” sites may constitute directed surveillance on a case by case basis and this should be borne in mind.
- 6.3 Providing there is no warrant authorising interception in accordance with section 48(4) of the 2000 Act, if it is necessary and proportionate for a public authority to breach covertly access controls, the minimum requirement is an authorisation for directed surveillance. An authorisation for the use and conduct of a CHIS is necessary if a relationship is established or maintained by a member of a public authority or by a person acting on its behalf (i.e. the activity is more than mere reading of the site’s content).
- 6.4 It is not unlawful for a member of a public authority to set up a false identity but it is inadvisable for a member of a public authority to do so for a covert purpose without an authorisation for directed surveillance when private information is likely to be obtained. The SRO should be satisfied that there is a process in place to ensure compliance with the legislation. Using photographs of other persons without their permission to support the false identity infringes other laws.
- 6.5 A member of a public authority should not adopt the identity of a person known, or likely to be known, to the subject of interest or users of the site without authorisation, and without the consent of the person whose identity is used, and without considering the protection of that person. The consent must be explicit (i.e. the person from whom consent is sought must agree (preferably in writing) what is and is not to be done).

## 7. General Provisions about Authorisations

- 7.1 Where an investigating officer of the Council wishes to engage in covert Surveillance, or wishes to either operate as or use a CHIS, RIPA sets out procedures for who can **provide authorisation** and what the evidence obtained is to be used for. In order to perform covert Surveillance or to operate/use a CHIS, the officer who wishes to do so must obtain:

Step 1: **authorisation** by the appropriate nominated officer (‘Authorising Officer’) (See Appendix 2),

Step 2: **approval** of the authorisation by the Magistrates (See Appendix 3)

- 7.2 Surveillance must only be authorised where it is believed that the Surveillance is necessary under the ground set out in paragraph 7 and is proportionate to what it seeks to achieve. To protect privacy, and comply with the HRA, all Council services will need to demonstrate that any intrusion into an individual's privacy is essential to an investigation.
- 7.3 Where Surveillance is considered appropriate it must still be authorised and then approved by an order of the Magistrates' Court before it can commence.
- 7.4 Authorising Officers will need to satisfy themselves that a defensible case can be made for Surveillance activity. The matters which the Authorising Officer must consider are set out in Section 8 below. Obtaining an authorisation and Magistrates' approval will ensure that the action is carried out in accordance with the law and subject to stringent safeguards against abuse. It will also make the action less vulnerable to challenge under the HRA

7.5 Where an authorisation is approved for Directed Surveillance / CHIS then it must only be carried out in accordance with the authorisation and only for the purposes of the investigation specified or described. It is also vital that the remit of the authorisation is communicated to and understood by, the Surveillance officers or the CHIS.

7.6 In no circumstance must any Covert Surveillance operation be given backdated authorisation after it has commenced. Embarking upon Directed Surveillance or the use of a CHIS without court-approved authorisation or conducting Covert Surveillance outside the scope of the authorisation will mean that the 'protective umbrella' of RIPA is unavailable and so any evidence obtained is likely to be inadmissible in court. This may also result in disciplinary action being taken against the officer/officers concerned within the Council's Human Resources policies and procedures.

## 8. **Grounds for Authorisation**

8.1 Authorisation for Directed Surveillance or the use of a CHIS may be granted by an Authorising Officer where and only where s/he believes:-

- (a) that the authorisation is necessary for the purpose of preventing and detecting crime or preventing disorder; and
- (b) that the authorised Surveillance is proportionate to that which is sought to be achieved (see paragraph 5).

8.2 Authorisation for using a CHIS can only be given for preventing or detecting crime or of preventing disorder.

8.3 Authorisation for Directed Surveillance can only be given for preventing or detecting criminal offences that meet the Crime Threshold Test. Directed Surveillance **cannot** be used for offences below that threshold or to prevent disorder.

8.4 Detecting crime includes establishing by whom, for what purpose, by what means and generally in what circumstances any crime was committed, the gathering of evidence for use in any legal proceedings and the apprehension of the person (or persons) by whom any crime was committed. Preventing or detecting crime goes beyond the prosecution of offenders and includes actions taken to avert, end or disrupt the commission of criminal offences.

8.5 In the case of crime when the investigator comes to the Authorising Officer the latter will be hard pressed, in many cases, to know whether s/he is satisfied that the investigation will follow the criminal route. If the concern is disorder this problem is greatly reduced since the evidence is being gathered to be presented for a wide range of remedies. Thus use of a CHIS under RIPA can be used in cases where disorder is being alleged under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003.

## 9 Completing the Forms for Authorisation

9.1 The investigating officer seeking authorisation does this by completing the necessary form. To ensure that the current forms are being used, they should be downloaded from the Home Office Website each time a new Authorisation is being sought at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ripa-forms--2>

When completing these forms for authorisation, they should provide:

- Name(s) (where known) or description(s) of the person(s) who is/are to be the subject of the Surveillance as well as any known history and character of that/those person(s).
- The location of the person who is the subject of the Surveillance or where such Surveillance is to take place and (if relevant) the place where the CHIS is to be located.
- The type of Surveillance device or equipment to be used (if any).
- The type of activities, numbers and names of officers who will be CHIS's (if relevant).
- The purpose of which the Surveillance is to be undertaken or CHIS used. As stated above, it also has to be demonstrated why it is necessary to use covert Surveillance or a CHIS.
- It must specify why the Surveillance to be undertaken or CHIS used is proportionate and in this context specifying:
  - (a) The objectives of the Surveillance or the use of the CHIS
  - (b) The crime or disorder being investigated
  - (c) Why the Surveillance or the use of a CHIS should be used in preference to other methods of investigation
  - (d) Why it would be more practicable
- For Directed Surveillance, confirmation that the criminal offence(s) (which should also encompass any "disorder") meet the Crime Threshold Test, and brief details in support of this confirmation.
- The objectives of the activities.
- The name and nature of the investigation or operation and what makes the Authorising Officer believe Surveillance or the use of the CHIS will achieve the objectives.
- The risk of information relating to third parties' private and family lives being obtained i.e. Collateral Intrusion.

- The likelihood of acquiring any confidential/religious material.
- The period of review that will apply
- Whether the Authorisation was ultimately refused and reasons why

## 10. Duration of Authorisations

### (a) Time Limits

10.1 Authorisations have a duration as follows:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| • Directed Surveillance                                     | 3 months from grant of judicial approval  |
| • Covert human intelligence source (where CHIS 18 or older) | 12 months from grant of judicial approval |
| • Covert human intelligence source (where CHIS under 18)    | 1 month from grant of judicial approval   |

and will cease to have effect after these periods. However, the authorisations will continue to exist until cancelled. The process of controlling RIPA authorisations should be by review and cancellation. If they are no longer required they should be cancelled proactively and not simply allowed to expire.

### (b) Review

10.2 Once granted, an authorisation should be reviewed regularly, at least as required by the Authorisation, by the officer managing the case to assess whether or not the activity authorised continues to be **necessary** and **proportionate**. The Authorising Officer should be notified of any instances where these criteria are no longer met. Reviews should be more frequent when access to Confidential Information or Collateral Intrusion is involved. Review frequency should be as often as the Authorising Officer deems practicable. Judicial approval is not required for an internal review.

10.3 The Authorisation forms should be used in conducting a review of Covert Surveillance or a CHIS.

### (c) Renewal

10.4 If at any time before an authorisation would cease to have effect the Authorising Officer considers it necessary for the authorisation to continue for the purpose for which it was given, they may renew it in writing for a further period not exceeding the relevant time limits in paragraph 10.1. Once authorised, renewals must also be approved by the Magistrates' as with initial authorisations (see Appendix 3).

- 10.5 A renewal takes effect at the time at which, or day on which the authorisation would have ceased to have effect but for the renewal. An application for renewal should not be made until shortly before the authorisation period is drawing to an end. Any person who would be entitled to grant a new authorisation can renew an authorisation. Authorisations may be renewed more than once, provided they continue to meet the criteria for authorisation.
- 10.6 An application for renewal should be made to the officer who granted the original authorisation unless there is a very good reason not to do so (e.g. because the original Authorising Officer is on annual leave/ has left the Council).
- 10.7 Applications for renewal should be made using the forms contained in Appendices 4
- 10.8 Authorisations may be renewed more than once, if necessary, and the renewal should be kept/recorded as part of the central record of authorisations.

**(d) Cancellation**

- 10.9 Finally with regards to authorisations, an authorisation must be cancelled by the person who granted or renewed it if that person is satisfied that the authorisation is no longer necessary on the ground under which it was granted or renewed or it is no longer proportionate to what is sought to be achieved by carrying it out. Alternatively, in the case of the authorisation of a CHIS, that person is satisfied that arrangements for the CHIS's case that satisfy the requirements as set out above no longer exist. When cancelling, the forms contained in Appendices 4 and 5 should be used. Judicial approval is not needed for a cancellation.

**11 RIPA Coordinating Officer and Record Keeping**

- 11.1 The RIPA Coordinating Officer will keep this Policy and Guidance document under review and will amend it to accord with best practice. They will also hold a centrally retrievable record of all authorisations and regularly update it whenever an authorization is granted, renewed or cancelled. The record will be made available to an Inspector from the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office, upon request. The record will be retained for a period of at least five years from the ending of the authorisation and will contain the following information:

- the type of authorisation;
- the date the authorisation was given;
- name and rank of the Authorising Officer;
- the unique reference number (URN) of the investigation or operation;
- the title of the investigation or operation, including a brief description and names of subjects, if known;
- Length of the Authorisation
- Review Periods

- if the authorisation is renewed, when it was renewed and who authorised the renewal, including the name and rank of the Authorising Officer;
- whether the investigation or operation is likely to result in obtaining Confidential Information as defined in this code of practice;
- the details and outcome of applications to the Magistrates' for judicial approval, including names of Magistrates and dates and times of hearings
- the date the authorisation was cancelled.

11.2 All original authorisations, renewals and cancellations shall be held by the RIPA Coordinating Officer with copies held by the Authorising Officer. These will include:

- a copy of the application and a copy of the authorisation together with any supplementary documentation and notification of the approval given by the Authorising Officer;
- a copy of the court order approving the authorisation
- a record of the period over which the Surveillance has taken place;
- the frequency of reviews prescribed by the Authorising Officer;
- a record of the result of each review of the authorisation;
- a copy of any renewal of an authorisation, together with the supporting documentation submitted when the renewal was requested;
- the date and time when any instruction was given by the Authorising Officer.
- The Cancellation Form

## **12 Record Keeping – Generally**

- 12.1 Copies of all written authorisations and reviews should be kept for a period of five years from the ending of the Authorisation or longer if required by the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996..
- 12.2 All information that is obtained during Surveillance undertaken for the purpose of a criminal investigation is recorded by means of a Surveillance log. This log should give an account of the events observed and conversations heard and the time and date of such events or conversations. As it is unlikely that such a log would be completed contemporaneously, the date and time that the entry is made should also be noted as well as the name of the person making the entry.
- 12.3 Where an authorisation is reviewed and either granted, withdrawn or refused then the review must be recorded in writing on the relevant form.

- 12.4 At no time must any of the recorded information be disclosed or used, except for the purposes for which it was gathered at that time or for use in any future criminal or civil proceedings involving the Council, or if disclosure is required by law.
- 12.5 All reference to the CHIS must be by way of the pseudonym or URN allocated. The only document that records the true identity of the CHIS is the 'source profile' which must be securely stored away from all other operational documentation. All of the information obtained by a CHIS and by the officer responsible for recording the use of the CHIS is to be recorded in a daily log similar to that referred to above for Surveillance. Where such a log also reveals the name of the CHIS this should only be disclosed if either legally necessary or if required by a Court. See paragraphs 4.6 to 4.10 for further requirements in relation to the use of a CHIS. Material produced by Covert Surveillance and use of CHIS will be retained in accordance with law, such as the requirements of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996.
- 12.6 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) provides for the general rights of access to recorded information held by public authorities and specifies the conditions before a request has to be complied with. The advice of the RIPA Coordinating Officer should be sought for any requests to see the authorisation documents under the FOIA.



### **13 Use of Covert Surveillance equipment, data security and data sharing**

- 13.1 Covert Surveillance equipment will only be installed with the necessary authorisation of the Council's Authorising Officers and only then when that authorisation has been approved by the Magistrates'. It will only be installed in residential premises if a member of the public has requested help or referred a complaint to the Council and such matter can only be investigated with the aid of Covert Surveillance techniques. Any permission to locate Surveillance equipment on residential premises must be obtained in writing from the householder or tenant, and should encompass all occupiers of the premises.
- 13.2 In the unlikely event ~~Any request by~~ a Council officer ~~requeststo~~ a resident to keep a video/audio/written diary as part of a covert evidence-gathering exercise this will be regarded as a Covert Surveillance exercise conducted on behalf of the Council and must be authorised and judicially approved in accordance with this policy.
- 13.3 During a covert operation, recorded material or information collected will be stored and transported securely. It will be reviewed daily and access to it will be restricted to the investigating officers and the Authorising Officer concerned. The RIPA Monitoring and Coordinating Officer will decide whether to allow requests for access by third parties including other Council officers. Access will generally only be allowed to limited and prescribed parties, including law enforcement agencies, prosecution agencies, legal representatives and the people subject to the Surveillance (unless disclosure would prejudice any criminal enquiries or proceedings). Requests for access will be dealt with in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- 13.4 A register will be maintained by the Authorising Officers of all reviews of material recorded and collected covertly.
- 13.5 Only high-quality digital or other recordings will be used. All DVDs and audiotapes will be identified uniquely. A register will be kept of all DVDs used to control the period of time they are retained (31 days) if not required for evidential purposes and the number of times they are re-used before being destroyed.
- 13.6 A register of recording and other surveillance equipment should be maintained to include details of its use.

## **14 Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)**

- 14.1 Slough Borough Council is committed to respecting people's rights to privacy and supports the individual's entitlement to go about their lawful business; this is a primary consideration in the operation of any CCTV system operated by the council. [Other agencies can request the use of public space CCTV systems for operational purposes, where RIPA applies, a copy of the RIPA authorisation will be held by the RIPA coordinator.](#)
- 14.2 The Council uses secure video imaging systems (CCTV) in public spaces, within car parks and at a number of council owned and operated sites across the borough. [CCTV in these areas is usually clearly sign-posted and visible.](#)
- 14.3 The Council's CCTV policy at:

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/crime-prevention-and-emergencies/cctv.aspx>

covers the purchase and use of CCTV equipment and includes the use of cameras for RIPA purposes.

## **15 The "Policing" of RIPA**

- 15.1 RIPA is overseen by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office. They are tasked with ensuring that RIPA is being applied properly. Inspections can be carried out at regular intervals.
- 15.2 In addition, any person aggrieved by the way a local authority carries out covert Surveillance can apply to The Investigatory Powers Tribunal for redress, within a year of the act complained of or any longer period that the Tribunal thinks it just and equitable to allow. This Tribunal can quash any authorisation and can order the destruction of information held or obtained in pursuit of it. It can award compensation, but its findings may be of use in a Human Rights case challenge or as a defence to a case brought by the Council or in a referral to the Local Government Ombudsman or a complaint to the Information Commissioner, from where compensation awards can flow.

## 16 Consequences of Non Compliance

16.1 Where covert Surveillance work is being proposed, this Policy and Procedural Guidance should be strictly adhered to in order to protect both the Council and individual officers from the following:

- (a) **Inadmissible Evidence** - there is a risk that, if Covert Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources (both defined at paragraph 2) are not handled properly, the evidence obtained may be held to be inadmissible.
- (b) **Legal Challenge** – as a potential breach of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which establishes a “right to respect private and family life, home and correspondence”, incorporated into English Law by the HRA. This could not only cause embarrassment to the Council but any person aggrieved by the way it has carried out Covert Surveillance can apply to The Investigatory Powers Tribunal under RIPA for redress within a year of the act complained of or any longer period that the Tribunal thinks it just and equitable to allow. This Tribunal can quash any authorisation and can order the destruction of information held or obtained in pursuit of it. Its findings may be of use in a Human Rights case challenge, as a defence to a case brought by the Council, in a referral to the Local Government Ombudsman or a complaint to the Information Commissioner from where compensation awards can flow.
- (c) **Censure** – the Investigatory Powers Commissioner’s Office conduct regular audits on how local authorities implement RIPA. If it is found that a local authority is not implementing RIPA properly then this could result in censure and reputational damage.
- (d) **Disciplinary Action** – failure of officers to comply with this Policy and Procedural Guidance may be regarded as a disciplinary offence under the Council’s Disciplinary Policies and Procedures.

## 17. Complaints Procedures

17.1 The Council’s Complaints Procedure should be used for any complaint, regarding breach of this Policy and Guidance.

17.2 Contravention of the Data Protection Act 1998 should be reported to the Head of Paid Service and the Information Commissioner,

## 18. The Role of Elected Members

Elected members are responsible for setting and reviewing the Council’s policy and should not be involved in the authorisation of individual cases. Cabinet should receive a report at least annually on activity in the last year, a formal review of the policy and recommendations of any amendments. of a local authority have the following responsibilities with regard to RIPA which rests primarily with the Commissioner for Regulation & Consumer Protection :

The Commissioner :

should review the authority’s use of RIPA and present an annual report to Cabinet should seek endorsement from Cabinet to set the policy at least once a year;

~~should consider internal reports on the use of RIPA on at least a quarterly basis to ensure that it is being used consistently with the local authority's policy and that the policy remains fit for purpose;~~  
~~should not be involved in making decisions on specific authorisations.~~

## 19.1 RIPA ~~Monitoring~~ Senior Responsible Officer

The Monitoring Officer of the Council is the Senior Responsible Officer [SRO] and is responsible for:-

- the integrity of the process;
- compliance with Act and Code;
- oversight of reporting errors and reasons; and
- facilitating inspections.

## 19.2 **The RIPA Coordinating Officer** has responsibilities for –

- ensuring that all Authorising Officers are of an appropriate standard;
- addressing any concerns about the standards of Authorising Officers;
- the integrity of the processes in place for the management of CHIS and Directed Surveillance authorisations;
- compliance with RIPA and with the Codes;
- oversight of the reporting of errors to the IPCO etc;
- engagement with the IPCO when they conduct their inspections;
- where necessary, oversight of the implementation of post-inspection action plans approved by the IPCO

## 20. Communications Data

This aspect of the manual sets out the Council's policies, procedures and Codes of Practice regarding the acquisition of communications data (Comms Data). Designated Officers for Comms Data purposes are detailed at Appendix 5

**In all cases applications for Comms data will be made through the National Anti Fraud Network (NAFN). NAFN submit applications on behalf of the Council to the Office for Communications Data Authorisations (OCDA)**

The application of the procedures in this section is mandatory for all Council service areas that undertake these functions. This Section has been revised following changes introduced by the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 and should be read in conjunction with the **Home Office Acquisition & Disclosure of Communications Data Code of Practice**. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-acquisition-and-disclosure-of-communications-data>

### 20.1 LAW & PROCEDURE

#### What is Comms Data?

The term 'communications data' embraces the 'who', 'when', 'where', and 'how' of a communication but not the content, not what was said or written.

Communications data is broadly split into three categories:

1. service data i.e. the use made of the service by any person, for example, itemised telephone records;

2. subscriber data i.e. any other information that is held or obtained by an operator or a person to whom they provide a service, for example, who the subscriber is of a telephone number or who the account holder is of an email address
3. traffic data i.e. where a communication was made from, to whom and when

The Investigatory Powers Act 2016 provides that a Council can obtain authorisation for the acquisition and disclosure of communications if three criteria are met:

1. it is necessary for the Council to obtain communication data for an applicable crime purpose in relation to a specific investigation;
2. the Council is party to a collaboration agreement certified by the Secretary of State;
3. the conduct to be authorised is proportionate to what is sought to be achieved.

## **20.2 Basis for lawful acquisition of data**

Local Authorities are permitted in limited circumstances to obtain communications data, which would result in the subject's Right to Privacy being infringed.

Part 3 of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 provides the statutory framework to enable the acquisition of communications data to be lawfully authorised and conducted so as to ensure it is compatible with **Article 8**.

## **20.3 What are Local Authorities permitted to obtain?**

The Council is only permitted to access subscriber information and service data. The Council cannot access traffic data. The Council can only request subscriber information or service data if it is required for the purpose of preventing or detecting crime or protecting public health. Such a request must be both necessary and proportionate as discussed previously in this policy. The Council is not permitted to intercept the content of communications.

## **Failure to satisfy legislation – consequences**

Please see paragraph **1615**

### **20.4 Slough's Centralised System**

As detailed in para **1110** and **1918** The RIPA Co-ordinating Officer is responsible for maintaining a register of RIPA applications. All officers must discuss the intention of applying for a RIPA authorisation and once agreed the investigating officer must obtain a URN before progressing with the application. It is the responsibility of the applying officer to provide details to the RIPA Coordinating Officers team on progress of the RIPA authorisation application, use and if appropriate renewal and revocation. Refer to Quick Guide and flow chart on page 34.

### **20.5 Forms to be Used**

Applications for Comms data are made on line via the NAFN portal

### **20.6 Relevant Definitions**

#### a) Single Point of Contact [SPOC]

SPOCs are an accredited individual or group trained to facilitate the lawful acquisition of communications data and effective co-operation between a public authority and a CSP. For all Comms Data applications the Council uses NAFN SPOCs.

#### b) CSP

An operator who provides postal or communications data is described as a communications service provider [CSP].

The Council uses the NAFN service and officers are required to consult a NFN SPOC throughout the application process. The SPOC will scrutinise the application and if he/she agrees the application is lawful, will submit the application to the Office for Communications Data Authorisations on behalf of the Council.

## **20.7 Disclosure Duties & Procedure**

a) Please see paragraph 19 above.

b) Original Application

To be retained by the SPOC

c) Golden Copy

Any documents or material provided to the Commission by a CSP as a result of a RIPA enquiry must be retained. This material is referred to by IOCCO as the 'Golden Copy' and this should always be available to be adduced in future legal proceedings if required. This is particularly important as the CSP may not retain the original data, depending on their retention policy.

## **20.8 Central Retrievable Record of Authorisations & Notice**

Trading Standards maintain an Electronic Central Retrievable Record of Authorisations and Notices, which may be via NAFN



## **20.9 Senior Responsible Officer**

**The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources) Order** came into force along with an updated version of the Home Office's COP on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2010, which contained a mandatory requirement to appoint a Senior Responsible Officer. (The Senior Responsible Officer at Slough Borough Council for Comms Data is the Group Manager – Consumer Protection))

The Senior Responsible Officer [SRO] must be responsible for:-

- . the integrity of the process;
- . compliance with Act and Code;
- . oversight of reporting errors and reasons;
- . facilitating inspections.

## **20.10 Recordable Errors**

Each public authority has a duty to keep a log of recordable errors. The record will be maintained by the ~~Monitoring~~Senior Responsible Officer.

The following are Reportable Errors:-

- o An authorisation or notice made for a purpose, or for a type of data, which the relevant public authority cannot call upon, or seek, under the Act;
- o human error, such as incorrect transposition of information from an application to an authorisation or notice
- o disclosure of the wrong data by a CSP when complying with a notice;
- o acquisition of the wrong data by a public authority when engaging in conduct specified in an authorisation;

## **20.11 Training & Monitoring**

~~In order to be a DP all officers must have attended a suitable training course and be accredited as such. Thereafter the SRO should ensure that all DP's receive regular updates and training as and when required.~~ All officers utilising RIPA for the acquisition of communications data must also have attended a suitable training course.

## **20.12 Oversight**

The Investigatory Powers Commissioners Office oversees the acquisition of communications data.

## **20.13 Codes of Practice**

Home Office Acquisition of Communications Data to be accessed via the following link:-  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-acquisition-and-disclosure-of-communications-data>

## **APPENDIX 1**

All codes of practice are available using the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ripa-codes>

All documents relating to RIPA forms are available using the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ripa-forms--2>

Also, see the Home Office guidance to local authorities in England and Wales on the judicial approval process for RIPA and the crime threshold for Directed Surveillance. This is available on:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-local-authority-use-of-ripa>

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **DESIGNATION OF AUTHORISING OFFICERS**

The following Authorising Officers are designated by the Council to authorise, renew and cancel Directed Surveillance or the use of covert human information sources (CHIS):

- Monitoring Officer (SRO)
- Head of Legal
- Associate Director – Community and Public Protection
- Group Manager – Community Safety, Housing Regulation & Enforcement (Co-ordinating Officer)
- Corporate Fraud Manager

<b>Title of Officer</b>	<b>Service Area</b>
<del>Director of Adults &amp; Communities</del>	<del>Enforcement of housing and council tax benefits including the investigation of fraud in connection therewith</del>
<del>Director Children, Learning &amp; Skills Services</del>	<del>All matters involving financial irregularity (excluding housing and council tax benefits) and issues relating to employees and workers.</del>
<del>Director of Transformation</del>	<del>Planning and building control, environmental health and trading standards</del>
<del>Head of Legal Services</del>	<del>All other service areas</del>
<del>Chief Executive – Head of Paid Service (or in absence chief officer)</del>	<del>Authorisation of a juvenile or vulnerable person as a CHIS and where the obtaining of Confidential Information is likely.</del>

The above officers are appointed and designated **Authorising Officers** under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance & Covert Human Intelligence Sources) Order 2010.

**The RIPA Senior Responsible Officer is the Council's Monitoring Officer ~~Director of Finance & Resources~~**

~~**The RIPA Monitoring Officer is the Council's Monitoring Officer**~~

**The RIPA Coordinating Officer is the Group Manager – Community Safety, Housing Regulation and Enforcement ~~Service Lead – Regulatory Services~~**

The Council also designate the named officers' successors where they are responsible for the service area and have received Council training in the use of RIPA.

## APPENDIX 3

### Judicial Approval

- a) Officers wishing use Directed Surveillance or a CHIS first need to obtain internal authorisation in accordance with this Policy. However **an authorisation does not take effect unless and until it has been approved by a Justice of the Peace (JP)** (i.e. a District Judge or lay magistrate). If at the hearing the JP is satisfied that the statutory tests have been met and that the use of the technique is necessary and proportionate he/she will issue an order approving the grant or renewal for the use of the technique as described in the application.
- b) The hearing will not be in open court, and no press, public, the subject of the investigation or the subject's legal representative will be present. In order to maintain privacy, notice of the application is not required to the person whom the authorisation concerns or that person's legal representatives.

#### **Making the Application**

- c) The flowchart below outlines the procedure for applying for judicial approval. Following approval by the Authorising Officer the first stage of the process is for the Council to contact Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) administration team at the magistrates' court to arrange a hearing.
- d) The Council will provide the JP with a copy of the original RIPA authorisation or notice and the supporting documents setting out the case. This forms the basis of the application to the JP and **should contain all information that is relied upon**.
- e) The original RIPA authorisation or notice should be shown to the JP but will be retained by the Council so that it is available for inspection by the Commissioners' offices and in the event of any legal challenge or investigations by the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT). The court may wish to take a copy.
- f) In addition, the Council will provide the JP with a partially completed judicial application/order form
- g) Although the Council is required to provide a brief summary of the circumstances of the case on the judicial application form, this is supplementary to and does not replace the need to supply the original RIPA authorisation as well.
- h) The order section of the form will be completed by the JP and will be the official record of the JP's decision. The Council will need to obtain judicial approval for all initial RIPA authorisations/applications and renewals and the Council will need to retain a copy of the judicial application/order form after it has been signed by the JP. There is no requirement for the JP to consider either cancellations or internal reviews.

#### **Arranging a Hearing**

- i) Officers should establish contact with HMCTS administration at the magistrates' court. HMCTS administration will be the first point of contact for the Council when seeking a

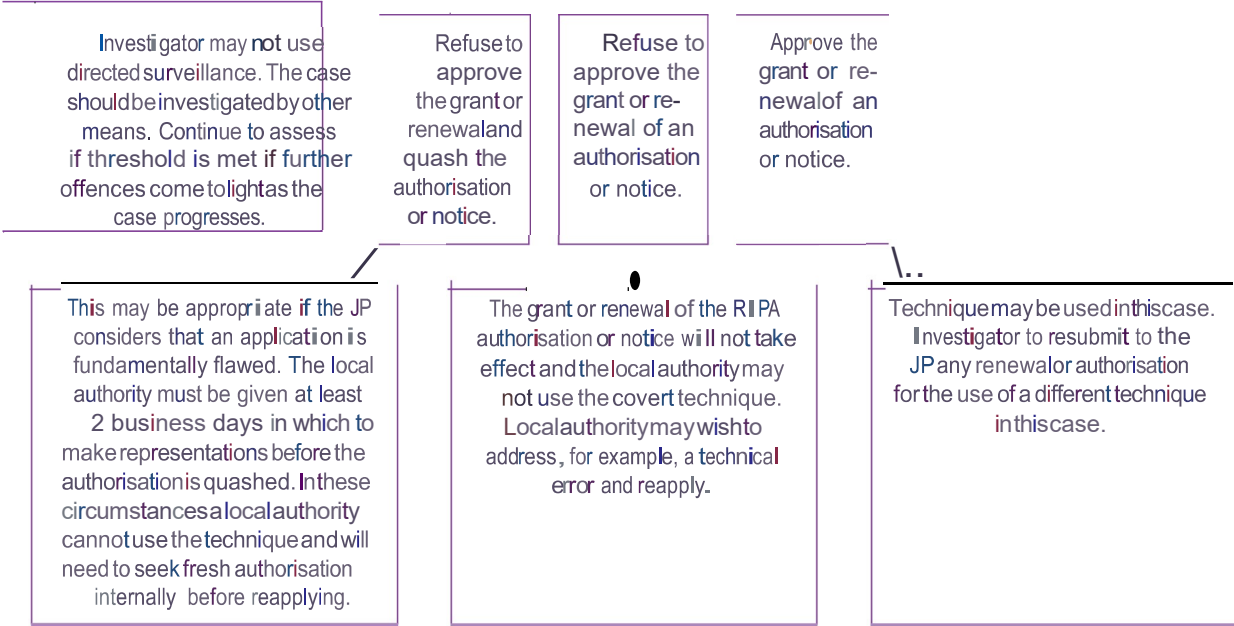
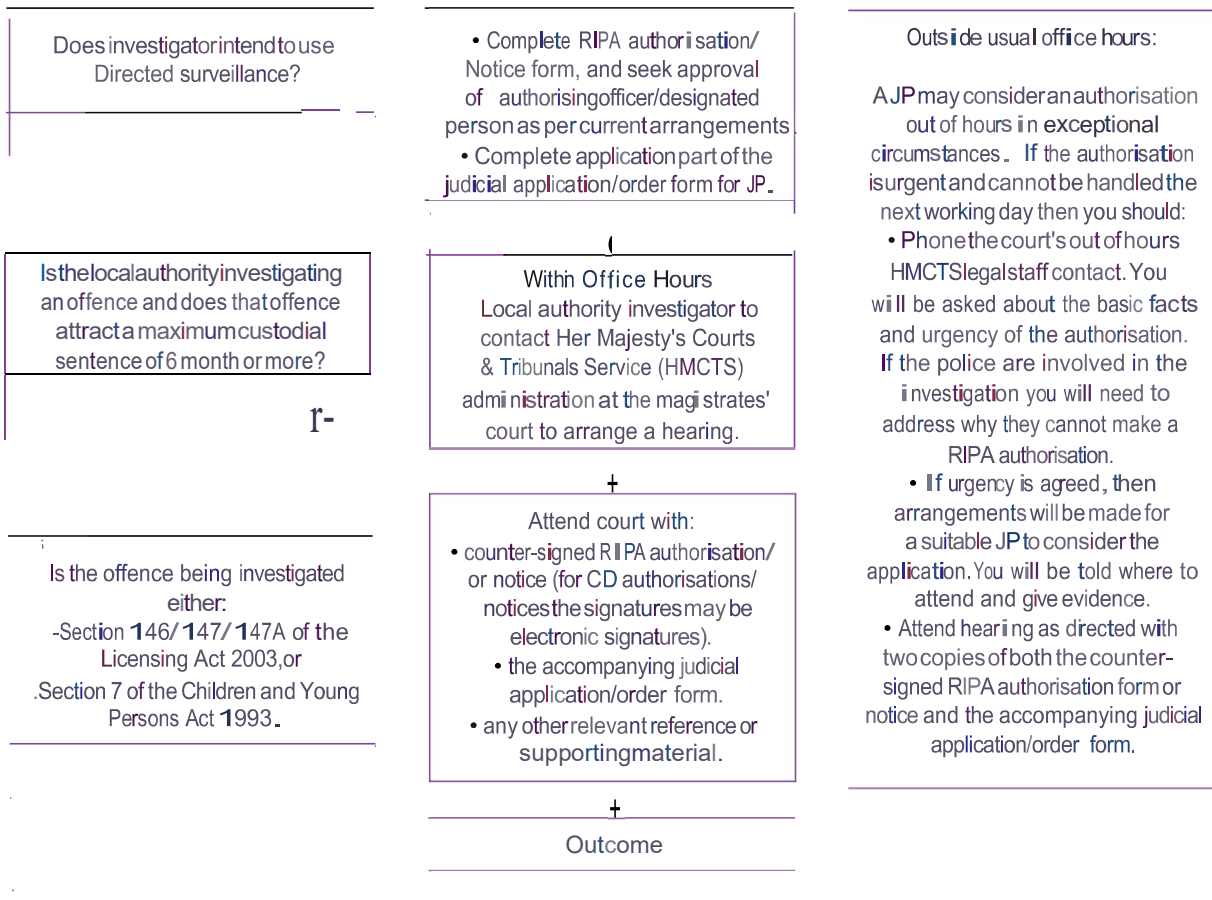
- j) **Urgent cases.** On the rare occasions where out of hours access to a JP is required then it will be for the Council to make local arrangements with the relevant HMCTS legal staff. In these cases the Council will need to provide two partially completed judicial application/order forms so that one can be retained by the JP. The Council should provide the court with a copy of the signed judicial application/order form the next working day.
- k) In most emergency situations where the police have power to act, then they are able to authorise activity under RIPA without prior JP approval. No RIPA authority is required in immediate response to events or situations where it is not reasonably practicable to obtain it (for instance when criminal activity is observed during routine duties and officers conceal themselves to observe what is happening).
- l) Where renewals are timetabled to fall outside of court hours, for example during a holiday period, it is the Council's responsibility to ensure that the renewal is completed ahead of the deadline. Out of hours procedures are for emergencies and should not be used because a renewal has not been processed in time.

### **Attending a Hearing**

- m) The hearing is a 'legal proceeding' and therefore Council officers need to be formally designated to appear under its Constitution be sworn in and present evidence or provide information as required by the JP.
- n) The hearing will be in private and heard by a single JP who will read and consider the RIPA authorisation or notice and the judicial application/order form. He/she may have questions to clarify points or require additional reassurance on particular matters.
- o) The Council will want to consider who is best able to answer the JP's questions on the policy and practice of conducting covert operations and detail of the case itself. It is envisaged that the case investigator will be able to fulfil this role. The investigator will know the most about the investigation and will have determined that use of a covert technique is required in order to progress a particular case. This does not, however, remove or reduce in any way the duty of the Authorising Officer to determine whether the tests of necessity and proportionality have been met. Similarly, it does not remove or reduce the need for the forms and supporting papers that the Authorising Officer has considered and which are provided to the JP to make the case.
- p) It is not envisaged that the skills of legally trained personnel will be required to make the case to the JP and this would be likely to, unnecessarily, increase the costs of Council applications.
- q) **Officers who are not solicitors** can appear in the Magistrates' on behalf of the Council under section 223 of the Local Government Act 1972, so long as they have been properly authorised to do so in accordance with the Council's Constitution. Such officers should take to court a copy of any such authorisation in case it is asked for by a JP or the Court Clerk.

# LOCAL AUTHORITY PROCEDURE: APPLICATION TO A JUSTICE OF THE PEACE SEEKING AN ORDER TO APPROVE THE GRANT OF A RIPA AUTHORISATION OR NOTICE

Local authority investigator wants to use a RIPA technique (directed surveillance, CHIS (covert human intelligence source) or communications data).



Obtain signed order and retain original RIPA authorisation/notice.  
 For CD authorisations or notices, local authority investigator to provide additional copy of judicial order to the SPoC.  
 If out of hours, a copy of the signed order to be provided to the court the next working day.

## **APPENDIX 4**

Up to date RIPA forms are available at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ripa-forms--2>

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **NAFN Designated Officers**

<b>Title of Officer</b>	<b>Service Area</b>
Head of Consumer Protection & Business Compliance	Neighbourhood Services Private Rented Housing Housing
Head of Neighbourhood Services	Trading Standards Licensing Food Safety Health & Safety



## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Date:</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> July 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Procurement of Temporary Labour Contract
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Chandra Muvvala - Lead Member for Public Protection, Customer Service, IT and Young Futures (including HR)
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Sarah Hayward, Executive Director – Strategy and Improvement
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Surjit Nagra – Associate Director - HR Adrian Thomson – Interim Recruitment Manager
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Decision Subject to Call In:</b>	Yes
<b>Appendices:</b>	None

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report outlines the rationale and benefits for the procurement of a contract for the supply of temporary labour. The key driver for this contract is the council's need to ensure that it can meet its requirements for temporary labour to cover one-off tasks or projects which require specialist skills and experience as well as roles where there are national shortages. The advantages of having in place a temporary labour contract include cost savings, efficiency gains, and access to workers with specialised expertise. The procurement process will therefore ensure better value for money.

#### Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- a. Confirm authority to commence the procurement process for the provision of a Temporary Labour Contract, following the approval of the procurement forward plan submitted to April 2023 Cabinet.

#### Reason:

The current contract for Temporary Labour is due to expire on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2024. To maintain uninterrupted service delivery, it is crucial to commence the procurement process without delay to ensure we have a seamless transition into the new contract.

#### Commissioner Review

Commissioners have reviewed this report and have no specific comments to add.

## **2. Report**

### **Introduction**

2.1 The report is seeking authority from Cabinet, to commence the procurement process of a four year (2+1+1) temporary labour contract. By breaking down the four years, it allows us to review performance in years two and three. The MStar 4 framework runs until 2027, whereby, when it will be replaced by MStar 5 and allows the Council to assess and explore the opportunity to procure, whilst still in contract.

2.2 The MSTAR framework is a national framework for the provision of managed temporary agency resourcing services to local authorities, educational establishments and other wider public sector organisations throughout the UK. Managed service providers can take responsibility for temporary staffing supply chains and/or resource pools improving control, safeguarding and visibility as well as delivering efficiency savings.

2.3 This MSTAR framework agreement has been established by Pro5 (led by the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO)) on behalf of the Local Government Professional Services Group (LGPSG) with wide consultation amongst key stakeholders (from local government, education and the wider public sector) including the Cabinet Office and the Department for Education.

2.4 Once approval has been granted the procurement team will initiate the process for this procurement while ensuring a smooth transition from the current contract to the new arrangement, safeguarding the provision of temporary workers services to the council.

### **Background**

2.5 Slough Borough Council's Temporary Labour Contract was last awarded in April 2020 on a four-year basis comprising of two years with a further two years extension in March 2022. The contract covers the provision of temporary workers for all departments and functions within Slough Borough Council. Currently the contract is providing an average of 300 temporary workers to the Council per day, which is assisting in maintaining operational efficiencies, managing workload fluctuations, and addressing staffing shortages, particularly in roles where there is a national shortage. For example, social workers and Occupational therapists.

2.6 The strategic context for the Council has changed significantly since the award of the current contract. In December 2021, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities made a series of statutory Directions requiring the Council to take prescribed actions in areas including financial sustainability, governance, procurement and contract management and culture change. The Directions were extended in September 2022 to cover recruitment to the senior officer structure. The Directions were made due to the Council having failed to comply with its best value duty which requires local authorities to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness." This requires consideration of overall value, including economic, environmental and social value, when reviewing service provision.

2.7 The Council has made considerable progress against a number of these areas including procurement and contract management. This ensures that there is a robust framework that has improved our approach and processes to ensure any contract award will provide best value for the council.

2.8 The combination of the Directions and poor governance which is now being tackled has led to significant growth in the council's use of temporary labour. This is now being more actively managed both through the current supplier and internal control mechanisms. The procurement itself will not necessarily impact the levels of temporary labour use but we will seek a supplier who will work proactively with us to manage use of temporary labour within acceptable levels to meet business need.

2.9 The nature of the temporary labour market has also changed. For example, technology has evolved to enable better candidate, user and agency experiences, enhanced reporting for spend, better equality and diversity data and tenure. In many cases candidates are looking to have more flexible working patterns including home working to balance time spent commuting and in an office. Slough is competing with other local authorities across Berkshire and given our location, with London boroughs who are offering attractive salaries and working arrangements.

2.10 Slough Borough Council is currently operating at a spend for temporary workers at £20.3 million for 2022-2023. Whilst cost savings of £767k were negotiated with the current vendor in 2022-2023, there is still an opportunity to negotiate greater cost savings.

2.11 With the ending of the current contract, the options outlined below were considered.

#### **Options considered.**

**Option One:** Cease using temporary workers. This is not recommended or realistic. Some key functions are reliant upon temporary workers to deliver services to residents and the correct use of temporary workers can be an effective way to fulfil a resourcing requirement.

**Option Two:** Do nothing - This is not recommended. The current contract is coming to an end and there is a requirement for the Council to retender the service to be compliant with both the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

**Option Three:** Procurement of a new temporary labour contract – **recommended**. This option is recommended because the council can enhance procurement outcomes and achieve better value for money. Procurement through a framework will enable a quicker and more efficient route to market and, with economies of scale, better rates can be accessed.

2.12 Although the current provider has a large agency supply chain it is not as effective as it could be. In the new contract, working closer with both the supplier and its supply chain of recruitment agencies will allow Slough Borough Council to engage with the market and ensure that we are working with the appropriate agencies within their specialist field to supply high calibre talent.

2.13 Whilst it is acknowledged that tighter contract management is needed, the new contract will allow the Council to understand the market trends and allow the Council to forward plan permanent solutions to reduce long-term cost through reduced temporary worker tenure periods. It should be noted that we are currently in a heavily candidate driven market and the need to engage temporary labour to fill gaps within the workforce, whilst recruiting permanently, will still arise as will the need to engage specialist skilled interims for project-based activities which are arising from the recovery programme.

2.14 Below are highlighted key benefits of procuring a new contract:

- a. Competitive Bidding will ensure the Council achieves value for money;
- b. Re-procuring the Council Temporary Labour Contract will allow the Council to invite bids from all 24 Vendors, encouraging competition and ensuring we secure the most cost-effective and efficient service provider;
- c. Improved Service Quality - the procurement process presents an opportunity to reset clear key performance standards / indicators and service level agreements, ensuring that the selected supplier meets our requirements and provides high-quality temporary workers via an engaged and fit for purpose supply chain; and
- d. Flexibility and Adaptability - by opening the procurement process, we can identify suppliers that have a proven record of accomplishment of adaptability, responsiveness, and the ability to address emerging needs effectively. This will enhance our ability to address staffing challenges and changes in demand.

## Timelines

2.15 The procurement and implementation processes are expected to run as follows:

<b>Time frame</b>	<b>Activity</b>
June – July 2023	User engagement to produce the specification
July – August	Preparation of Tender Documentation
September	Advertise and invite bids from suppliers on the framework
October	Evaluation and scoring of bids Meet with shortlisted suppliers
November	Contract clarifications and completion
November – December	Contract Award
December – March 2024	Mobilisation and Go Live
1 <sup>st</sup> April 2024	Effective date of new contract

2.16 Depending on the outcome of the procurement, the contract implementation period could be significant, particularly if the current contractor does not retain the contract. Hence it is important to allow enough time for the process to be completed.

## 3. Implications of the Recommendation

### 3.1 *Financial implications*

3.1.1 The financial implications of procuring the Council Temporary Agency Contract will depend on the bids received and the negotiated terms. The total value of the current contract over the last four years will exceed £70 million at the current spend rate although the levels of agency spend will reduce over time as many areas are now able to recruit permanently to posts where appropriate. However, it is expected that the procurement process will enable us to secure competitive pricing, continue to implement a strict Agency Recruitment Policy, with Executive Level Sign off and the potential introduction / review of an internal charge for the use of agency staff, to be passed back by way of rebate to a centralised point within Slough Borough Council. The potential introduction and use of the rebate, will be considered as part of the implementation process for any new contract.

3.1.2 The contract award does not commit the Council to any expenditure but creates the contract terms under which future assignments will be made but does ensure the council is able to achieve best value for those assignments. Each individual assignment is subject to an internal budget authorisation before any spending is committed under the contract

### 3.2 *Legal implications*

3.2.1 The estimated contract value is above the financial threshold for public service contracts (£213,477 inclusive of VAT) so the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 apply to this procurement.

3.2.2 The Council is (and will be) identified as a potential call off party in the MSTAR4 and MSTAR5 framework agreements, and the proposed services and contract value are (and will be) in scope under the frameworks. ESPO is a reputable framework provider and can lawfully procure public sector framework agreements. The proposed use of the MSTAR4 and MSTAR5 framework agreements is therefore compliant with both the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules (CPR).

3.2.3 A mini competition will be conducted in accordance with the terms and conditions of the MSTAR4 and MSTAR5 framework agreements. The scope for making any amendments to the call off agreement will be clearly set out in the MSTAR4 and MSTAR5 framework agreements. Legal advice will be sought from HB Public Law from the outset of the procurement to amend and complete the call off agreement pursuant to the terms of the framework agreement where permissible to best suit the Council’s requirements. Once a successful bidder has been selected, legal advice will be sought from HB Public Law to finalise the call off agreement.

3.2.4 Under the CPR, contracts valued at £100,000 and above must be sealed.

3.2.5 The Council is under a general Duty of Best Value <sup>[1]</sup> to “make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.” The procurement of a temporary labour contract will enable the Council to fulfil its best value duties. These arrangements will secure continuous improvement regarding economy, efficiency and effectiveness and overall value, including social value which will be considered in the procurement process.

3.2.6 The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (as amended) (TUPE) may apply to any service provision changes and transfer of services. The procurement process will take account of this. Specialist legal advice will be sought from HB Public Law on the potential TUPE implications on this project.

### 3.3 *Risk management implications*

3.3.1 The following key risks have been identified -

Risk	Assessment of Risk	Mitigation	Residual Risk
Loss of continuity of service if the contract cannot be awarded within given timescales	Medium Staffing – All contingent labour would be out of contract. Payroll – We would have no facility to	Assign sufficient resource to complete the procurement on time.  Agree short-term extension with incumbent	Medium

	payroll any existing workers beyond March 24 Procurement – Agreements with all agencies would need to be reached. We would also forego access to framework rates and margins	supplier with break clauses at 30-day markers	
No bids are received for the contract	Low We are using the national framework	Negotiate with incumbent supplier for continued service	Low
Costs Exceed Estimated Financial Envelope	Medium The full cost cannot be assessed until the rates and margins have been agreed.	Introducing further rigour to the process of using contingent labour and a full review of Interim Exec supply chain and margins to ensure consistency and value for money.	Medium
Procurement timetable cannot be met	Low Any vendor engaged can mobilise within 6 weeks	Assign sufficient resource to complete the procurement on time.  Speak with incumbent to look at short-term extension, in line with procurement guidelines.	Low

### 3.4 *Environmental implications*

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

### 3.5 *Equality implications*

3.5.1 The supplier will be required to have in place a suitable equal opportunities policy

### 3.6 *Procurement implications*

3.6.1 As one of the largest frameworks for Contingency Staffing, it is recommended that SBC go through the MStar framework to procure these services. MStar offers:

- a. Pre-Qualified Vendors
- b. Transparent Costings
- c. Cost Saving efficiencies through set rates per job

3.6.2 The proposed use of this framework is compliant with both the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

### 3.7 *Workforce implications*

3.7.1 The implications of this procurement exercise will have a positive impact on the council's workforce as it will improve the council's ability to source good quality temporary labour to plug short-term gaps in resources and will therefore alleviate resource pressures in services areas.

### 3.8 *Property implications*

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

## **4. Background Papers**

[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 17/04/2023 18:30 \(slough.gov.uk\)](#)

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**Slough Borough Council**

<b>Report To:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> July 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Library 2023/24 Operating Model Performance Report
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Muvvala (lead member for public protection, customer service, IT and Young Futures)
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Richard West
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Ketan Gandhi – AD Community & Public Protection
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Decision Subject To Call In:</b>	No
<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix A: Performance report April and May 2023

**1. Summary and Recommendations**

- 1.1 It was agreed at February 2023 Cabinet that a new Library Operating Model be implemented on 1 April 2023 as part of the Councils 2023-24 savings plans and that the performance of the model be reported back to Cabinet in July 2023.
- 1.2 This report demonstrates that implementation of the new Library Operating Model has been successful, and that the savings plan is on target to be achieved.

**Recommendations:**

Cabinet is requested to:

- a) Welcome the successful implementation of the new Library Operating Model.
- b) Note the performance of the new Library Operating Model which was implemented on 1 April 2023 as set out in Appendix A.

**Commissioner Review**

Commissioners have reviewed this report and have no specific comments to add.

## 2. Report

### Introduction

- 2.1 Councils have a statutory duty to provide library services as described in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. This duty requires councils to deliver a “comprehensive and efficient” library service. There are no prescriptive definitions in the Act about what constitutes a comprehensive and efficient service. However, case law has determined that if any significant changes are made to how a library service is delivered, the council must follow a fair process to locally determine what a comprehensive and efficient library service looks like and what it delivers. This includes considering local needs and consulting with the public when devising a new way of delivering services.
- 2.2 A 12-week public consultation concluded on the 20 January 2022 and informed the March 2022 Cabinet agreement to the Library Service Plan 2022-27. The key findings of the library consultation were that:
- The library service is highly valued by library members.
  - More than 80% of library transactions take place through self-service kiosks.
  - 70% of all items issued (hard copy and e-resource) are from the children’s library.
  - Respondents like the idea of co-locating other Council services with the current library buildings.
  - Young People value study space, where they can talk about issues, and access on-line materials.
  - Our on-line service is growing but is not widely known about.
  - People would value the opportunity to become volunteers in the library service.
  - The library service should consider the diverse needs of the population, including use of the library at home service, the availability of materials for residents for whom English is not a first language and the options of outreach work.
- 2.3 The consultation results demonstrate the need to publicise online resources and improve volunteering opportunities, as well as ensuring that effective services are delivered in buildings.
- 2.4 The strategic aims in the Library Plan, agreed at March 2022 Cabinet, were informed by public consultation. The 2022-23 Library Operating Model was informed by this consultation. The 2023-24 Library Operating Model was also informed by the same public consultation and by operational experience in 2022-23 with the key areas as set out in the table below: -

<b>2022 – 2027 Library Plan work areas</b>	<b>Impact of 2023-24 operating model</b>
High quality support for adults and children to support literacy and encourage a love of reading for pleasure.  Performance measure #1 Performance measure #6	Library staff will be available at 3 library locations throughout each week (with a rota of staff availability on Saturdays) to provide high quality literacy support to residents. In-library events to promote a love of reading will be delivered and, where appropriate will be enhanced by the addition of volunteers to provide more 1-on-1 support to residents who require this.

<p>Make sure the right library services are delivered in the right way in the right locations ensuring that the physical building spaces and events are fully accessible, supporting those with additional needs.</p> <p>Performance measure #1 Performance measure #2 Performance measure #4</p>	<p>Library services will be available at all 4 current library building locations. Library staff will be available in-person at consistent and planned times at 3 locations throughout the week. Britwell Hub library will be predominantly self-service with library staff available by phone if other SBC staff overseeing the library area are unable to support customers with library specific queries.</p> <p>All Library staff have had training in using basic Makaton to communicate with residents and the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) will be used to identify other training needs associated with supporting residents with additional needs. This will include reviewing customer flow to identify “quiet times” at library buildings and advertise these so residents who find busy spaces challenging know when they may find it more comfortable to access the building.</p>
<p>Encourage residents of all ages to make use of our library service to improve their wellbeing and personal development.</p> <p>Performance measure #3 Performance measure #6 Performance measure #7</p>	<p>The Library Service will continue to participate in the UK-wide literacy programme “Summer Reading Challenge” aimed at children and young people. This has been our premier engagement event for driving both library membership for young people but also to increase borrowing by this age group.</p> <p>Focussing on volunteer recruitment will allow the service to deliver a range of events like book clubs, poetry clubs etc. to encourage adults to use the library service.</p> <p>Further promotion of the on-line library resource will also encourage adults who are working when the library buildings are open to still borrow books and magazines etc.</p>
<p>Increased range and diversity of on-line resources and support for residents to use these virtual resources, making sure that no resident is excluded from accessing the on-line world.</p> <p>Performance measure #3 Performance measure #4</p>	<p>The publications budget will remain at £90k per annum allowing the Library Service to continue to purchase a range of physical books and on-line resources.</p> <p>Focussing on recruiting volunteers will also increase the capacity of the service to offer low-level and informal support for residents needing guidance and confidence to access the digital world.</p>

<p>A range of exciting, relevant and enjoyable events hosted by library services.</p> <p>Performance measure #5 Performance measure #6</p>	<p>The service will continue to deliver a Summer Reading Challenge each year specifically aimed at school-age children.</p> <p>Staff working with volunteers will also be able to continue to host events such as “Rhyme Time”, storytelling, book clubs etc. The new model includes a focus on securing additional external funds (sponsorships and grants) to support the delivery of literacy-based events.</p>
<p>Increased opportunities for volunteering in our library service and highly professional volunteers working with all library users.</p> <p>Performance measure #5</p>	<p>Operational challenges in 2022 meant that the recruitment of volunteers did not take place. The 2023/24 service delivery model includes a staff post with a clear remit to work with partners to recruit, retain and engage with volunteers.</p> <p>Clear volunteer role descriptions have been developed for each of the service areas that would benefit from and be of interest to volunteers (Library at Home service, library events and library digital support).</p>
<p>Improved collection and use of data to make sure our decisions are based on evidence.</p> <p>Performance measure #2 Performance measure #3</p>	<p>The proposed model maintains various software licences which allow the service to efficiently collect data about footfall in each library, borrowing activity and use of IT equipment.</p>
<p>Strong engagement with residents to help us shape the service and promote events, activities, and library resources.</p> <p>Performance measure #6</p>	<p>In addition to quantitative data collected electronically, the new model will also allow the service to implement a regular series of light-touch customer engagement activities to help the service flex in response to customer demand.</p> <p>The proposed model also strengthens the relationship between the library service and other services delivered from these buildings so anonymised customer feedback can be shared.</p>
<p>We provide and spend a publications budget in line with councils in our most similar group and review our building opening times to ensure value for money.</p> <p>Performance measure #3</p>	<p>The publications budget will remain at £90k per annum which maintains Slough’s position as being in-line with the spend per head of population of councils in our most similar group.</p>

2.5 In February 2023 Cabinet requested updates about performance specifically against planned opening hours and the blend of footfall across the opening hours agreed for the 2023-24 Library Operating Model. In March 2023 discussions with the then Lead Member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills resulted in the following suite of performance indicators being agreed:

Ref	Title	Description	Performance
#1	Compliance with opening times	Number of days any library could not operate to the published days & times.	100% compliance.  All libraries were open for the advertised times.
#2	Number of people visiting libraries	Electronic footfall counts from all 4 buildings with a library. All libraries either host other events or share the location with other services. This data is not able to count only those residents who come to browse or use the library resources.	Target is 402,700  Library opening hours have reduced by 36% compared to 2019/20. During 2019/20 total visitors to libraries was 629,222. The new target is this pre-Covid visitor number reduced by 36%.
#3	Library book issues	Library books issued <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total numbers of books issued</li> <li>• Number of books issued via self-service kiosks &amp; online</li> <li>• Number of books issued from Children's Library</li> <li>• Number of electronic items issued online</li> </ul>	Target total book issues = 232,598 Target self-serve and online issues = 208,633 Target number of books from Children's Library = 170,472 Target number of electronic items issued online = 113,664  Library opening hours have reduced by 36% compared to 2019/20. These targets (except electronic items) are based on the achievements in 2019/20 reduced by 36%. Because electronic items borrowed online is not affected by building opening times the target remains the same as the actual 2019/20 figure.
#4	Use of Library pages on SBC website	Number of views of each page and number of unique views of each page. Snapshot data comparing one month in 2023 with the same month in 2022.	Target to increase unique page views by 25% compared to 2022
#5	Library volunteers	Total number of volunteers. Total number of volunteer hours per month.	Increase total number of volunteers and volunteer hours by 20% compared to 2019/20.

			Target number of volunteers 2023/24 = 68. Target number of hours volunteered in 2019/20 = 1,200.
#6	Events held at libraries	Total number of events and categories of events. Cost per participant to deliver Summer Reading Challenge	Reduce Summer Reading Challenge cost per participant compared to 2019 cost of £3.82 per child.
#7	Library membership	Total new members each month	Annual new membership target = 4,878 Monthly new membership target = 406  Currently, library membership has to be completed in-person. As with other targets related to library opening hours this target is based on 2019/20 data reduced by 36%.

### Options considered

Consideration was given to providing more limited reporting to Cabinet or not providing a formal update. However, the then Lead Member was keen to have a formal update on a regular basis to give a more rounded picture of Library Service performance.

Officers will work with the new Lead Member on reviewing the performance suite as well as the wider library plan during 2023/24.

### Background

- 2.6 The Council must continue to deliver significant levels of savings over the next few years, as well as disposing of surplus assets to reduce its borrowing levels. We have started work on a comprehensive estates strategy which will explore the condition, costs, and uses of all Council operational buildings. As part of this work, we will shape a long-term plan for the delivery of services including libraries. Whilst this work is progressing best use will be made of the available buildings and the library service will operate from The Curve, Langley Library, Cippenham Library and the Britwell Hub subject to long term decision on these buildings' utilisation.
- 2.7 Under our Asset Disposal Strategy, the Council needs to rationalise its buildings and look to use them for multiple uses. This may reduce the amount of floor space to be dedicated to library areas and increase the number of officers from other services who can support the opening, closing and day-to-day operation of the building, however no decision has been made about this at this time.
- 2.8 Library services are a statutory service delivered by local authorities under the duty described in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. This duty requires councils to deliver a “comprehensive and efficient” library service. There are no prescriptive definitions in the Act about what constitutes a comprehensive and efficient service. However, case law has determined that if any significant changes

are made to how a library service is delivered, the council must follow a fair process to locally determine what a comprehensive and efficient library service looks like and what it delivers. This includes considering local needs and consulting with the public when devising a new way of delivering services.

- 2.9 At the February 2023 Cabinet meeting it was agreed to introduce a new library operating model with reduced opening hours and reduced numbers of staff employed in the service.
- 2.10 The performance measures agreed give an overall picture of how the new model is operating and are attached as **Appendix A**.

### 3. Implications of the Recommendation

#### 3.1 Financial implications

- 3.1.1 Successful delivery of the 2023-24 Library Operating Model will ensure that the libraries element of the Councils 2023-24 savings plans is achieved. This is on target.
- 3.1.2 The available budget for 2022/23 for Library services was £958k. This was made up of staffing costs of £834k and non-staffing costs of £124k. The library staff budget needed to run the predominantly self-service Library service in 2023/24 is £558k (supported by occasional use of staff from other services to intervene/provide oversight at zero cost to the library service) + non staffing costs of £124k = £682k. This gives a saving compared to 2022/23 budget of £276k.
- 3.1.3 The savings will be made by not recruiting to vacant library officer posts. There will be no redundancies.
- 3.1.4 The library service is not dependent on specific buildings. No building management financial savings or asset sale receipts have been assumed in these proposals. However, it should be noted that if any current building including a library area is permanently closed this would bring building-based savings including repairs, maintenance, business rates, insurance, utility costs and facilities officer's time. Indicative building management costs are set out in the table below: -

Location	Repairs & Maint.	Facilities Costs & Mgt Fee	Business Rates	IT Asset Costs	Heat, Light & Power	Total
<b>Langley Library</b>	£24,422	£8,884	£26,112	£11,977	£14,729	<b>£86,124</b>
<b>The Curve</b>	£167,792	£86,801	£386,560	£44,241	£261,690	<b>£947,084</b>
<b>Britwell Hub</b>	£43,190	£59,026	£66,560	£12,157	£37,704	<b>£218,638</b>
<b>Cippenham Library</b>	£22,155	£9,138	£15,843	£11,977	£14,219	<b>£73,332</b>

Note - if a library area is discontinued, then the building costs remain unless the building is closed/sold. Costs to keep a building secure would be incurred should services be removed before a building is sold.

#### 3.2 Legal implications

- 3.2.1 Library services are provided under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, section 10 of which places a duty on the library authority to provide a:

“comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”. Further detail is provided in the Act as follows:

*library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability -*

*(a) of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and*

*(b) of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it.*

3.2.2 Case law has interpreted what a “comprehensive and efficient” library service may mean in practice. This includes confirming that it does not mean that every resident lives close to a library, instead meaning that the service is accessible to all residents using reasonable means, including digital technologies. An efficient service should make best use of the assets available to meet its core objectives and vision, whilst recognising the constraints on council resources. Any decision about the library service should be embedded within a clear strategic framework which draws on evidence about needs and aspirations across the diverse communities of the area. The availability of resources is highly relevant to the question of what constitutes a comprehensive and efficient library service and where reductions are required due to a financial crisis, whether on a local or national level, this should be considered in any review of library services.

3.2.3 The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) has published guidance, which should be considered and followed. The guidance makes clear that a comprehensive and efficient library service will differ between councils and will depend on the needs of each area. It is the role of councillors and local officials to determine how much they spend on libraries and how they manage and deliver their services, but this must be done: -

- In consultation with their communities
- Through analysis of evidence around local needs
- In accordance with their statutory duties (these being wider than the specific duty set out above and including wider statutory duties, including duties under the Equality Act and best value duties)

3.2.4 When making public law decisions, the Council should take account of all relevant information, including the statutory framework, the financial position of the Council, the consultation results from 2021/22, and the equality impact of the decision. When proposing to change and to reduce services it is not uncommon for the majority of respondents to disagree with the proposal. Cabinet should take these views into account but must make a decision that is reasonable taking account and balancing of all relevant information.



### 3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 This report makes no recommendations for Cabinet to consider and there are no additional risk implications.

### 3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 This report makes no recommendations for Cabinet to consider and there are no additional environmental implications.

### 3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 The library service carried out an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) in September 2021 as part of a Needs Assessment. This EIA included an action plan to ensure that any equality implications were mitigated and managed. The EIA was updated considering the public consultation for the March 2022 Cabinet Paper and was further updated for the Cabinet Paper presented in February 2023.

3.5.2 A review of the EIA will take place in April 2024 after a year of the new library service model being in operation.

### 3.6 Procurement implications

Not applicable.

### 3.7 Workforce implications

3.7.1 Not applicable

### 3.8 Property implications

3.8.1 Not applicable.

## 4. **Background Papers**

None

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## **Library 2023-24 Operating Model Performance Report – Appendix A**

Currently this data covers April and May 2023 only. It may be updated with June data before the Cabinet meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2023.

### **Performance measure #1: Compliance with published opening hours**

100% achieved at all sites.

The new opening hours and how often they were achieved over April and May 2023 are set out in the table below. Note: all libraries operate self-service all of the hours that they are open. The % achieved relates to those libraries which can only open when we have staff in attendance:

<b>2023/24</b>	<b>The Curve</b>	<b>Britwell</b>	<b>Langley</b>	<b>Cippenham</b>
Monday	9am-5pm <b>100% achieved</b>	9am-5pm Self-service only	10am-5pm <b>100% achieved</b>	Closed
Tuesday	10am-6pm <b>100% achieved</b>	9am-5pm Self-service only	10am-5pm <b>100% achieved</b>	10am-5pm <b>100% achieved</b>
Wednesday	9am-5pm <b>100% achieved</b>	9am-5pm Self-service only	10am-5pm <b>100% achieved</b>	10am-5pm <b>100% achieved</b>
Thursday	9am-5pm <b>100% achieved</b>	9am-5pm Self-service only	Closed	10am-5pm <b>100% achieved</b>
Friday	9am-5pm <b>100% achieved</b>	9am-5pm Self-service only	10am-4pm <b>100% achieved</b>	Closed
Saturday	10am-5pm <b>100% achieved</b>	10am-4pm* *Last Saturday of the month only <b>100% achieved</b>	10am-4pm* *Last two Saturdays of the month only <b>100% achieved</b>	10am-4pm* *First 2 Saturdays of the month only <b>100% achieved</b>
Sunday	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed

This high level of performance has been achieved by library service staff working flexibly across all sites, some staff move between sites each day. The service has also worked closely with other Slough Borough Council services (e.g. Leisure Services, Community Development Team, Building Management and Customer Service) to ensure that all sites remained open even if there were limited library service staff available on particular days.

### **Performance measure #2: Number of people visiting library buildings**

<b>Actual library visits (annual)</b>	<b>Apr 2019 to Mar 2020</b>	<b>Apr 2020 to Mar 2021</b>	<b>Apr 2021 to Mar 2022</b>	<b>Apr 2022 to March 2023</b>	<b>Apr 2023 to March 2024 (running total)</b>
Library visits	629,222	90,752	229,287	313,876	24,633

Actual library visits (monthly)	Apr 2019	Apr 2020	Apr 2021	Apr 2022	Apr 2023
	58,752	0	12,691	21,295	24,633
	May 2019	May2020	May 2021	May 2022	May 2023
	60,712	0	12,792	26,356	29,432

The new 2023/24 target takes 2019/20 as a baseline as this is the last pre-Covid year. Because the total opening hours for Slough libraries has decreased by 36% in 2023/24 compared to 2019/20 so the new target is the 2019/20 figure reduced by 36%.

Annual target for visits to library buildings is 402,700

Monthly target for visits to library buildings is 33,558

**This target has not been achieved in April 2023.**

**This target has not been achieved in May 2023.**

We cannot say that all visits to library buildings are to use library services. All library buildings are now multi-use buildings with at least one other service (e.g., Customer Service) working from the site.

Detailed footfall counts per hour across all library sites are currently unavailable due to outstanding IT issues.

The Curve: In addition to library services, the following services work from the building on a permanent or ad hoc basis:

- Registrar Service (registration of marriages, births and deaths plus Citizenship)
- Community Learning and Skills service (enrolment, assessment and delivery of adult learning)
- The Venue hosts public and private events and performances (e.g., Creative Academy performances take place at The Venue).
- Councillor surgeries

Britwell Hub: In addition to library services (all self-service), the following services work from the building on a permanent or ad hoc basis:

- Customer Service
- Housing Advice
- AJ Café (and “warm space” every Monday)
- Community groups use the hall (e.g., Recycled Teenagers)
- Medical centre
- Councillor surgeries

Langley Library: In addition to library services (all self-service), the following services work from the building on a permanent or ad hoc basis:

- Customer Service
- Councillor surgeries

Cippenham Library: In addition to library services (all self-service), the following services work from the building on a permanent or ad hoc basis:

- Customer Service
- Community health clinics
- Councillor surgeries

### **Performance measure #3: Library book issues**

<b>Actual library book issues (annual)</b>	<b>Apr 2019 - Mar 2020</b>	<b>Apr 2020 - Mar 2021</b>	<b>Apr 2021 - Mar 2022</b>	<b>Apr 2022 - Mar 2023</b>	<b>Apr 2023 – March 24 (running total)</b>
Total book issues	363,433	54,350	257,686	294,707	41,710
Self-serve and online issues	325,989	0	223,844	275,823	39,621
% self-serve to total issues	90%	0%	87%	94%	95%
Children's book issues	266,361	39,001	197,828	227,144	31,255
% children's to total issues	73%	72%	77%	77%	75%
Electronic resources issues online	113,664	301,893	279,613	1,092,164	164,076

The new 2023/24 targets take 2019/20 as a baseline as this is the last pre-Covid year. All of these methods of borrowing items from the libraries rely on a building being open and available. The total opening hours for Slough libraries has decreased by 36% in 2023/24 compared to 2019/20 so the new targets (except online only borrowing) are the 2019/20 figures reduced by 36%.

- Target total book issues = 232,598
- Target self-serve and online issues = 208,633
- Target number of books from Children's Library = 170,472
- Target number of electronic issues online only = 4,557

Actual library book issues (monthly)	Apr 2019	Apr 2020	Apr 2021	Apr 2022	Apr 2023
Total book issues	32,634	184	8,657	24,912	20,801
Self-serve and online issues	28,717	0	5,412	23,138	19,854
% self-serve to total issues	88%	0%	62%	93%	95%
Children's book issues	24,149	128	6,375	19,692	15,814
% children's to total issues	74%	70%	74%	79%	76%
Electronic resources issues online	4,557	22,606	21,408	86,784	87,616

Actual library book issues (monthly)	May 2019	May 2020	May 2021	May 2022	May 2023
Total book issues	29,181	5,064	9,207	24,454	20,909
Self-serve and online issues	24,512	0	6,892	22,729	19,767
% self-serve to total issues	84%	0%	75%	92%	95%
Children's book issues	20,785	3,988	6,844	18,471	15,441
% children's to total issues	71%	79%	74%	76%	74%
Electronic resources issues online	1,739	22,593	24,628	92,191	76,460

The new annual targets described above have been divided equally into monthly targets. For April and May 2023, the new targets and performance are:

- Target total book issues = 20,886  
Actual total book issues = 20,801 (April) and 20,909 (May)  
**Target not achieved in April but achieved in May.**
- Target self-serve and online issues = 18,379  
Actual self-serve and online issues = 19,854 (April) and 19,767 (May)  
**Target achieved in April and May.**
- Target number of books from Children's Library = 15,456  
Actual Children's Library issues = 15,814 (April) and 15,441 (May)  
**Target achieved in April but not achieved in May.**
- Target number of electronic resources issued online = 4,557  
Actual number of electronic resources issued online = 87,616 (April) and 76,460 in May.  
**Target achieved in April and May.**

#### **Performance measure #4: Use of Library Service pages on Slough Borough Council website**

In March 2023 the Library Service pages on the [www.slough.gov.uk](http://www.slough.gov.uk) website were reviewed and refreshed to make it easier for users to go directly to their local/nearest library page.

Link	April 2022 page views	April 2022 unique page views	April 2023 page views	April 2023 unique page views	% change in unique page views
Libraries homepage	837	541	718	539	-0.37%
Britwell library page	110	79	140	120	+52%
Cippenham library page	113	98	183	161	+64%
Langley library page	220	171	317	267	+56%
The Curve library page	351	287	660	552	+92%
Reserving items page	270	209	309	261	+25%
Renewing items page	109	89	158	138	+55%

Link	May 2022 page views	May 2022 unique page views	May 2023 page views	May 2023 unique page views	% change in unique page views
Libraries homepage	980	696	5,688	3,575	+414%
Britwell library page	95	83	414	263	+216%
Cippenham library page	119	106	613	374	+253%
Langley library page	198	166	824	511	+208%
The Curve library page	400	334	1,876	1,155	+246%
Reserving items page	260	223	802	470	+111%
Renewing items page	138	124	537	346	+179%

The improvements to the web pages will have had a positive impact on the number of unique page views in April and May 2023 compared to the same month in 2022<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Performance measure #5: Library volunteers**

The last time volunteers were used by the Library Service was in 2019/20 when a total of 57 volunteers supported the service (3 supporting Library at Home and 54 supporting the Summer Reading Challenge). Over that 12-month period they

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<sup>1</sup> Pageviews is the total number for pages viewed. Repeated views of a single page are counted. Unique pageviews is the number of sessions during which the specified page was viewed at least once.

If customer-A is using the internet and comes back to the same page 3 times during any one period of time on the internet, that's 3 views and 1 unique view – they are all by the same person during the same period.

If customer-A uses the internet on 3 different days and goes to the same page once each day, that's 3 views and 3 unique views.

volunteered 1,000 hours. Since March 2020 until March 2023 there have been no volunteers working in any of the libraries.

In February and March, a new volunteer recruitment campaign took place and from these 5 new volunteers were recruited in April 2023 offering Digital Inclusion support to residents at all library sites.

In April 2023 these volunteers gave 6 ½ hours in total.  
In May 2023 these volunteers gave 29 ½ hours in total.

Additional volunteers will be recruited during June to support the delivery of the Summer Reading Challenge across all library sites and with sports and leisure partners (the theme for 2023 is “Ready, Set, Read!”).

The library service has received support and guidance from Slough Council Voluntary Service (SCVS) about recruiting and retaining volunteers. This support is ongoing as we grow our volunteer base.

#### **Performance measure #6: Events held at libraries**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Number of events</b>	<b>Adults attending</b>	<b>Children attending</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>The Curve</b>	20	526	543	Duplo play, Story & Music time, Grow a healthy Slough event.
<b>Britwell</b>	1	5	7	Coronation craft event.
<b>Langley</b>	21	458	735	Duplo play, Story & Music time, Grow a healthy Slough event.
<b>Cippenham</b>	41	450	375	Duplo play, Story & Music time, seated exercise, family history event, author event.
<b>TOTAL</b>	83	1,439	1,660	

All events apart from Grow a Healthy Slough, seated exercise and family history events were delivered by library staff. Coronation events and the author event were supported by external grants.

#### **Summer Reading Challenge – value for money**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Total cost</b>	<b>£ per participant</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>2019</b>	3,604	£13,785	£3.82	
<b>2020</b>	200	£550	£2.75	Online only
<b>2021</b>	2,533	£9,410	£3.71	
<b>2022</b>	1,976	£3,375	£1.70	
<b>2023</b>	TBC	£3,044	TBC	

The Summer Reading Challenge is held between July and September each year. Participant data will be available in October 2023.



**Performance measure #7: Library memberships**

<b>Actual new members</b>	<b>Annual</b>	<b>Monthly (average)</b>
2019/20	7,621	635
2020/21	0 (Covid)	0
2021/22	4,832	402
2022/23	6,303	525

Library membership has to be completed in-person. As with other targets related to library opening hours this target is based on 2019/20 data reduced by 36%.

New annual target for 2023/24 is 4,878 new library members.

New monthly target for 2023/24 is 406 new library members.

	<b>April 2019</b>	<b>April 2020</b>	<b>April 2021</b>	<b>April 2022</b>	<b>April 2023</b>
<b>New members</b>	664	0	137	524	531
	<b>May 2019</b>	<b>May 2020</b>	<b>May 2021</b>	<b>May 2022</b>	<b>May 2023</b>
<b>New members</b>	547	0	212	527	499

Actual new members joined in April 2023 = 531

Actual new members joined in May 2023 = 499

**Target achieved in both months**

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