

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO:	Cabinet
DATE:	29 th March 2022
SUBJECT:	Slough: Functional Capability Assessments
PORTFOLIO:	Councillor Swindlehurst, Leader, Forward Strategy & Corporate Resource
CHIEF OFFICER:	Chief Executive
CONTACT OFFICER:	Gavin Jones
WARD(S):	All
KEY DECISION:	NO
EXEMPT:	NO
DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN:	YES
APPENDICES:	None

1 Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report focusses on the council's response to the following DLUHC Direction to assess the functional capability of all services by the end of February 2022.
- 1.2 Following the Directions being issued in December 2022 by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, all council service managers undertook an assessment of the functional capability to identify challenges that prevent a consistently good service being delivered.
- 1.3 This process was coordinated by the council's Strategy and Partnerships Team, who guided the process, analysed the responses, and produced this council-wide synthesis of key themes and areas of concern.
- 1.4 The council has started the second phase of this process, which is to write costed action plans that address the key gaps identified in these functional capability assessments. Those action plans will inform the council-wide Recovery Plan and Recovery Tracker, which will be used by the Improvement and Recovery Board and Cabinet to assess progress towards the council's recovery aims.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

Approve the analysis and findings included in this report.

Reason: The analysis and findings in this report will inform the development of costed actions plans that will underpin the council's Recovery Plan.

Commissioner Review

"Commissioners will follow the discussion at Cabinet with interest."

2 Report

2.1 This report highlights the key themes and areas of concern that were highlighted through the functional capability assessment process.

2.1.1 Work to address the issues highlighted in this report are already underway, including:

- Work to develop the Council's Recovery Plan
- The financial recovery and renewal programme
- An ICT remedial work programme
- A new contracts and risk management approach
- The formation of a Data Strategy Board
- Proposals to restructure the Place & Community directorate

2.1.2 A set of key themes emerged from these assessments. The themes are:

- Leadership and management
- Staffing levels
- Programme and change management
- Data, insight, and performance management
- Partnerships

2.1.3 Leadership and management

- Directorates have reported issues with fragmented line management arrangements resulting from the fall out of the phase 2 restructure, which are affecting capability
- This has been raised as a particular challenge in the Place & Community Directorate, where only 60% of the management roles created in April 2021 have been recruited to
- There is a lack of clear accountability in some areas, with services adapting to circumstances and improvising line management arrangements to fill gaps, which is leading to confusion for officers outside of these teams, councillors, partners, and others.
- An updated, stable reporting structure will therefore have to be developed as an urgent priority.
- In addition, some Associate Directors and Group Managers hold portfolios that they have little or no prior technical knowledge of, as was noted in the Governance Review of 2021.

2.1.4 Staffing levels

- Some teams are significantly understrength in comparison to their self-identified required capacity, with a particular challenge in several corporate support services – Data & Insight; Communications; Electoral Services; Strategy, Policy, and Partnerships; ICT; Commercial and HR are all missing over 25% of their identified required staff.
- These staff shortages will hinder the council’s ability to deliver an effective recovery plan.
- There are also significant staff shortages in the School Effectiveness, Inclusion (SEND) and Population Health Management (Public Health) teams.
- In total, Corporate Services had 83% of its identified required roles staffed, People (Adults) 94% and People (Children) 85%.
- The Executive Director for Place & Community has identified the need for a comprehensive realignment and restructure of the directorate.
- As well as the gaps in the identified required structures, there are significant amounts of interim staff. For example
 - 31 members of the finance team are interim (45% of the identified required roles), as were 19 of the Revenues & Benefits team (31%).
 - There are only 3 members of the Public Health team who are substantive, with the remaining members all interim. This includes the Service Lead and the whole of the Health Protection team.
- The People (Adults) directorate has also identified the reliance on locums and agency staff as a key capability challenge.
- Slough Children First has also identified gaps in terms of agency and permanent staff and does not have the right structure in place for a sustained service, highlighting challenges in the following departments:
 - Finance and Resources
 - HR and OD
 - Frontline services:
 - Targeted Early Help
 - MASH (Front Door)
 - Assessment
 - Contextual Safeguarding
 - Youth Offending Team
 - Safeguarding and Family Support
 - Children Looked After
 - Children with Disabilities
 - Care Leavers
 - Virtual School
 - Quality Assurance and Safeguarding

2.1.5 Programme and Change Management

- All directorates have reported challenges with the management of change programmes and there is currently an absence of a Programme Management Office, following its removal in the phase 2 restructure.
- Services have identified several major programmes which will require improved capacity in programme and change management to be successfully implemented, including:

- Departmental restructure programmes
- Savings programmes
- Training and development programmes
- A culture change programme
- A staff mentoring programme
- Programme and project management support is required to successfully deliver the ASC transformation programme, with the directorate anticipating it will need to award a contract to the current contractor from March to supply this – delaying potential savings. The directorate also anticipate that programme management capability will be needed to implement the Health and Care Act.
- Slough Children First will have no project management capacity after a DfE funded post leaves in March 2022. The company anticipates two project managers will be required to deliver savings targets – particularly for their commissioning service.

2.1.6 *Data, Insight & Performance Management*

- A thorough Data and Insight user needs assessment was undertaken at the council in summer 2020, and the council self-assessed itself to be below average in the management of data and generation of insight overall and within all domains of the assessment – technology, processes, skills, leadership.
- Data improvement work has been undertaken in the past 18 months, deriving from that assessment. These improvements have demonstrated early benefits.
- At the core of the corporate challenges faced is an absence of a single Data Strategy and associated data governance and joined-up decision-making.
- The problems generated from this incoherent approach to data and insight are then amplified by both legacy issues with ICT systems and software and an imbalanced, and in some service areas under-resourced, staffing approach (and associated activity costs e.g. training, licences). A rebalancing of staffing and additional investment will be required to bring the council's use of data and insight up to an industry good standard across all services.
- The lack of consistent, accurate and timely data and insight and limited benchmarking data has been identified as a risk for good decision making
- New performance frameworks also need to be developed for Place & Community Directorate, which while collecting a lot of data, needs to better understand how to use it to manage trends.
- SCF have highlighted a need to improve the visualisation of their data through tools such as PowerBI.
- A scoping exercise needs to take place with CLT and Associate Directors. Council-wide data transformation and analytical resource is currently fragmented post-restructure and there are multiple options for how we set up in the future.
- There is currently a capacity of 4.5 FTE roles within the Data and Insight Team - it is anticipated that 4 FTE (or equivalent agency hires/ procurement budgets) additional capacity will required to meet the skills and capabilities gaps identified that are preventing the full implementation of the data improvement plan. This has been modelled in the capitalisation directive business case.

2.1.7 Partnerships

- As part of the assessment, services were asked to identify areas where partnership arrangements needed to be improved, as well as potential areas which might benefit from working in partnership.
- A significant amount of officer time is currently required to support a variety of statutory partnerships – so partnership working is being affected by the workforce issues raised earlier.
- A refresh of strategic partnership arrangements started in October 2021 and changes need to be continually embedded to ensure those arrangements are delivering effectively for the council, for the partners, and for residents and businesses
- Partnership arrangements need to be updated in the Place & Community directorate to reflect the council's recovery priorities.
 - SBC's past funding of Community Sector groups to deliver discretionary services has been significant and has now all but stopped, and there are challenges for supporting these groups to obtain alternative funding and to support / enable volunteers to provide services without significant funding.
- The Executive Director for People (Adults) who is leading on strategic partnerships work has identified the need to reset the council's contribution to the Slough 2040 Vision.
- The Associate Director for Education and Inclusion has warned that partnerships could deteriorate with the local community, including schools, parents and those that access the service because of staffing instability.
- SCF has identified several key partnership challenges, including:
 - Engagement with the police for joint triaging of domestic abuse
 - Developing partnerships with community and voluntary services
 - A lack of capacity to support the Children and Young Peoples Partnership Board
 - A lack of capacity for engaging with community leaders
 - Developing partnerships with schools
 - Ensuring a continuum for safeguarding issues with adult teams

2.2 **Service areas:** In addition to the functional capability assessments highlighting key themes for consideration, the exercise also highlighted specific services that require urgent attention and improvement plans put in place. These areas were known before these assessments were completed as either the DLUHC Directions or regulatory inspections have highlighted concerns. In the case of public health, the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic has been profound and requires attention to consider the right approach to covid recovery.

2.2.1 The service areas highlighted as needing urgent attention are:

- Inclusion (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)
- Information and Communication Technology
- Human Resources/ Organisational Development
- Public Health
- Place and Community (whole directorate)

2.2.2 *Inclusion (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)*

- The SEND service has experienced transient staffing and high leadership turnover over recent years, leading to the service not being able to effectively meet its statutory duties.
- This was highlighted in the joint inspection of the local area of Slough conducted by Ofsted and the CQC, which determined that a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) was required because of significant areas of weakness in the area's practice
- In addition, SBC downgraded the salary of all officers in the team which led to immediate resignations throwing the service into further turmoil.
- The service is therefore under-staffed, although there has been some stabilisation of leadership since November 2020.
- Without further investment and resourcing the team will not be able to improve or meet the requirements of the WSOA. The WSOA will be the basis of any future Ofsted inspection, which is likely within the next 18 months.
- Improvements will be difficult until the team has more stability. Compliance and training are needed.
- The team is being trained on processes, however, implementation of this is being hampered due to inexperienced staff, sickness absence and staff leaving the organisation.
- Once the team is established, improvements can be made through the strategic use of data and the development of a place planning strategy.

2.2.3 *Information and Communication Technology*

- The individual functional capability assessments outline specific challenges with systems affecting services' capability.
- As a summary of the issues:
 - A major programme of remedial work is required.
 - All core systems, reporting solutions and public-facing portals require improvement to some degree.
 - The reliability of our systems infrastructure needs enhancing
- The service has operated in a state of flux for the past two years, due to transitioning back from an externalised transactional services provider, the COVID pandemic and the more recent Section 114 notice.
- A business case has been produced focussing on the need for investment in IT capacity with a particular focus on both investment in permanent staff and training.
- The existing team continues to be significantly reliant on contract / interim staff (at present there are 7 contractors and 15 permanent staff and 11 vacancies)

2.2.4 *Human Resources/ Organisational Development*

- As noted above, there are significant workforce challenges the council needs to address to improve capability across the organisation. The scale of these challenges is significant, and the HR team may need further support to lead strategic people decisions, including improving policies and culture.
- The Our Futures Programme reduced the size of the HR team by approximately 50%.
- The service also "lost" significant organisational memory and knowledge in core functions.

- The service has also identified that it is paying below the market rate for a range of positions, across a range of levels.
- The council has had a long-term issue in attracting people to hard-to-fill job roles and the nature of the location (close to London and with a large industrial estate within Slough) all contributing to extreme difficulties in attracting staff, particularly at the current pay rates.
- The service is reviewing the needs of the whole function to ensure it can be fit to support the organisation to the level of change that the Council will need to deliver soon. The LGA are supporting this review which it is hoped will conclude by the middle of March.
- SCF have also identified crucial HR and OD posts which have hitherto been DfE funded, which may need to be recruited to, to address the workforce and cultural challenges that they have identified.

2.2.5 *Public Health*

- There is a significant reliance on agency/interims as noted previously, with only 3 permanent members of staff. It is one of the smallest teams in the country
- A new structure has been agreed – but will need support to implement this
- Capacity has been impacted by the ongoing pandemic response – moving into business-as-usual mode means additional tasks and functions being delivered on top of existing functions. Management of covid grants is also affecting capacity.
- There are significant health inequalities across the town – and SBC’s approach will need to be reset after pandemic
- Further support is needed for options for East Berks PH offer or place-based PH/population health focus
- There is a limited capacity to deliver major PH core work, the PH offer within the ICS and the health in all policies approach
- The service will also have to manage the impact of the end of interim contacts that were funded through COVID grants
- The tracking of delivery of PH outcomes will be needed across the council

2.2.6 *Place and Community (whole directorate)*

- The director has identified three priority areas for recovery, which will require structural, and process change to the way the directorate is currently set up and run.
 - *Asset Disposals Programme:* The sale of up to £600m of assets is critical to the Councils financial recovery. Everything to do with Council owned buildings needs to be considered as part of our Asset Disposal Programme. Cost-benefit analyses will be undertaken to ensure all cases are considered on their merits and we will look to identify opportunities to reduce operating costs.
 - *Implementing the Local Plan:* Enabling regeneration of the town and determining best consideration for Council owned buildings and land must be informed by the existing Local Plan, its monitoring, and associated Planning Policies. We must provide timely and up to date planning advice to enable the major development projects within the town including British Land / ADIA – Slough High Street (Town Centre) to progress efficiently and deliver viably. The new Local Plan has a draft 24-month programme to submission for examination. Cross council and Member engagement, funding, recruitment for

a permanent Local Plan Lead and additional officers will be needed to make this happen.

- *Housing*: Publication of a new Housing Strategy and realigning / repurposing housing functions is needed

2.3 Directorate summaries - Each directorate has been asked to produce a briefing summary, laying out the challenges for recovery in their directorate, the impact these challenges are having, potential action to improve them and their priorities for the stabilisation phase of the recovery plan.

2.3.1 *Corporate services*

The directorate has a set of five overarching aims that will guide all of its work throughout 2022/23:

1. Act as a leader for the improvement journey that the council needs to undertake. To show drive and energy, to demonstrate transparency and rigour, and to engage widely and positively
2. Undertake emergency remedial work to ensure core processes are delivered in a safe, secure, and accurate way
3. Improve the reliability of services delivered to internal colleagues and to external customers
4. Deliver against the priority improvement needs as set out in this summary paper. These priority improvement needs will embed the platform for the delivery of consistently good services
5. Deliver a discrete set of best practice initiatives to test new approaches and inspire the next phase of change

The problem

- A fragmented resourcing and line management structure following the Our Futures programme
- Inherited inadequate systems and processes across all functions
- Some significant knowledge and skills gaps due to staff leaving or being reassigned
- Undocumented and/or inefficient business processes across functions
- A reliance on contractors to deliver a range of business-as-usual activity
- Some gaps in capability to inform strategic and operational decisions with reliable evidence
- Impact of the restructure on staff's morale and motivation
- Clear direction on the long-term goal
- Clear communication on problems through all levels in the organisation as some service areas remain unaware of the strategic issues
- A view that most roles can be 'generalist' in nature, diluting specialist skills in key areas

The impact

- Time taken up by fixing historical issues as more become known as further review occurs
- Issues and risks that have been uncovered have further knock-on effects to council recovery e.g., the increasing financial gap
- Being unable to deliver critical core processes either in whole or in part
- An inconsistent support offer to council services, partners, and direct to residents and businesses
- Very limited capacity to improve functional delivery
- Frustrated staff and partners, as processes are slow and confusing
- Lack of engagement in change from some staff across all levels
- High staff turnover is high with many critical roles filled by interims and critical processes managed by external parties

Existing solutions underway

- Intervention support aligned to critical needs e.g., ICT, Governance, HR
- Remedial work on finances, procurement, audit, and risk management
- Member engagement work is underway
- An electoral review has been launched and is underway
- A data improvement plan has been launched and underway, with a Data Strategy in development
- Remedial work in ICT has started
- LGA improvement support has started

New approaches planned

- Restructures to some functions within the directorate
- Invest in skills and recruitment to fill critical gaps across the directorate
- A cross-organisational reporting environments improvement project to make better use of data
- Focus on a set of good practice projects in each team to learn from and to demonstrate future improvement potential
- Develop a directorate engagement plan that aligns to the corporate communications and engagement plan

2.3.2 Finance and Commercial Services

The problem

The Council has for several years suffered greatly from a lack of:

- understanding of its true financial position
- corporate and financial ownership, drive and leadership of the problem as it understood it
- professional financial standards at all levels
- skilled project management
- development and leadership of the Council's finances and finance team
- financial drive, ambition, positive attitude, ownership etc

The impact

- no (complete and accurate) accounts for 5 years
- no proper management of its budget
- poor financial systems
- effectively no general reserves
- the need for a capitalisation direction that exceeds any in the Country from what is a very small Council
- a very large DSG deficit with no plans to tackle it
- very poor governance of all its companies
- many extremely adverse external reviews
- the scale of the issues is such that embedding all of the better practise will take several years.

Solutions to date

Since May 2021 the Council has:

- implemented new ways of working to expedite the production of more accurate accounts in future and support the audit process
- designed a proper budget process covering 2021/22 and 2022/23
- begun early work on the budget for 2023/24
- begun reviews of its companies
- revised its planned arrangements for internal audit
- set out an approved asset disposal plan and sought partners to assist with this
- reviewed some of its financial systems
- designed a functional structure and process to develop the Finance team
- started reviews of the Dedicated Schools Grant
- identified and is rectifying its insurance budgets and processes
- prepared an initial business plan
- reviewed its PFI scheme
- developed an action plan for revenues and benefits.
- designed various financial management standards:
 - budget monitoring guidance
 - financial modelling standard
 - business case approaches
 - a fees and charges policy
 - expenditure control processes
 - a procurement strategy
 - budget processes and allocations

Future improvements

Our Business Plan sets out the areas for further improvement:

- development of a Comprehensive Training and Development Strategy
- implementing a culture change programme with support through extensive coaching and mentoring
- development of an approach to Succession Planning
- implementing a Departmental Communications Strategy
- embedding plans for continuity and development through a Rotations policy

- growing our own through investing in a broad-based apprenticeship and trainee scheme
- reviewing our productivity

Focus for 2022/23

Several key themes have emerged which feature as a part of this assessment and will continue to be developed in the coming years as the department consolidates and moves forward for the future. At the time of writing, the scale of the financial deficit continues to rise to a level not previously seen by any other local authority. Our key areas for improvement are:

- Developing our people - At the heart of our organisation and its success are the people who work tirelessly to deliver services to our customers and citizens. We intend to reward their dedication and perseverance by investing in them and the development of their skills. We will be offering colleagues better opportunities for training and career planning so they feel supported and encouraged to progress, enabling us to “grow our own” capability and provide rewarding and fulfilling careers for our team.
- Financial team - Fundamental to the change programme is the recruitment of a new team. The department has been working with a transitional structure during the year and will continue to do so during 2022 whilst we prepare to put in the place the new permanent structure by October 2022.
- Financial reporting - In 2022 we will build upon this year’s significant improvement to the timeliness and quality of financial reporting both internally and to other stakeholders, working closely with colleagues in spending departments to provide greater clarity as to what Slough aims to achieve with its spending plans and then monitoring and reporting the progress we make.
- Financial governance and systems - The pace of change and the achievements to date in overhauling the financial governance framework will continue with the work to automate and rationalise our inconsistent and varied manual processes and to help improve financial control. Improving governance and decision making will be a theme for 2022 working to transform risk management across Slough Borough Council.
- Financial management and budget setting – Following concerns about the 2021/22 budget setting process the team has reworked all department revenue budgets in the light of current key assumptions regarding income levels, spending, and demand for services, and, agreed detailed service targets and delivery plans with budget holders. In addition, the team has worked on the capitalisation direction which was submitted to DLUHC in February 2022 and which will determine the future direction of the Council’s finances.
- Improving financial decision making - Introducing a consistent and rigorous business case framework specialist team will provide a robust platform for decision making going forward, improving the governance and stewardship of our finances. The continued review of all our relationships with partners especially our companies will continue at pace.
- Commercial services – the team has been outsourced for a number of years and we need to build a new team in order to give us the capacity and capability to provide a high-class service.

- Internal audit – the service has been outsourced for a number of years and we need to bring this back in-house in order to apply greater control and flexibility about the deployment of resources.
- The finance recovery and renewal action plan in conjunction with this High-Level Functional Capability Assessment and our Departmental Business Plan show how we will continue to move forward innovating the way we work and provide a coherent and forward-looking service to our customers, both within the Council and to our citizens. This on-going transformation is backed by the Cabinet

2.3.3 *Place and Community*

Directorate aims for the stabilisation phase of recovery (2022/23)

The directorate has a set of five overarching aims that will guide it's work throughout 2022/23:

1. Restructure the Directorate to respond to new priorities and much reduced volume of work. Implementation of a clear structure and set of deliverables.
2. Lead the Asset Disposal Programme including the inter-dependent “where we work from strategy” (locality hubs / locality working) and the leasing, licensing and renting of Council Corporate property.
3. Enable the regeneration of the town by others. Withdraw from self-delivery of property development wherever practicable. Drive the production of Planning Policy leading to the production of a new Local Plan to guide and encourage the right development in the right part of the borough by others.
4. Design, consult on and publish a new Housing Strategy together with integrating Housing Teams under one professionally qualified Associate Director and underpinned by the successful implementation of the Northgate Housing Management System.
5. Improve the reliability of services delivered to internal colleagues and to external customers to become consistently good in all that we do

The problem

- There are no RICS qualified Red Book Assessors through which to deliver the Asset Disposal Programme
- There is a target to produce a new Local Plan by the end of 2023 but the directorates' current strategic planning team and corporate engagement capacity are too small to deliver against this timetable.
- Associate Directors and some Group Managers hold portfolios that they have little or no prior technical knowledge of
- The intended April 2021 management structure was only 60% recruited to, but the directorate is unable to return to 2020 structure as significant numbers of staff were made redundant and more have chosen to leave. The Directorate has approximately 100 vacant posts out of approximately 700. Assumed reporting lines are not the actual reporting lines
- Identity lost due to ‘management speak’ in naming teams on 1 April 2021. There was poorly understood labelling (naming) of teams
- The deletion of teams on 1st April 2021 occurred before new ways of working, including self-serve through web / IT system-based processes, were implemented

- There is a high staff churn and high rates of sickness/absence
- There is an over reliance on a few or, in some cases, a single officer
- There are undocumented and/or inefficient business processes across functions
- The remuneration for several permanent technical posts is significantly out of sync with the market rate
- Ineffective business case and governance processes in the past have resulted in poor decision making, substantial risk to the Council and commitments well beyond expectation

The impact

- There is a delay while the directorate builds a team able to drive the Asset Disposal Programme – a key element of our recovery.
- Reliance on the existing Local Plan and associated Planning Policies is cumbersome for officers and developers
- Officers lack sufficient technical knowledge individually and collectively to make strategic and operational decisions
- The directorate is operating a “fluid meanwhile management structure” with managers and officers filling gaps on a “make do with who we have basis” rather than having the right person for the post in the right structure.
- Impact on morale - urgent need to adopt a stable structure and to communicate this.
- The meanwhile structure is invisible to those outside of the teams effected bringing confusion, frustration and mistrust from outside officers, customers and residents
- Officers have been asked to step in to cover gaps as best as they can. Many need high levels of support from external consultants or officers with responsibility in other areas compounding the overall problem. There is a continuous adaptation of “meanwhile structure” with ever decreasing headcount, resilience and corporate knowledge
- Delays in the provision of technical advice are frustrating fellow officers, customers and residents. Change programmes have to be done in sequence rather than by multiple work streams delivered in parallel
- There is poor and delayed delivery of processes either in whole or in part where “staff with the knowledge” have left
- There is a “needs must” reliance on contractors to deliver a range of business-as-usual activity at above market rates
- Projects such as Nova House, Old Library Site residential development, and Cornwall House need to be managed to an effective and expedient exit position placing a considerable drain on resources

Existing solutions underway

- Procurement of independent Property Advisors is underway with the successful applicant to be in place by end of February 2022.
- This Advisor will advise on the Asset Disposal Programme and train, support and mentor existing and new staff until we have an internal team which has sufficient capability and capacity to be self sufficient
- Clarity that Disposals will be delivered under existing adopted policy is providing stability and more flexibility for disposals and major regeneration sites (such as town centre).

- Progress made to conclude one part of new Local Plan process ahead of agreement on next step.
- Fluid adaptation of “meanwhile structure” realigning displaced teams and officers by spreading the load in a reactive way. Sharing problems openly with ADs and GMs to bring a collective response to deal with the main / most pressing problems first
- Support and mentoring of officers communicating where we are, listening to the issues raised and outlining our plans for the future
- Review of James Elliman Homes (SBC Housing Company used for provision of affordable housing) and, in parallel, assistance with the development of a new Housing Strategy by external advisors - Local Partnerships
- Managers are developing new job descriptions for Job Evaluation and in parallel are researching JDs and remuneration rates paid by other local authorities for similar roles to help inform the process. The focus is on packages to offer for posts which are “hard to attract staff to” and “hard to retain staff in”

New approaches planned

- Creating a new AD Property portfolio control everything to do with property.
- Establish proper systems to control and manage the portfolio in a sustainable manner.
- Recruitment of suitable professionals and/or development of redeployed staff with the mentorship of the Advisor
- Refocus the role and authority of the AD Planning, Regulation and Economic Development to provide technical support, strategic direction and operational decision making to drive the production of a new Local Plan
- Ensure Disposals take account of existing framework and emerging UK Environment Act and other obligations to enable viability and suitability for identified sites.
- Restructure (subject to consultation) - realignment, relabelling and restructure of teams with technical teams led and managed by professionally qualified officers. Fit for purpose Job Descriptions and full recruitment to the new Place & Community structure
- Document and follow new operational procedures to bring operational and financial stability
- Consultation on new Housing Strategy leading to its implementation and adoption

2.3.4 *People (Adults)*

Directorate priorities for the stabilisation phase of recovery (2022/23)

- Identifying programme and project management support
- Conducting two restructures - ASC and Public Health – and recruiting to key posts across the directorate - for which HR support will be required.
- Getting the outstanding contracts issues resolved – procurement and legal support
- Improved performance and activity reporting – from performance team
- Improved financial reporting – with net and gross budget/expenditure reporting

The problem

- Capacity impact of ongoing pandemic response – moving into business-as-usual mode means additional tasks and functions being delivered on top of existing functions
- Permanent leadership with relevant qualifications and skills is in place across all of the directorate apart from PH where need to employ permanent consultant
- Reliance of locums and agency staff across most parts of the directorate – recruitment and retention is difficult.
- Lack of any programme and project management – and reliance on external contractor to deliver this for the ASC transformation programme
- Lack of consistent, accurate and timely data and insight and limited benchmarking data is a risk for good decision making and understanding areas of poor performance. Much of this is DIY at the moment
- Financial reports – net and gross budget reporting
- Significant savings programme 22/23 and 23/24 across all parts of the directorate – capacity and capability issues across various parts of the programme. Need for additional external capacity and expert support
- ASC reform is looming – with uncertainty of funding – nationally and locally. Key areas will be:
 - Fair Cost of Care 22/23 and 23/24
 - Charging reforms and implementation of the cap for care – from April 23
 - ASC assurance/inspection – from April 23
- Options for further integration with the NHS at Place and/or across East Berks will require support to deliver
- Health and Care Bill and Integration White paper implications uncertain but will require focus

2.3.5 *Slough Children First/ People Children*

What is going well

- Targeted Early Help decisions are appropriate and well considered
- MASH operating in real time with effective application of thresholds for interventions
- Improved quality of assessments with strong focus on impact of children
- Exploitation Team completing holistic assessments informed by multi-agency mapping, supporting children to remain in the family home and keeping them safer
- Range of services for domestic abuse and a program which is being accredited
- Improved management oversight and more regular supervision providing a better grip, and supporting leaders to have a good understanding of service
- Performance management reporting is well-established and driving improvements
- 78% of children have been on a CP plan for less than 1 year
- All children Looked After 16+ have an allocated PA
- Virtual School has extended its remit to include all children with an allocated social worker with positive impact on children re-engaging in education
- Staff morale is high, there has been increase in permanent staff and good pipeline of AYSE
- Practice improvement mentors have supported staff to ensure more consistent practice

- Focus on sufficiency of emergency placements, short breaks and local provision
- The impact of clinicians' work on individual children
- Good Ofsted outcome for IFA and Respite unit

Areas of focus for further improvement

- Focus on quality to ensure consistent effective child centred interventions
- Review of Early Help Target Operating model and alignment of edge of care services
- Implementation of an effective edge of care strategy
- Review our CIN interventions to ensure they are timely and evidence informed
- Strengthen our approach to hear the voice of the child in our recording
- Further develop our participation strategy to include CIN, those subject to CP plans and families' wider networks
- Further embed our quality assurance framework to ensure we close the loop and involve front line practitioners and managers more effectively
- Embed our organisational development strategy to assist in the attraction, recruitment, development, and retention of experienced quality staff
- Develop local sufficiency of placements for 16+
- Improve SEND our provision
- Review our exploitation strategy to ensure we maximise the impact on children across the whole child's journey

Directorate priorities for the stabilisation phase of recovery (2022/23)

- Filling key posts in the following priority order:
 - Social workers, particularly in Safeguarding and Family Support
 - Posts to deliver the savings programme - 2 x project managers; 1 x HR advisor; 0.5 FTE finance business partner; 0.2 Comms officer
 - Placement Officers
 - Permanent Team Managers
 - Business Support across operational teams
 - Communications Officer
 - Capacity to support the strategic partnership work incl. Children and Young People's Partnership Board.
- Development and implementation of a multi-agency strategy for Early Help with partners which will reduce the demand for statutory services.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

- 3.1.1 The financial implications arising from the functional capability assessments will be costed and reported with the final plan due at the end of May 2022. The costed plans will have to be delivered within the Council's approved revenue budget for 2022/23 and taking account of the estimated capitalisation direction and required budget savings for 2023/24 and beyond.

3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 The Council has a duty under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 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.

3.2.2 On 1 December 2021, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities made a direction that the Council had failed to comply with the requirements of Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999, following the receipt of two commissioned reports. Commissioners were appointed to support, report on and where prescribed exercise functions of the Council. The Council was directed to take a number of actions, which include undertaking an assessment of the functional capability of all service areas identifying the gaps in capacity and capability within 3 months of the date of the Direction. The Council should also prepare and agree action plan to the satisfaction of the Commissioners within 6 months of the date of the Direction. This report provides Cabinet with the findings of the functions capability assessments.

3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 A thorough and accurate assessment of services' capacity and capability is required to properly implement the Directions of the Secretary of State, and to provide an evidence base for the council's Recovery Plan.

3.3.2 Services are now producing action plans to address the capacity and capability gaps that have been identified in these assessments. There is considerable risk to the Council if these capacity and capability gaps are not addressed as the Council will be unable to effectively deliver its statutory functions. As part of the wider recovery plans, the Council will be reviewing its corporate and directorate risk registers to ensure these risks are adequately reported, monitored and mitigated against.

3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 Not applicable

3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

3.5.2 Addressing the gaps in capacity and capability identified in these assessments will be vital for ensuring the council can effectively meet its statutory duties and discharge its equality duties.

3.6 Procurement implications

3.6.1 Not applicable

3.7 Workforce implications

3.7.1 The report highlights several workforce challenges that have been identified through these assessments – which are summarised in sections 2.1.3-4.

3.8 Property implications

3.8.1 Not applicable.

4. Background Papers

None