



Slough Children First Company Business Improvement Plan 2025 – 2028



OWNERS

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Company
Chair

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Chief
Executive and
Executive
Director of
Children's
Services

Version:2

**Date 27th
November
2024**

Happy Safe & Loved, Thriving

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Introduction from the Chair of Slough Children First Company and the Chief Executive

We are pleased to introduce our Slough Children First Business Improvement Plan 2025 – 2028 which details the progress made on our improvement journey to date and the ongoing work to achieve our vision that children in Slough are **'Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving'**.

Children's social care services in Slough continue to be delivered by Slough Children First (SCF), a company wholly owned by Slough Borough Council. Children's Services in Slough remains subject to statutory direction from the Government and has done so for over 10 years. We continue under the scrutiny of the Department for Education (DfE) through a DfE appointed Commissioner who chairs our Improvement Board. Our ambition is to provide sufficient assurance to the DfE to enable a reduction in intervention during the next phase of the Business Improvement Plan.

The Company Board is stable, having retained the same membership from May 2021 to November 2024 when one of the Non-Executive Directors (NED) retired. That role is now held by a newly appointed NED who brings with her significant national leadership experience of children's Social Care services.

Our commitment to ensuring every child receiving help and support from SCF is reaching their full potential remains constant, but as a Company we continue to adapt the way we work in response to the national and local priorities, including significant financial pressure across the country.

The Council continues with statutory intervention from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in relation to its financial position and the company works closely with the council to play its part.

Key to our success in challenging circumstances is our good working relationship with Slough Borough Council (SBC) and our commitment to multi-agency working with partners across the statutory, voluntary, community and faith sectors.

As the Chair of the Slough Children First Company Board and the Company's Chief Executive, we see our teams working hard every day with an absolute commitment to improve the outcomes for our most vulnerable children. Over the last 12 months we have seen a period of reform across our organisation, with a committed workforce and improving practice to benefit our children. We recognise that we need to deliver a consistently good service.

We remain committed to helping at the earliest possible time and enabling family-led decisions to keep children safely at home. Where children need to be cared for outside of their families, we will make sure the care they receive is of the highest quality. We are committed to ensuring that all our work will be underpinned and informed by the views and experiences of Slough's children and young people and acknowledge that successful implementation of this Business Improvement Plan will be judged on the difference it makes for children and young people in Slough.

Simon Baker

Sue Butcher

The Vision

The Vision is for all children in Slough to be **'Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving'**. We know we need to continue to deliver at pace, with focus and purpose to achieve the high ambitions we have for our children. Our aspirations over the next 3 years are that we have developed and delivered new ways of working in the community. That we are evidencing the impact of these changes and seeing increased positive outcomes for children and families.

We have learnt from previous inspections and our own quality assurance processes which help inform our planning. The recommendations from inspections are set out in Appendix 2. The Slough Children First Business Improvement Plan ensures a consistent approach to the overall improvement throughout all our services, including Youth Justice and the provision of support to children with inclusion and SEND needs.

We are still on a journey of improvement and with the foundations now firmly set with a strengthening culture, strong values and improving quality of practice we can continue our improvement to Good. To achieve our vision, we have a robust continuous improvement program and we have ambitious transformation intentions considered against our 6 strategic priorities and what this would mean for children and young people.

The Current Challenges

SBC faces extraordinary financial challenges which are reflected in the Section 114 Notice of July 2021 and continued oversight and scrutiny by Commissioners appointed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Inevitably these financial challenges impact on the work of SCF. Despite these constraints we continue to demonstrate that we provide services effectively and efficiently in line with best value.

There is a national cost of living crisis, and Slough's children and families are no exception to experiencing significant financial hardship, with direct impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of families and we have seen an increase in referrals directly related to this.

Many Children and Young people have not yet fully recovered from the complex impacts of the pandemic and may remain more difficult for us to engage with.

Slough's proximity to London adds complexity around challenges of county lines, exploitation and serious violence, how we tackle this and reduce the risk to children and young people. In order to address those challenges, we have appointed a dedicated Head of Service to provide the oversight of support to young people who face significant challenges because of exploitation and serious violence.

We will continue to focus on getting alongside our children and young people and work with our partner agencies to ensure a multi-agency response to children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation, Trafficking and Modern-Day Slavery.

We are committed to supporting young people who are seeking refuge from their country of origin through the National Transfer Scheme. We must support these young people to recover from the trauma that they have experienced.

In Slough we have a rising obesity issue in an already complex system where healthy life expectancy is ten years younger than neighboring Boroughs.

2024 Highlights

There have been some great achievements over the last year, and this is evidenced by the progress of the overall improvement journey thus far. Our robust quality assurance framework shows improvement in practice areas of focus and positive feedback from children and families. The number of children and young people needing statutory intervention is well understood and increasingly in line with our statutory neighbors, evidencing a better understanding and management of demand throughout the system. As the Family Help and earlier intervention models develop, we know we will see more children and family's needs being met much earlier. Work continues to be undertaken as part of the improvement plan to understand the need of our

community better and to model effective and flexible services.

- **Development and launch of the dashboard** has led to a refreshed performance approach and clear line of sight.
- **Review of SEND**, leading to improved collaborative working, joint responsibilities and systemwide practice, demonstrating strong and tenacious leadership and good collaborative approaches.
- Successful launch of the **corporate parenting strategy**
- Launch of the new **Line of Sight** meeting which brings leaders across the partnership together to take a local community focus on areas in Slough, sharing insight and working together to improve services across the partnership.
- Launch of **Slough Academy** to support workforce development and frontline practice.
- **Recruitment** of a permanent senior management team, including the new Adolescent Support Services.
- Progressive and innovative work to **strengthen the Front Door, our Early Help offer and Partnership services**, so we can offer better support to families much earlier on.
- Review, consultation and relaunch of an improved **Local Offer** for our care experienced young people.
- Improved use of **IT and technologies** to enhance our services to children and families.
- **Performance, Quality, Assurance & Improvement Framework ((PQAIF)** helping to develop practice and highlighting any improvements. Embed a learning culture and enable SCF to regularly assess impact of service delivery on children's outcomes.
- **Permanency and Sufficiency Framework** embedding new governance, scrutiny improved practices. Sufficiency strategy in place and making a difference to cost and choice of placements.
- Increased **workforce stability**
- **Early Help Strategy** was launched and the 'Team around the School' approach is starting to gain momentum.
- **Participation Strategy** has been reviewed and implemented with a re-launch of Children in Care Council
- A **balanced budget** through the Business Improvement Plan by improving workforce stability and reduced our reliance on agency workers, improving consistency of service.
- Launch of an awards process to regularly recognise and **reward good practice** in Slough.

Company Priorities

Our aim is to deliver consistently good services. The company is in a strong position to consolidate improved practice whilst also being ambitious in our next steps to strengthen our offer to children and families. Our focus is to build further on our relational ways of working and strengthen our system's approach to leadership and working together.

Priority 1

Children, young people, and their families must be able to easily access Early Help and know where to go and who to speak to when they need it.

We will:

- Introduce a conversational way of working with families and professionals at the front door to identify the right support at the right time for children and young people.
- Keep children safe from exploitation and provide services to support them.
- Help keep children at home through an edge of care support offer.
- Create a Family Help model to support children and their families who need help at Early Help and Child in Need level.

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.

We will

- 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).
- Ensure that children who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) are supported to access work, education or training.
- Provide opportunities for training, education and employment to our Care Leavers and Care Experienced Young People supported by our corporate parenting partners.

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 will:

- Support more children to stay safely at home through our edge of care approach.
- Support children to return home as soon as possible with the right help.
- Design and implement Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC)
- Launch the family group conferencing service to promote family decision making and support kinship care.
- Increasing the number of foster homes with our Regional Fostering Hub.
- Support care leavers to stay put or stay close.
- Work with SBC to provide clearer housing pathways for our care leavers.
- Establish clear permanence plans for all our children in care and strengthen transitions to adult support through our corporate parenting priorities.
- Progress plans to open our own residential children's home for children with complex needs.
- To open our own care leavers hub providing high support to our care leavers.

Priority 4

Children and their families will have effective support and care from a stable workforce.

We will

- ensuring consistently high-quality services across all our work with vulnerable children and young people
- We will support the retention of permanent staff members through a Career Progression Pathway and wellbeing offer.

- Further strengthen our workforce offer through the Slough Academy to support recruitment and retention.
- Continue to prioritize our plans to secure a workforce of permanent employees, particularly frontline practitioners.
- Continue to create an environment where staff feel valued and supported.

Priority 5

Children and young people will be supported to participate in shaping the services they receive.

We will

- Continue to grow and develop our engagement with children, young people and families.
- Involve and listen to children in decisions about their lives and to parents about the help they need.
- strengthen and explore the use of our channels of engagement such as apps and social media.
- Further evolve our children in care and care leaver forums and the feedback and complaints systems.
- Implement Care Leavers and UASC Ambassador model.
- Involve children and young people in the production of new initiatives.

Priority 6

We will work in partnership with colleagues across the Council and all the services that work with children, young people, and their families in Slough.

We will

- Work together with partners across the system to create shared ways of working and strengthen practice.
- Work together with our community, voluntary and faith sector.
- Advocate on behalf of children in care for strengthened partnership commitment to the local offer and to build a care leaver covenant.

Our Practice Approach.

STAR

Our approach is relational, a 'way of being'. This is how we seek to work with our children and families, and how we work with each other.

- **Strengths Based** – the lens through which we seek to understand and help.
- **Trauma Informed** – recognising that life events do and can continue to impact our children, parents', and one another.
- **Attachment Theory** – understanding child development and how parenting influences this.
- **Restorative Practice** – how we work with families and each other.

Our Three-year plan 25-28: Enablers and transformation focus areas.

This Business Improvement Plan is a three-year plan, it sets out the key milestones and company's transformation roadmap over the three-year period

Fundamental to our plan is an absolute focus on our **four enablers** through which we will continue to have a secure foundation upon which we can deliver our priorities for children to ensure that they are happy, safe & loved, thriving.

Enabler 1 – Building a stable workforce of permanent and well-equipped staff.

By focusing efforts on the recruitment of high-quality front-line practitioners we will create a stable and well performing team so that children experience fewer changes of worker and receive help and care from practitioners who are engaged in their lives and show that they care. This also means that we must challenge where practice isn't meeting the needs of our children which we will do in line with our relational and restorative ways of working – high support, high challenge, high expectations.

Enabler 2 - Good social care practice

The continued investment in learning and support through the Slough Academy will provide the framework to support our front-line practitioners and managers to continually improve and build their knowledge base.

This means doing what is needed and doing it well.

Enabler 3 - The required supporting infrastructure to succeed.

We will learn from best practice across the country and learn from what works well. This means that we need to evolve some of our ways of doing things to modernize our approach and to best meet the needs of children and families in a changing social landscape. We will make sure that our structure and alignment with the council best reflects that need.

Enabler 4 – Resources aligned to priorities and delivering value for money.

We will ensure that our finance and resources are prioritised in our help and prevention services to make sure that help is given at the earliest opportunity. We will work with national and local initiatives to secure good value from the market.

What we will be focusing on

- **Relational Front Door.** By changing the way professionals and the community ask for help and seek advice, we are considering new ways of working to support discursive referral pathways for professionals and families to help sign-post to the right support. These options include investment into a new early help hub or family help hub to reduce referral demand, support children to get the help they need and to identify more efficient ways of working.
- **Aligning support functions.** A review, in conjunction with Slough Borough Council we are reviewing all of our support functions to identify ways to deliver the services we currently have at better value, alongside our colleagues in SBC. We believe that this will increase team resilience and skill.
- Make better use of **digital** and **technology** across the organisation to better support our understanding of work for children which will have the added benefit of identifying financial efficiencies. .
- **Building stable homes.** Where it aids and supports the recruitment and retention of foster carers, we will explore SCF investment in extensions, conversions, and renovations of foster

carer's homes to improve placement sufficiency and stability for children and young people. We are also exploring the potential to open our own home for children with complex needs to help children stay close to home and school if they need a longer break or support as a looked after child.

- We have made plans to trial new approaches to supporting children and families through **Family Help** which now empowers and enables professionals from non-social work disciplines to provide help with the oversight and supervision of a qualified social work manager.
- We want to create a **hub for care experienced young people** that will bring together accommodation and preparation to adulthood support together in one location. We will work with our partners to build this into a shared multi-agency space enabling young people to have a 'one-stop shop' where they can receive help and advice.
- We continue to identify ways to lead a Family Drug and Alcohol Court **FDAC** across Berkshire to support complex cases in a timely way, increasing permanency, reducing court times and prolonged placement costs.,

Our Improvement Plan

Slough Childrens First Improvement Plan gives a shared understanding of the priorities and improvements needed and drive significant progress and transformation in key areas that arose from the Ofsted inspection outcomes that were published in March 2023. The progress of our plan is scrutinised by the DfE Childrens Commissioner, the monthly Improvement Board and the Company Board.

We are ambitious for the children of Slough; but we stay aware of where we were, and we are confident in where we are now. Our improvement plan helps us to map out the journey clearing detailing what we still need to do to get us to where we want to be.

The foundations are now in place, with what we need to do next set out clearly in our transformation road map which is underpinned by our improvement plan. We have taken the opportunity for reflection and considered our priorities and in doing so we have refined our improvement plan, adding new focused actions where required, such as HMIP and SEND.

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. Through our participation offer we continuously look for opportunities for children and young people to help us shape the future of the company.

The 18 workstreams listed within the Company's Improvement Plan each has their own individual action plan and service plan to support delivery of change,

The plan supports our aspirations for transformation to ensure we meet our 6 priorities for children and young people and their families in Slough. These workstreams are there to set out what is required In order for us to achieve the set against the 6 strategic priorities.

The plan also reflects how we will work in line with the 6 ambitions from Stable Homes Built on Love. The government strategy to reform children's social care in England published in February 2023. Each section of our plan has cross cutting actions. totaling 158 things we commit to achieve the 25-28 improvement ambitions for children in this plan and beyond.

Our Improvement Model



Reform

We have been responding and getting the basics right.

January 2023 - March 2025

- Ensuring stable leadership and robust management structures are in place.
- Stabilising the workforce
- Ensuring governance and structure is in place for improvement.
- Ensuring partners are engaged in our journey.
- Ensuring clear minimal standards of practice and children are safe.

Perform

We will expedite the way we are by building on strengths and realigning services

April 2025 - September 2026

- Evaluate progress, refine activity. accelerate pace of activity.
- Developing and implementing innovative new working models in line with working together and keeping children safe, helping families thrive
- Demonstrate impact on outcomes for children and families.
- Evidence strong partnerships and joint working
- Ensuring that children's needs are being consistently met.
- Consistently getting the basics right.
- Mature, stable and forward-thinking strategic leadership.

Transform

We will be embedding and ensuring impact

October 2026 - April 2028

- Continuing to transform service delivery implementing new bold initiatives.
- Ensure improvements are a success and are impacting positively on children and families.
- Taking opportunities for continuous pioneering improvement
- Consistently, stable highly skilled workforce
- Exemplary leaders
- Undertaking excellent Social Care practice
- Clear and consistent evidence of improved outcomes for children, young people, and families.

Our success measures.



Quality Indicators
(audits, sampling,
observations)

Quantity Indicators
(performance, data)

What Children and
Young People tell
us

What staff tell us

Slough Children First Improvement Plan - Phase 2



Hapy, Safe & loved, Thriving

25 – 28 Ambitions for SCF/SBC Improvement Journey

Stable homes built on love (SHBOL) – 6 ambitions

1. Leadership will drive our priorities and ambition throughout the organisation.
2. We will evolve IT, data analysis, and management information reporting.
3. Practitioners will provide children and families with a good or better help.
4. Every child with SEND gets the high-quality support they need.
5. Focus on prevention and deliver the right service at the right time.
6. Achieve a workforce that is highly skilled, happy, safe, and stable

1. Family Help
2. Keeping children safe
3. Supporting families to help children.
4. Make care better for children in care and care leavers.
5. Children have great social workers.
6. Improving the whole system for children and families

| Workstream | SCF Improvement service area plan | Strategic Priority | SHBOL Ambition |
|------------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Leadership and Change | Driving Priorities 1 – 6 | Improving the whole system |
| 2 | Finance & Business Support | Priority 4: Children and their families will receive support and care from a stable workforce. | Improving the whole system |
| 3 | People | Priority 4: Children and their families will receive support and care from a stable workforce. Priority 5: Children and young people will be supported to participate in shaping the services they receive. | Children have great social workers. |
| 4 | Standards of practice | Priority 4: Children and their families will receive support and care from a stable workforce. | Children have great social workers. |
| 5 | Reviewing Service | Priority 5: Children and young people will be supported to participate in shaping the services they receive. | Keeping children safe |

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| 6 | Quality Assurance | Priority 5: Children and young people will be supported to participate in shaping the services they receive. | Improving the whole system |
| 7 | Performance Management Information and IT | Priority 6: We will work in partnership with colleagues across the Council and all the services that work with children, young people, and their families in Slough. | Improving the whole system |
| 8 | Prevention & Partnerships | Priority 1 Children, young people, and their families must be able to easily access Early Help and know where to go and who to speak to when they need it. | Supporting families to help children and Family Help |
| 9 | The Front Door | Priority 1 Children, young people, and their families must be able to easily access Early Help and know where to go and who to speak to when they need it. | Supporting families to help children. |
| 10 | Safeguarding, Family Support & Court | Priority 6: We will work in partnership with colleagues across the Council and all the services that work with children, young people, and their families in Slough. | Keeping children safe & Supporting families to help children. |
| 11 | Adolescent Services | Priority 6: We will work in partnership with colleagues across the Council and all the services that work with children, young people, and their families in Slough. | Keeping children safe & Supporting families to help children. |
| 12 | Children in our care and Care Experienced | 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. | Make care better for children in care and care leavers |
| 13 | Children with Disabilities | Priority 6: We will work in partnership with colleagues across the Council and all the services that work with children, young people, and their families in Slough. | Keeping children safe & Supporting families to help children. |
| 14 | SEND | Priority 6: We will work in partnership with colleagues across the Council and all the services that work with children, young people, and their families in Slough. | Improving the whole system |
| 15 | Virtual School & NEET | 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. | Improving the whole system |

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| 16 | Regulated Placements | <p>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.</p> | Make care better for children in care and care leavers |
| 17 | Commissioning and Procurement | <p>Priority 6: We will work in partnership with colleagues across the Council and all the services that work with children, young people, and their families in Slough.</p> | Make care better for children in care and care leavers & improving the whole system |
| 18 | HMIP Improvement | <p>Priority 6: We will work in partnership with colleagues across the Council and all the services that work with children, young people, and their families in Slough.</p> | Keeping children safe & Supporting families to help children. |

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Transformation Roadmap

| | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Transformation | Key Milestone | Key Milestones | Key Milestone |
| Front Door Redesign | <p>Spring - Proposals paper to move to a conversational model to be considered.</p> <p>Summer - Consultation period Implementation group established.</p> <p>Autumn - Formal launch</p> | <p>Spring - Ongoing implementation.</p> <p>Summer – extend upon the multi-agency colocation.</p> <p>Autumn – Annual Evaluation</p> | |
| Measure | Children and families will be receiving services appropriate to their needs supported by a partnership approach making decisions using a relational approach. | | |
| Family Help | <p>Spring – Review and Evaluate the Family Help Pilot and agree next steps, including proposals for Early Help/ Child In Need teams.</p> <p>Summer - Implementation group established.</p> <p>Autumn - Formal launch</p> | <p>Spring - Ongoing implementation and review.</p> <p>Summer – Full multi-agency co-location</p> <p>Autumn – Annual Evaluation</p> | <p>Spring – Consider the benefits of a fully Integrated Family Hub Model</p> |
| Measure | Children and families will be receiving services appropriate to their needs supported by a partnership approach making decisions using a relational approach. Children will experience less changes of worker so will receive consistent support. | | |
| Adolescent Support Service | <p>Spring - Edge of care development work with North Yorkshire finalises the new delivery model.</p> <p>Summer - Exploitation Service refresh, consultation,</p> | <p>Spring - Ongoing implementation and review of the 3 new services.</p> | <p>Spring – Effective youth safety response is in place achieved by a “whole system” partnership approach and joined up</p> |

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| | <p>and co-production work with young people.</p> <p>Summer - Launch of adolescent support service</p> <p>Summer – Edge of care final model agreed.</p> <p>Autumn - Edge of care team launch</p> | <p>Summer – Formal feedback from young people and coproduction a new Youth Safety strategy</p> <p>Winter – Annual evaluation and strategy launch</p> | <p>responses.</p> <p>Spring – Mapping, tracking data sharing IT infrastructure embedded across partners to allow for prevention and disruption at the most sophisticated level.</p> |
| Measure | <p>Children will be protected from violence, abuse, and exploitation, by a faster, stronger and safer communities, public spaces and school. Young people will receive the support they to prevent escalation of risk and the need to come into our care and we will see a reduction in youth crime and violence.</p> | | |
| Youth Justice | <p>Spring – Robust improvement plan implemented and Quality Assurance framework in place.</p> <p>Summer - Self-assessment.</p> <p>Autumn – Impact and Evaluation Review of progress</p> | <p>Spring- further develop trauma informed practice with in SCF and across the partnership.</p> <p>Spring - Potential re-inspection.</p> <p>Summer –Self-assessment</p> <p>Autumn - design and launch a new universal youth model with the VCS providing coordinated additional support in “hot spot” areas.</p> | |
| Measure | <p>Children who are working with the Youth Justice Service benefit from high quality assessments which consider their needs. Victims are supported through a restorative justice approach, reduction in young people offending and re offending in Slough.</p> | | |
| FDAC | <p>Spring – Regional model scoped, regional agreement in place and a regional business case completed.</p> <p>Summer – Implementation and steering groups for 6 months</p> <p>Autumn – Regional SLA approved.</p> <p>Winter – FDAC Launched</p> | <p>Summer – Centre for Justice and Innovation 6-month review</p> <p>Winter – Year 1 savings evaluation</p> | <p>Spring – Centre for Justice and Innovation full annual evaluation and review of impact, savings, and outcomes.</p> <p>Winter – Year 2 savings evaluation</p> |

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| Measure | Implementation of a problem-solving court will support parents to overcome challenges with a multi-disciplinary approach and reduce the need for children to come into our care increasing stable homes with families. | | |
| Family Group Conferencing (FGC) | <p>Spring - Formal launch of FGC.</p> <p>Summer - FGC service implemented</p> | <p>Spring – Develop intelligent impact and evaluation reporting</p> | Business as usual |
| Measure | We will see a reduction in requirements for statutory social care services as Family Group Conferencing helps children remain with their parents and carers developing strategies to address challenges in a way that makes sense to them and keeps their children safe and well. Stability in placements and mental health and wellbeing as children and young people develop lifelong loving relationships, even if they are not living with their birth family. | | |
| Stable Homes – Residential Home | <p>Spring - Options approved to open a Slough residential home for children with complex needs providing residential care or 'long breaks.'</p> <p>Summer – Through collaboration between SCF and SBC agreed capital investment and building completion.</p> <p>Autumn - Ofsted registration</p> <p>Winter - Launch of residential home for children with complex needs and disability.</p> | <p>Spring - Review of home.</p> <p>Summer - Explore opportunities for this to become a traded service.</p> <p>Winter – Annual review</p> | Ongoing review of home. |
| Measure | For some of our children with complex needs will offer more options of high-quality care, staying close to home, preventing the need for high cost out of area specialist placements. | | |
| Services for children in our care, care leavers and those who are care experienced. | <p>Spring - Redesigning our offer through consultation and co-production with young people.</p> <p>Strengthen the local offer and a strong Care Leavers Covenant through the Corporate Parenting Board.</p> <p>Identify care experienced champions to work with SCF and SBC.</p> | <p>Spring – DfE National Advisor review visit.</p> <p>Spring – Anticipated Ofsted focused visit.</p> <p>Summer – Staying close policy Young People consultation.</p> | <p>Spring – DfE National Advisor final review and recommendations</p> |

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| | <p>Summer - Implementation of any changes to pathway and team design</p> <p>Summer – Onboard our UASC Ambassador</p> <p>Autumn - Identify opportunities for partnership co-location to strengthen access to help and support for our care leavers.</p> <p>Winter - Protected characteristic guarantees approved.</p> <p>Winter – Agreed housing pathway.</p> | <p>Winter –Staying Close Policy approved and launched</p> | |
| <p>Measure</p> | <p>Young people in our care or who have been in our care will have access to good education employment and training opportunities and be involved in decision making using their voice to shape their plans. They will have a good choice of safe secure and suitable accommodation.</p> | | |
| <p>Slough Academy</p> | <p>Spring – 1 year rolling program of embedding best practice in Social Work</p> <p>Winter - Full evaluation of phase 1 of the Slough Academy</p> | <p>Spring – Phase 2 Launch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website agreed and launched. • Online training platforms launched. • Full roll out of the continuous learning programme based on good practice to the Social Care workforce. • AYSE development programme | <p>Spring - Phase 3 Launch First evaluation (Phase 1 and 2)</p> <p>Summer - SCF recruitment joins the Academy.</p> <p>Summer - Development of extended practitioner offer.</p> <p>Autumn - Design and development of the non-social care workforce offer</p> |
| <p>Measure</p> | <p>Slough Children First will have a stable, highly skilled permanent workforce The Academy will help develop good practices, inspire new ways of working, and shape the training, recruitment, and retention of social care staff.</p> | | |

Participation

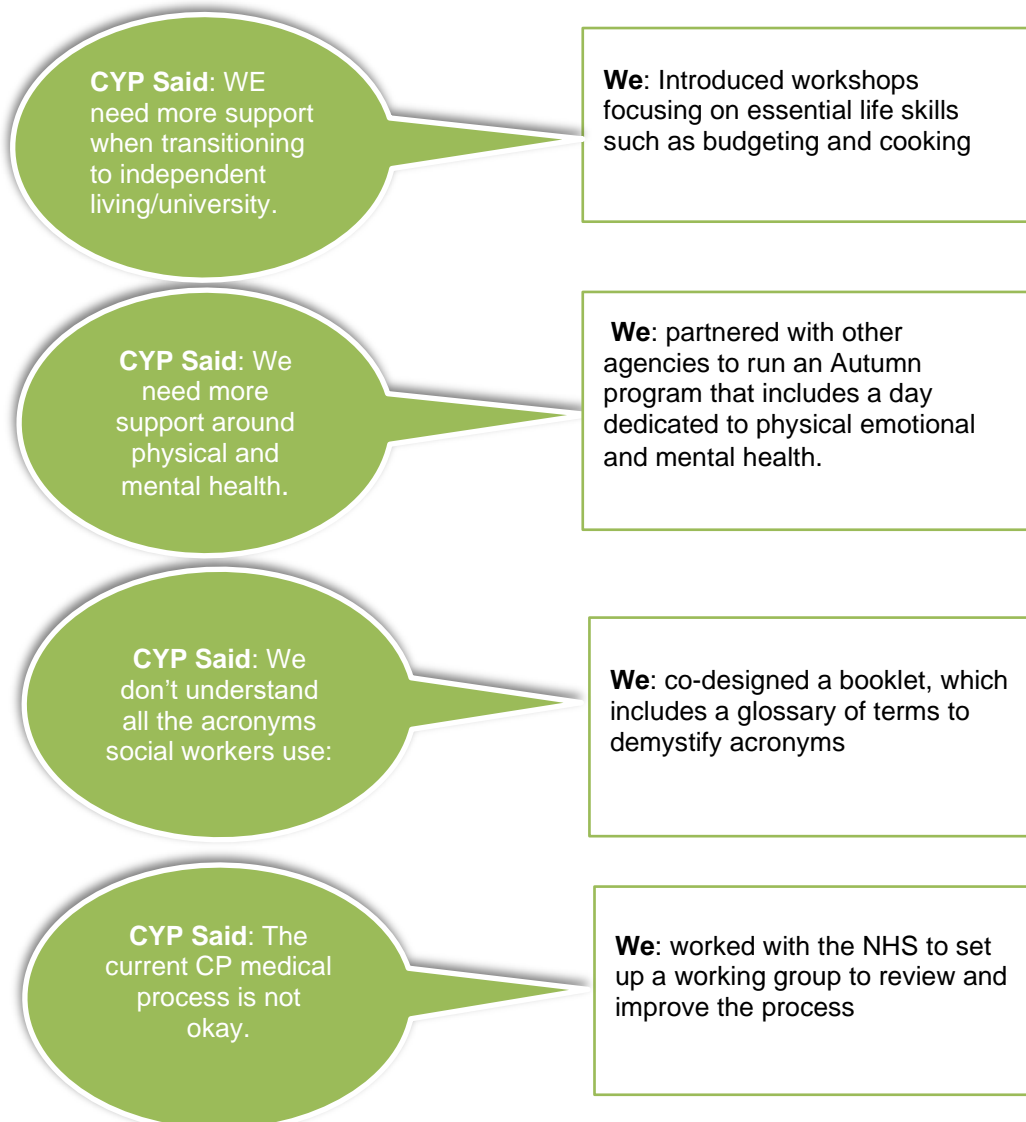
A series of participation events have taken place with the aim of strengthening the child's voice in our decision making and service development, with young people being part of the interview panel for the Company Boards latest Non-Executive Director appointment. There have been clear, tangible developments, such as the participation of young people in staff interviews ranging from Director to Newly Qualified Social Workers, designing logos, attending the Corporate Parenting Panel, and leading the launch of the Corporate Parenting strategy.

The engagement of young people in meetings has led to partnership working with other agencies to look at how their services can be improved, which will in turn have a direct impact on the experiences of Slough's young people.

We have more we want to achieve alongside our children and young people in the coming years, including:

- Ensuring CYP have safe spaces to talk – whether this be physical or virtual
- Enhanced engagement with partner agencies, to offer an improved, inclusive participation offer for all.
- The CYP voice being noticeable in design and delivery changes, with their challenges being identifiable as reasons for change and improvement. – do we need to include

We work hard to listen to our children and young people and respond to what we hear.



Ambitions for the company

The Company, as an entity, has delivered social care services for Slough Borough Council (SBC) since October 2015 but its name and ownership changed in 2021 when it became Slough Children First (SCF) and wholly owned by SBC. We are currently working with SBC to identify ways for the Company and SBC to work closely together through its back-office functions.

The Chief Executive of SCF is also 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 and promotes a 'one service approach' for Slough's children. We have a shared Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) that works closely to promote seamless services.

Key Contractual Performance Measures

New contractual KPIs were approved and agreed in December 2023 by the Council's Cabinet. There are 20 agreed KPIs (below), covering areas of Political Ownership; Governance and Accountability; Effectiveness of Partnership Working; Effectiveness of Business and Improvement Arrangements; Cultural Shift, Change Management and Communication; Participation, Voice and Influence; Sufficiency, Sustainability and Management of Resources; Workforce Planning and Staff Engagement and I Quality of Practice.

Overall KPI monitoring has moved from monitoring to showing impact during the year.

SBC holds SCF accountable for our performance through quarterly contractual monitoring meetings using the following KPIs.

| Indicator |
|--|
| Effectiveness of Corporate Parenting Panel |
| Effectiveness of Council's scrutiny function |
| Effective Governance |
| Effective statutory partnerships |
| Effective commissioning strategies |
| Effective inter-agency working |
| Business Improvement |
| Effective risk management system |
| Culture leading to outcomes focused improvements. |
| Improved participation of children and young people at strategic level |
| Financial sustainability – annually |
| Evidence of value for money |
| Financial sustainability – medium term |
| Quality of Practice |
| Participation in CLA reviews |
| CLA placed over 20 miles away. |
| Care experienced young people in EET. |
| Workforce Diversity |
| Children with disabilities |

Our Financial Plan

We are a demand-led service; therefore, operational costs are driven by the demands experienced by the service. The company recognises that by strengthening early intervention and realigning services it can influence this demand whilst improving services and keeping value for money in mind through our year 2-year transformation ambitions.

The table below directly compares the first financial year of this business plan, 2025/26 to the outturn for 2023/24 and budget and the forecast for 2024/25, where a contract variation has reduced the core contract value for 24/25 v original budget.

| | Outturn 2023/24 £000's | Forecast 2024/25 £000's | Budget 2024/25 £000's | Plan 2025/26 £000's |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Income | | | | |
| SBC Income | (40,515) | (37,038) | (39,049) | (38,353) |
| SBC other income | (100) | (250) | (100) | (150) |
| DFE Income | (1,073) | (710) | (749) | (462) |
| Grant Income | (4,325) | (4,699) | (4,981) | (4,022) |
| Other Income | (1,522) | (1,288) | (1,316) | (949) |
| Total Income | (47,535) | (43,985) | (46,196) | (43,937) |
| Expenditure | | | | |
| Pay & Agency | 20,062 | 19,791 | 19,645 | 19,300 |
| Placements | 16,830 | 14,150 | 16,995 | 14,924 |
| Support to children and young adults | 4,991 | 4,874 | 4,464 | 4,565 |
| Legal fees | 1,716 | 1,875 | 1,875 | 1,640 |
| Overheads | 3,935 | 3,294 | 3,216 | 3,358 |
| Transformation costs | | | 0 | 150 |
| Total revenue expenditure | 47,534 | 43,985 | 46,195 | 43,937 |
| Revenue (Surplus) / Deficit | (1) | (0) | (0) | 0 |

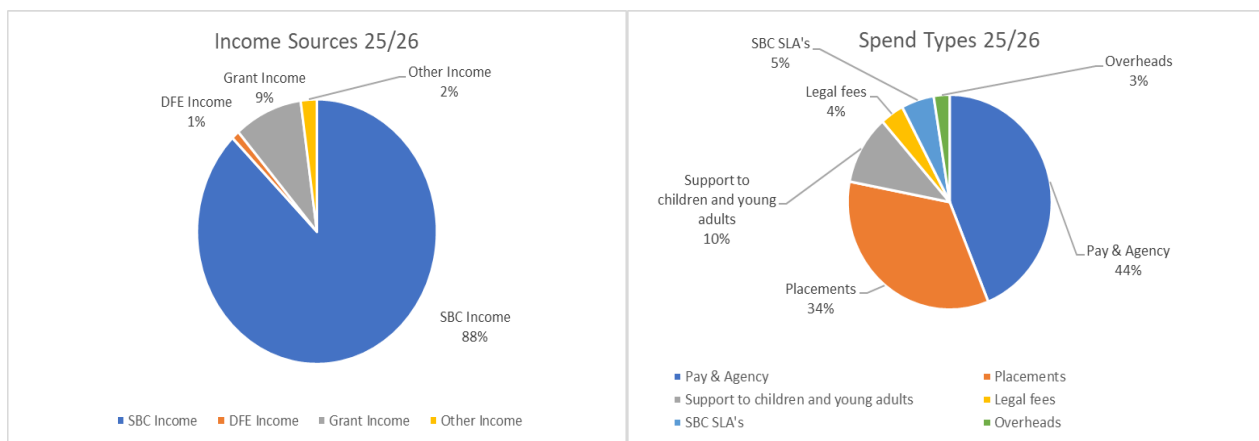
The table highlights how the company is delivering savings and reducing its cost base. This has been achieved both through reducing demand and doing things differently and more cost effectively.

We have significantly reduced spend on placements for children in our care. An External Placement Panel that regularly reviews all external placements has been successful in driving down spending by ensuring children are placed in the most suitable home with the most appropriate support at the best possible price. In addition, part of this has been a reduction in children seeking asylum in Slough. The budget was based on more children presenting directly in Slough or who have come through the National Transfer Scheme.

This has meant the SCF have been able to reduce the core contract value in 24/25 by £2,011k.

Where our financial resources come from is shown in the pie chart below with income from SBC making up 88% of all our funding. Similarly, the types of expenditure we have can be seen in the pie chart below next to income sources, with the biggest categories of spending being salaries (44%) and placement costs for children in care (34%). Support to children and young adults (10%), legal fees (4%) and overhead costs (8%) (including SLA costs to SBC)

make up the remaining spend.

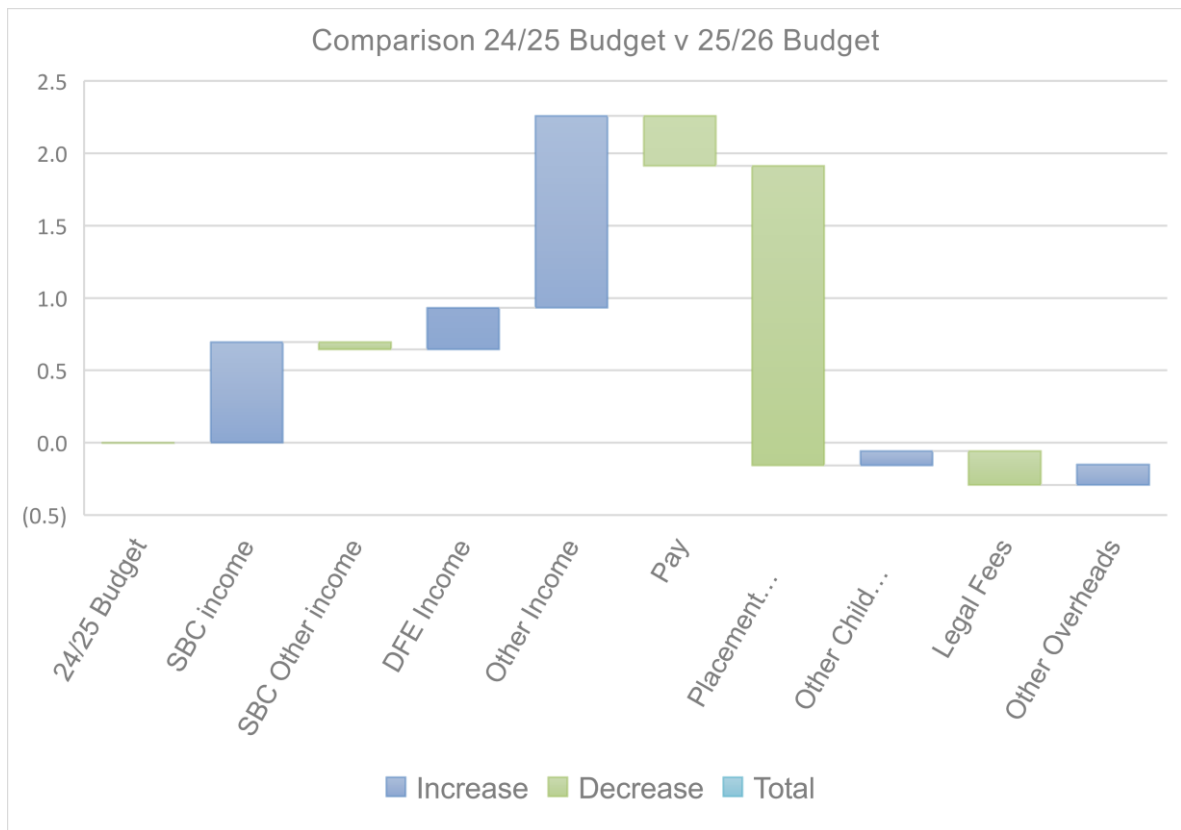


The amount of SBC funding at £38,353k is a reduction from 24/25 budget of £695k.

The table below directly compares 2024/25 budget to the first year of this business plan, 2025/26.

| | Budget 24/25 | Plan 2025/26 | Change | Comment |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|---|
| Income | | | | |
| SBC Income | (39,049) | (38,353) | 695 | Proposed reduction to core contract |
| SBC other income | (100) | (150) | (50) | Transformation funding |
| DFE Income | (749) | (462) | 287 | Reduction in Running Costs Grant |
| Grant Income | (4,981) | (4,022) | 959 | UASC Volume reduction, end of other small grants |
| Other Income | (1,316) | (949) | 367 | Reduced Health contribution expectations |
| Total income | (46,195) | (43,937) | 2,259 | |
| Expenditure | | | | |
| Pay & Agency | 19,645 | 19,299 | (346) | Extension to TEH, 2 service reconfigurations and improved agency position, offset by NI changes |
| Placements | 16,995 | 14,924 | (2,070) | Volume reductions and change in mix due to Edge of Care, Fostering recruitment and resilience fostering, revised UASC volumes & rates |
| Support to children and young adults | 4,464 | 4,565 | 101 | Care Leaver rate increases, offset with lower volumes from Housing impact on volumes |
| Legal fees | 1,875 | 1,640 | (235) | Hourly rate increases offset by volume and disbursement reductions |
| Overheads | 3,216 | 3,358 | 142 | Recruitment costs - agency & Int'l, Agresso costs offset with small other overhead savings |
| Transformation costs | 0 | 150 | 150 | Support for Improvement programme |
| Total revenue expenditure | 46,195 | 43,937 | (2,259) | |
| | (0) | (0) | 0 | |

The waterfall graph below shows the change between 24/25 budget and 25/26 budget by type of income and expenditure. Total income has reduced by £2,259k, offset by spend reductions of £2,259k to retain a balanced outturn position.



The main changes have been reductions in placement spend (£2,070k) through lower Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UAS Children) numbers and a favorable change in mix of placement to more inhouse provision, lowering the average weekly rate. The Edge of Care team and extension to the Targeted Early Help team are also predicted to reduce demand into higher tiered statutory social work.

As the UAS Children cohort are part funded by Home Office grant, some of the reduced spend has led to, and been offset by reduced grant funding (£723k). During 24/25, NHS Health contributions to shared funding of packages of support for children with complex needs has been much reduced with the effect of decreased expectations of funding such support in 25/26 (£419k).

Inflation of 2% has been included on all placement allowances and contract spend.

Following the recent changes to NI, it is to be noted that there are potential risks to the business plan, estimated to be around £250k relating to contract increases over and above those included in the plan. It is not yet certain if all the NI increase incurred by providers would be passed on to SCF, but where any cost pressures arise from this, the contractual In Year mechanism will be used to request additional funding if the pressures cannot be managed in the contract sum.

Staff cost reductions have been achieved through reductions in agency spend and the ongoing work to increase our permanent workforce. It is to be noted that this is after growth of £412k of pay inflation at 2% across both pay and agency. Additional growth from the recently announced pay award for 24/25 and budget changes in NI costs from 25/26 have impacted staff costs by £177k.

- The average annual salary changes between 24/25 and 25/26 is a decrease of 3.5% due to fewer agency staff included in the budget and a slight increase in the vacancy factor following this year's trend.

- Overall headcount has increased on the 24/25 budget by 2.6FTE due to service configurations across Early Help and the Adolescent Support Team. The Resilience fostering model is assumed to be up and running with staffing in for the full year.
- Increased headcount also allows for 10 additional maternity leave interim covers due to the 3-year average of 12 workers being off at any one time.
- The vacancy rate is a slight increase of 1.28% to just below 7% for 25/26. This is based on trend data.
- Agency numbers are expected to be lower in 25/26 than 24/25 at 13.43 v 22.85. Growth in recruitment fees to enable our continued successful recruitment of international social worker program, along with our workforce strategy of “grow your own” through several student social work programs, although ambitious means our requirement for agency workers is much reduced during 25/26. This will be monitored closely as the market can change quickly in this area. The introduction of the national “*Agency child and family social worker statutory guidance*” in how local authorities recruit agency workers should also help us achieve this.

| | 2024/25 - Budget | | | 2025/26 | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| | Permanent | Agency | Vacancy | Permanent | Agency | Vacancy |
| FTE | 305.22 | 22.85 | 19.26 | 312.65 | 13.38 | 23.95 |
| %age | 87.88% | 6.58% | 5.55% | 89.33% | 3.82% | 6.84% |
| Total FTE | | | 347.33 | | | 349.97 |
| Costs | 18,012 | 1,633 | | 18,118 | 1,182 | |
| Total Costs - pre inflation | | | 19,645 | | | 19,300 |

Our Demand-Led Service

Activity and demand for 25/26 is modelled by taking current run rates and overlaying Office of National Statistics data and other key assumptions that impact on activity to give volumes per service area.

| | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | 2025/26 | 2026/27 | 2027/28 |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Assessments | 418 | 433 | 393 | 368 | 371 | 371 |
| CIN | 527 | 488 | 473 | 426 | 378 | 376 |
| CP | 256 | 236 | 205 | 204 | 206 | 206 |
| CLA | 253 | 226 | 212 | 227 | 234 | 232 |
| CL | 233 | 247 | 241 | 243 | 246 | 245 |
| Other | 144 | 77 | 61 | 55 | 55 | 55 |
| Total Statutory | 1,830 | 1,706 | 1,585 | 1,524 | 1,490 | 1,486 |
| Total TEH | 722 | 632 | 557 | 601 | 660 | 660 |
| Total | 2,551 | 2,338 | 2,142 | 2,125 | 2,150 | 2,146 |

Our key caseloads by service area are detailed in the tables below and reflect the case holding establishment in the budget which is constantly monitored when requesting any recruitment to posts.

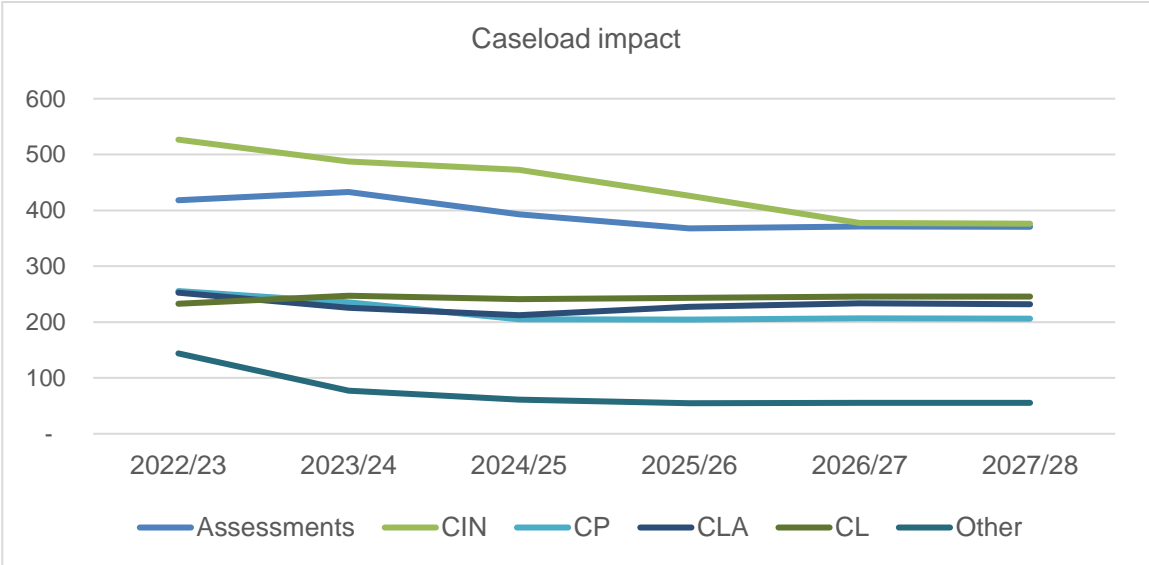
Our forecasts predict small demographic growth of 2.3% from 24/25 actual volumes. The impact is broken down to an additional 47 families and children needing help and support from social care by March 2026. We expect this to be offset by the realignment of services within Ealy Help and Prevention where children and families will receive help and support earlier to avoid the need to step up to statutory support, thus reducing demand.

As we continue influencing demand by realigning our service and working more effectively, with families and children, this we hope, will continue to result in an increase of Early Help intervention offsetting reductions in statutory services, Children in Need and Assessment. We have inevitably seen a rise in the Early Help workforce as a result.

The number of Children in Our Care are expected to increase during 25/26, largely driven by growth forecast in the UASC population and pressures through the National Transfer Scheme to accept more referrals.

Some of our key placement sufficiency transformation ambitions, included in the business and improvement plan for 25/26 are aligned with our Sufficiency Strategy and its 5 key workstreams of:

- Edge of Care / Early Help
- Commissioning
- Fostering Recruitment and Retention
- Achieving Permanence
- Care Experienced Young People



Over the next year, the focus of the workstreams need to be on measured outcomes.

- Decrease in the number of Children and Young People needing support from a statutory service.
- Children and Young People who have received the right help from the right support in a timely way.
- The reduction in the need for high-cost placements
- Increase in the number of Children and Young People who live in stable homes.
- Increasing the number of Children and Young People who remain local to Slough when it is safe to do so.
- Ensuring that Young People have the skills they need before moving will decrease the

number not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

As we are predicting a growth in the number of children in care, to pre-empt a rise in costs, the company is continuing to focus on inhouse foster care recruitment, including the recruitment of 2 additional resilience foster carers by the end of the financial year. The Edge of Care Team embedded in the newly created Adolescent Support Service will work intensively with families and children with complex needs offering short term intervention to try and maintain families at home together and avoid escalation into care.

The Company will continue to promote permanence - forever homes for children in our care and look at matching children long term with their foster parents and converting those in foster placements to their permanent homes under Special Guardianship Orders and reunifying children home where it is assessed the right decision for them.

The impact on where we place our children is demonstrated below.

| Placement Type | 01/04/2025 | Demo growth | UASC | Recruitment | Resilience | Edge of Care | SGO | 31/03/2026 |
|-------------------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Res | 18.00 | | | | | - 1.00 | | 17.00 |
| IFA | 61.00 | 1.39 | - | 5.00 | - 2.00 | - 4.00 | - 2.00 | 49.39 |
| In house | 59.00 | 1.35 | | 5.00 | 2.00 | - | | 67.35 |
| 16-18 Semi | 13.00 | | | | | - 3.00 | | 10.00 |
| UASC | 19.00 | | 24.00 | | | | | 43.00 |
| Secure | 1.00 | | | | | | | 1.00 |
| Total CLA | 171.00 | 2.74 | 24.00 | - | - | - 8.00 | - 2.00 | 187.74 |
| SGO | 145.00 | | | | | | 2.00 | 147.00 |
| Adoption | 68.00 | | | | | | | 68.00 |
| Total Permanent | 213.00 | - | - | - | - | - | 2.00 | 215.00 |
| Total Placements | 384.00 | 2.74 | 24.00 | - | - | - 8.00 | - | 402.74 |

Most of the growth is from an expectation that our UASC cohort will move back towards our 0.07% allocation of 43, however, any growth, either above or below this will not have a significant effect on placement costs as the Home Office funding funds the majority of the direct placement costs for each of these children.

As we are focusing on a balanced, high quality but more cost-effective mix of placements for our children, through our placement sufficiency workstream, we are expecting reductions in high-cost external provisions such as residential and agency fostering with a view that our placement budget requirements for 25/26 are as set out below.

| Placement Budget 2025/26 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|------------|------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| | Budget 24/25 | | | Budget 25/26 | | | Variance | | | Budget 26/27 | | | Budget 27/28 | | |
| | FTE | Rate | Total | FTE | Rate | Total | FTE | Rate | Total | FTE | Rate | Total | FTE | Rate | Total |
| Children Looked After | £'000s | | | £'000s | | | £'000s | | | £'000s | | | £'000s | | |
| External Residential | 18 | 5,640 | 5,234 | 18 | 5,123 | 4,800 | 0 | -517 | -434 | 17 | 5,225 | 4,651 | 16 | 5,343 | 4,563 |
| Asylum Seeker 16-18 (Semi-Independent) | 45 | 832 | 1,966 | 32 | 854 | 1,424 | -13 | 22 | -542 | 43 | 865 | 1,939 | 43 | 881 | 1,976 |
| Semi Independent < 18's | 15 | 1,684 | 1,329 | 11 | 1,817 | 1,086 | -4 | 134 | -243 | 9 | 1,853 | 901 | 9 | 1,895 | 916 |
| Secure Remand | 1 | 4,725 | 248 | 1 | 2,342 | 124 | 0 | -2,383 | -125 | 1 | 2,389 | 127 | 1 | 2,443 | 130 |
| Total Children Looked After | 79 | 2,123 | 8,778 | 62 | 2,283 | 7,434 | -17 | 160 | -1,344 | 70 | 2,075 | 7,618 | 70 | 2,088 | 7,585 |
| Permanency | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Adoption Allowances | 74 | 236 | 913 | 68 | 230 | 815 | -6 | -7 | -97 | 68 | 235 | 832 | 68 | 240 | 851 |
| Special Guardianship Order | 157 | 203 | 1,664 | 146 | 245 | 1,868 | -11 | 43 | 205 | 149 | 250 | 1,939 | 151 | 256 | 2,009 |
| Permanency total | 231 | 213 | 2,576 | 214 | 240 | 2,684 | -17 | 27 | 107 | 217 | 245 | 2,770 | 219 | 251 | 2,859 |
| Fostering | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| External Fostering Agency | 70 | 1,084 | 3,970 | 55 | 1,147 | 3,275 | -15 | 63 | -695 | 45 | 1,170 | 2,752 | 40 | 1,197 | 2,502 |
| In House Foster Carers | 67 | 478 | 1,670 | 64 | 462 | 1,532 | -3 | -16 | -139 | 68 | 472 | 1,679 | 71 | 482 | 1,782 |
| Fostering Total | 137 | 788 | 5,640 | 118 | 779 | 4,806 | -19 | -9 | -834 | 113 | 749 | 4,431 | 111 | 740 | 4,284 |
| Total Placements | 448 | 728 | 16,995 | 395 | 725 | 14,924 | -53 | -3 | -2,070 | 400 | 710 | 14,819 | 399 | 708 | 14,728 |
| Careleavers | 68 | 636 | 2,245 | 63 | 756 | 2,478 | -5 | 119 | 232 | 45 | 756 | 1,775 | 63 | 788 | 2,569 |

As children transition to adulthood our aim is for care experienced young people (CEYP) to move into semi-independent and independent provisions. This could be social housing or private lets, some of which would be funded through access to benefits or employment.

Due to an unexpected growth of UASCs during 23/24 our CEYP will increase through 24/25 and into 25/26. With a focus on value for money, our commissioning team has been working to foster relationships with private landlords locally and secure accommodation that is value for money for those CEYP that can live independently and in, or close to Slough. Other work has been on going with SBC Housing Department where a dedicated CEYP housing officer is now in place with a commitment from Housing to allocate 3 social housing places per month to Slough's care experienced young people.

| Description | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | 2025/26 | 2026/27 | 2027/28 |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Revised volumes excluding Asylum seekers | 28 | 21 | 19 | 15 | 11 | 11 |
| Revised volumes Asylum Seekers | 20 | 41 | 55 | 48 | 34 | 51 |
| Total | 48 | 61 | 74 | 63 | 45 | 63 |

Taking all the above together, our key metrics as an organisation are summed up in the table below.

| Key Metrics | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| | 2023/24 Act | 24/25 Bud | 25/26 Bud | 24/25 F'cast | Aug Bud |
| Permanent Staff | 295 | 324 | 337 | 298 | 305 |
| Agency | 51 | 23 | 13 | 37 | 23 |
| Total Staff | 346 | 347 | 350 | 335 | 328 |
| Children open to SCF - Statutory | 1706 | 1747 | 1524 | 1585 | 1730 |
| Children open to SCF - Early Help | 632 | 684 | 601 | 557 | 689 |
| Children open to SCF - Total | 2338 | 2431 | 2125 | 2142 | 2419 |
| Children on a CIN plan | 487 | 490 | 426 | 473 | 471 |
| Children on a CP Plan | 236 | 250 | 204 | 205 | 242 |
| Children Looked After | 225 | 248 | 227 | 212 | 240 |
| Care Leavers in accommodation | 61 | 78 | 63 | 65 | 81 |
| UASC <18 | 27 | 50 | 32 | 28 | 50 |
| UASC >18 | 38 | 57 | 48 | 50 | 60 |
| Total UASC | 65 | 107 | 80 | 79 | 110 |

The Financial Model

The financial model we have used reflects the activities required to achieve our priorities for our children and our aim is to deliver better outcomes for children by doing things differently for less with a clear focus on improving practice and value for money.

As demonstrated in the previous section, we are maturing as an organisation developing new ways of working to influence demand and spending through the whole system. We will look to understand how Working Together to Safeguard Children can help Slough, and its partners work together effectively to help, protect, and promote the welfare of children in future years.

Advancing the way, we use technology to support better collaboration, improve management information and reduce duplication is vital to our sustainable future.

Our modelling reflects **Priority 1** in Early Help through targeting a 20% reduction in the number of families stepping up into statutory social care. This is through adding in the cost base of what was a medium- term funded additional Targeted Early Help team.

The continued development of partnership working **Priority 6** and use of portals to make communication and delegation more efficient will bring savings longer term through empowering community partners to become the lead professional working with families rather than Social Care.

The new Adolescent Support team brings together edge of care, youth offending and exploitation to work with families in crisis to avoid children entering care alongside an increase in the reunification of children returning home.

The Sufficiency Strategy workstreams feed into **Priority 3** enabling the average weekly rate of our placement costs to fall. This is from growth in our in-house care provision for children placed with foster parents as well as offering an alternative to residential or high-cost agency foster care. Our resilience foster carers will have specialist training and access to high levels of support from clinicians and social workers enabling them to care for children with more complex needs. Through targeting an additional 5 new carers and 2 resilience carers this will drive greater value for money.

Our spending on placements for UASC and CEYP is also expected to benefit from commissioning initiatives aimed at targeting the rates paid and driving better value for money. This will be done through supplier relationship management and engagement to secure accommodation available for Semi-Independent and Independent living, as well as working with our SBC Housing colleagues to secure social housing for our over 18's.

A stable workforce where Slough is a preferred employer is **Priority 4** for the company. The ratio of permanent to agency staff is modelled at 89% permanent and 4% agency with the remaining 7% factored for vacancies. This is a huge change on previous years and is a direct result of our successful international recruitment plan and our on-going ASYE and apprenticeship programs to grow our own professional workforce. The Company continues to work with Frontline, England's largest social work charity to further grow our own sustainable and stable workforce.

Overall, the financial modelling shows a balanced position, whilst enabling a cost reduction on our core contract value back to Slough Borough Council.

Our Cashflow

The 12-month cash flow as depicted in the table below suggests that the Company will be able to manage within its means for the next financial year.

| CASH FLOW FORECAST | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | Fcst | Fcst | Fcst | Fcst | Fcst | Fcst | Fcst | Fcst | Fcst | Fcst | Fcst | Fcst | Fcst |
| | Mar-25 | Apr-25 | May-25 | Jun-25 | Jul-25 | Aug-25 | Sep-25 | Oct-25 | Nov-25 | Dec-25 | Jan-26 | Feb-26 | Mar-26 |
| | £000's | £000's | £000's | £000's | £000's | £000's | £000's | £000's | £000's | £000's | £000's | £000's | £000's |
| RECEIPTS: | -2,092 | -4,553 | -4,349 | -4,194 | -4,502 | -4,194 | -4,194 | -4,425 | -4,349 | -4,194 | -4,425 | -4,194 | -4,310 |
| EXPENDITURE: | 5,361 | 4,573 | 4,168 | 4,168 | 4,573 | 4,168 | 4,168 | 4,573 | 4,168 | 4,168 | 4,573 | 4,168 | 4,168 |
| NET CASHFLOW | 3,270 | 21 | -181 | -26 | 71 | -26 | -26 | 148 | -181 | -26 | 148 | -26 | -141 |
| BANK BALANCE B/F | -7,830 | -4,561 | -4,540 | -4,721 | -4,747 | -4,676 | -4,702 | -4,728 | -4,580 | -4,762 | -4,787 | -4,639 | -4,665 |
| BANK BALANCE C/F | -4,561 | -4,540 | -4,721 | -4,747 | -4,676 | -4,702 | -4,728 | -4,580 | -4,762 | -4,787 | -4,639 | -4,665 | -4,807 |
| SECONDARY ACCOUNT BALANCE | -31 | -31 | -31 | -31 | -31 | -31 | -31 | -31 | -31 | -31 | -31 | -31 | -31 |
| Total | -4,592 | -4,571 | -4,752 | -4,778 | -4,707 | -4,733 | -4,759 | -4,611 | -4,792 | -4,818 | -4,670 | -4,696 | -4,838 |

The cash flow assumes that by the end of the financial year 24/25 receipts will include the reduction of the core contract by £2m and the settlement of £7m of SBC debt. This would enable the company to repay the loan of £5m that the company has received from SBC.

Our Balance Sheet

SCF's balance sheet shows the projected position for the next year at a balanced position.

| Slough Children First Ltd | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Balance Sheet | as at 31 Mar 2024 £000's | as at 31 Mar 2025 £000's | as at 31 Mar 2026 £000's |
| Current Assets | | | |
| Debtors | 8,562 | 2,553 | 3,203 |
| Cash at bank and in hand / (overdrawn) | 9,811 | 4,561 | 4,807 |
| Total current assets | 18,372 | 7,113 | 8,009 |
| Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year | (13,371) | (7,115) | (8,010) |
| Total current liabilities | (13,371) | (7,115) | (8,010) |
| Net current assets / (Liabilities) | 4,999 | (1) | (1) |
| Long Term Creditors - Receipts in Advance | (5,000) | 0 | 0 |
| Total long term liabilities | (5,000) | 0 | 0 |
| Net Assets / (Liabilities) | (1) | (1) | (1) |
| Reserves | | | |
| Income and Expenditure Account | (1) | (1) | (1) |
| Reserves | (1) | (1) | (1) |

The Profit and Loss Account

The table below shows the projected position over the life of the business plan. Each year presents as a balanced outturn with income matching expenditure.

As can be seen from the Profit & Loss account, income is set to reduce over the next 2 years, with an increase in income seen in the final year of the plan due to inflation expectations and increasing Home Office income for our CEYP. As expenditure is expected to follow suit, the company can remain sustainable and deliver a balanced outturn year on year.

| | Plan 2025/26 £000's | Plan 2026/27 £000's | Plan 2027/28 £000's |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Income | | | |
| SBC Income | (38,353) | (38,189) | (39,173) |
| SBC other income | (150) | 0 | 0 |
| DFE Income | (462) | 0 | 0 |
| Grant Income | (4,022) | (4,285) | (4,525) |
| Other Income | (949) | (1,029) | (1,045) |
| Total Income | (43,937) | (43,503) | (44,744) |
| Expenditure | | | |
| Pay & Agency | 19,300 | 19,686 | 20,080 |
| Placements | 14,924 | 14,819 | 14,728 |
| Support to children and young people | 4,565 | 3,900 | 4,725 |
| Legal fees | 1,640 | 1,713 | 1,797 |
| Overheads | 3,358 | 3,385 | 3,413 |
| Transformation costs | 150 | 0 | 0 |
| Total revenue expenditure | 43,937 | 43,503 | 44,743 |
| Revenue (Surplus) / Deficit | 0 | (0) | (0) |

£150k of expenditure, funded through the SBC Transformation fund is included in the 25/26 plan to ensure the Company can continue its progress along its Improvement Plan to better practice.

The summary below shows the changes from the 24/25 budget core contract value to the proposed 25/26 core contract value.

| | 2025/26 |
|---|---------------|
| Prior Year Core Contract | 39,043 |
| Variations | |
| Pay Inflation - | 415 |
| Contract Inflation - | 434 |
| | 849 |
| Loss of Income | 1,774 |
| Growth | |
| Staff - maternity and extension to Targeted Early Help | 206 |
| Staff - Impact of NI Changes from 1st April 2025 | 358 |
| UASC and CEYP - rebase of volumes and rates | 1,235 |
| Legal - hourly rate increase of 19% | 159 |
| Overheads, including Agresso costs, Recruitment & Fostering Hub fees | 208 |
| | 2,165 |
| Savings | |
| Full year effect of robust oversight of External Placements Panel & rebase of v | (1,592) |
| UASC Placements - Full year effect YOY & Rebase of volumes | (1,148) |
| Fostering - resilience, growth of in house carers and conversion to SGO | (182) |
| Edge of care preventative work impact on CLA placements | (77) |
| CEYP - volume reductions from Housing and more timely engagement with HO | (642) |
| Legal | (443) |
| Overheads - Printing, Stationery, mileage, interest | (89) |
| Income growth from fostering and Breakaway services offered to other Las | (46) |
| Full year impact of 24/25 Pay award | (181) |
| Staffing savings from re-design and agency reduction | (1,078) |
| | (5,478) |
| Total Variation to Funding Requirement | (690) |
| Proposed Core Contract | 38,353 |

Value for Money

Measures are in place across SCF that contribute to ensuring that value for money is a consideration across all spending decisions. Value for Money is a consideration in all areas, covering both commissioned and non-commissioned activities.

SCF have processes in place to consider all expenditure, including recruitment. Depending on whether the request is for direct child, non-child related spend, contract expenditure or recruitment of staff depends upon the process to be followed.

Panels within SCF include the External Placement Panel (EPP), Access to Resources, Legal Gateway and the CWD panel. They have their own Terms of Reference and documentation requirements in order that decision makers, who is a frontline Head of Service, can approve or reject spend requests specific to children.

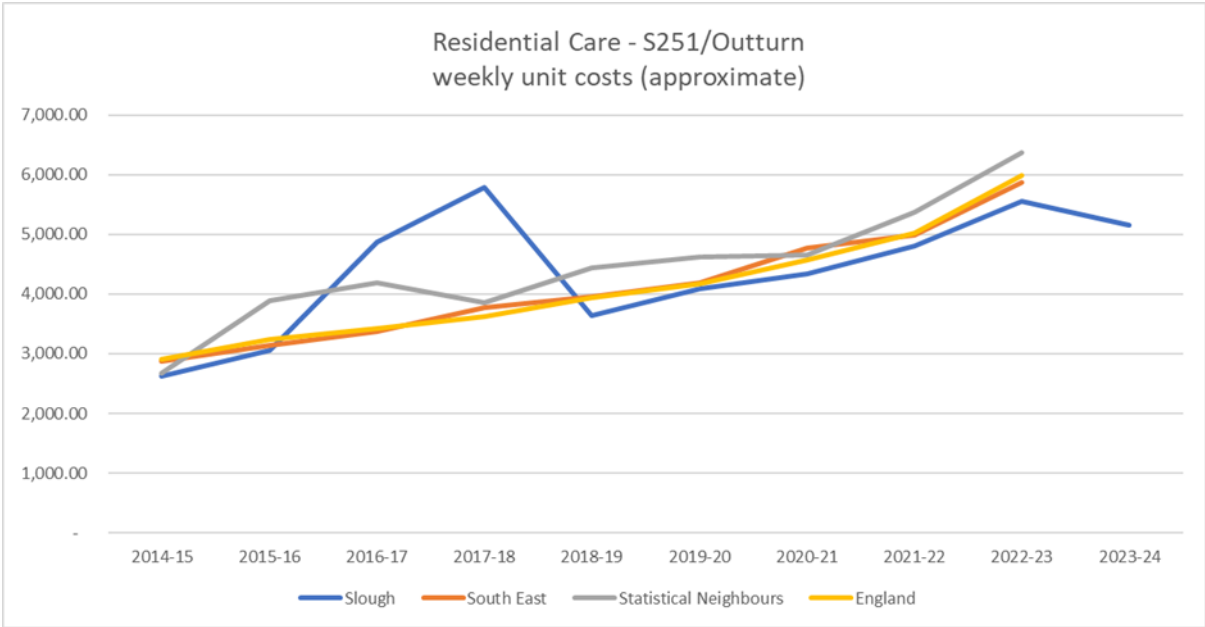
The EPP reviews all placements on a rolling basis and in the previous budget year, around £1m of cost reductions was achieved, and in Q1 24/25, £560k of further annual cost reductions have been identified. The panel keeps scrutiny on the agreed costs and the service provided for those costs, whether the child still requires the same level of support, and whether a step down to a different placement or even home can be considered. A number of children have also been reunified home through the process.

SCF review services regularly and have recently identified areas where they are delivering good quality services that other LA's may want to buy into. These includes "selling"

placements with our own in house foster carers to other LA's and selling bed nights at our in-house short breaks residential provision at Breakaway. The daily / nightly charge is reviewed annually to ensure it is at an appropriate level to cover actual unit costs, contribute to overheads and is also benchmarked where possible against other providers. Our programme of "grow our own" social workers, career development from best use of the Apprentice Levy and introduction of the Social Work Academy, combined with regular review of agency workers and contract time frames ensure staff resource is also delivering value for money.

Benchmarking data suggests SCF are bucking the trend on placement costs and are succeeding in reducing costs. This is in part due to the EPP as detailed above, and the legal gateway panel which decides whether to issue proceedings in the first place. Creative support packages have been provided to some families to try and manage the family to remain together and avoid expenses care proceedings and placement costs. Cost of placements has been well scrutinised since the start of the company. A comprehensive table including key metrics is produced every month which sets out unit costs, volumes, and total costs for each type of placement and how these compare to budget.

The graph below is from government benchmarking data up to 2022-23 and show how SCF have brought itself back in line with others for overall costs but is also on a downward trajectory for residential costs, contrary to what is seen elsewhere across the country.



SCF is not complacent in delivering value for money and continually identifies areas for improvement and oversight. A focus for 25/26 will be as per the below:
 Review all agency business cases to ensure business cases cover period in post.
 Develop reporting on the use of frameworks for placements and savings made from these.
 Development of and reporting from a tracker on numbers claiming, and not claiming, Housing Benefit and Universal Credit

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 from a company limited by guarantee to being wholly owned by Slough Borough Council (SBC). SCF is a not-for-profit company providing children’s social care services including Early Help services. The Youth Justice Service is based in the company but is not included in this plan as it has its own plan, is funded from a different source, and is differently regulated. 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 SEND.

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.

As of 1st September 2024, Members of the Board are:

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Chair of the Board | Simon Baker |
| Non-Executive Director | Nina Robinson |
| Non-Executive Director | Raj Bhamber |
| Non-Executive Director | Lesley Hagger (until 31 st October 2024) |
| Non-Executive Director | Steven Mason |
| Executive Director | Sue Butcher - Chief Executive |
| Executive Director | Ben Short - Director of Operations (Children’s Social Care) |
| Executive Director | Alex Pilgerstorfer – Acting Director of Finance and Resources. |

From 1st November 2024 Lesley Hagger will be replaced by Debbie Jones.

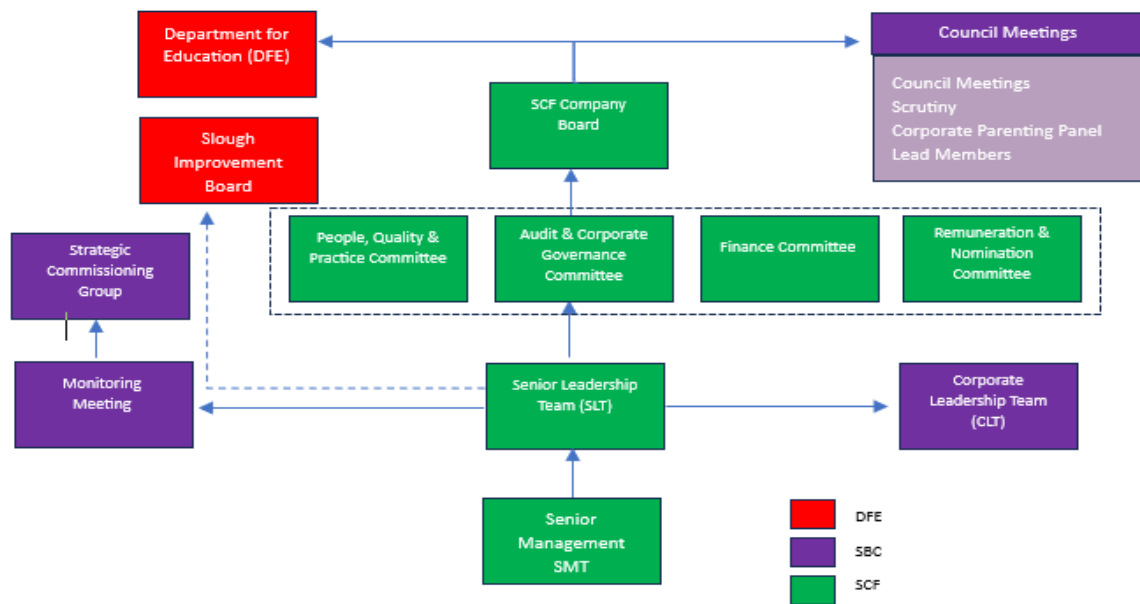
| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| Audit and Corporate Governance Committee (ACGC): | Chair - Nina Robinson |
|--|-----------------------|

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| Finance Committee (FinCom): | Chair - Steven Mason |
| Remuneration, Nominations and Appointments Committee (RNAC): | Chair - Raj Bhamber |
| People, Quality and Practice Committee (PQPC), | Chair - Lesley Hagger |

The Board operates through the sub committees to monitor progress in detail.

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

Governance Arrangement



The Strategic Leadership Team

The Strategic 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 a resourceful, efficient, and effective a way as possible.

The Associate Director of Education, with input from the Education Finance Business Partner, complements the membership to ensure that wherever possible services for children are delivered together.

Membership as of 1st September 2024 comprises:

Chief Executive/DCS **Chair**
 Director of Operations (Children's Social Care)
 Acting Director of Finance & Resources
 Head of HR and OD
 Director of Education
 Education Finance Business Partner

Sue Butcher
 Ben Short
 Alex Pilgerstorfer
 Kate McCorrison
 Neil Hoskinson
 Vacant



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 |

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

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.

Focused Visit April 2024 can be accessed [here](#)

