

**DRAFT**

# **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2019/20**

## **Annual Governance Statement for the Financial Year 2019/20**

Slough Borough Council, like every other local authority, is required to review its governance arrangements annually pursuant to the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The preparation and publication of an **Annual Governance Statement (“AGS”)**, in accordance with the principles set out in the CIPFA/SoLACE publication, “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016)” (“the Framework”), fulfils this requirement.

The Framework requires local authorities to be responsible for ensuring that:

- Their business is conducted in accordance with all relevant laws and regulations
- Public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for
- Resources are used economically.

The Framework also expects that local authorities will put in place proper arrangements for the governance of their affairs and ensure that the responsibilities listed above are met.

During the last quarter of the financial year 2019/20 and into the financial year 2020/21, Slough Borough Council, like every other local authority, was affected by the global spread of the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 and the attendant pandemic COVID-19. Slough Borough Council’s response and actions are set in the separate appendix to this Report.

### **Key Elements of The Council’s Governance Framework**

#### **Council, Cabinet and Leader**

- Give Leadership
- Set Policy
- Support Slough’s communities

The Council operates a “Leader and Executive (England)” model of governance under the Local Government Act 2000.

The council currently consists of 42 elected members of the council (councillors). The Mayor chairs Council meetings and the Deputy Mayor deputises in the Mayor's absence. The Council's constitution sets out how the council will operate.

The Council is given direction by the Leader of the Council. The Cabinet (the council's executive committee of councillors) consists of the Leader elected by the Council and the other Lead Members appointed by the Leader.

The Leader and Lead Members in the Cabinet meet prior to each Cabinet meeting to discuss the agenda items and the Cabinet also meets with the Chief Executive and Directors and Officers prior to each cabinet meeting to discuss the agenda items and a forward programme for the Cabinet.

All Reports prepared for Cabinet and Council require prior consideration by the Council's Management Team (CMT), the Section 151 officer, the Monitoring Officer and legal services officers. Reports prepared for other statutory committees require consideration by legal services officers.

The Cabinet structure covers different portfolio areas, each one led by an elected councillor called a Lead Member. The Cabinet discharge the Council's executive functions and monitor the Council's performance by receiving quarterly performance management reports prepared by the Council's Project Management Office (PMO). The PMO track and report on performance on all the Council's major projects and a member of the PMO sits on the Council's Risk and Audit Board. The Cabinet approves all the Council's major procurements and provides political and community leadership and makes many of the day to day decisions on service provision. The Council retains responsibility for setting the policy and financial framework and revenue and capital budgets which are monitored by the Cabinet regularly and exercising all functions reserved to full Council.

### Decision Making

- Council meetings
- Recording of decisions

Article 13 of the Council's current Constitution details the decision making process

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=563&MIId=6238&Ver=4&Info=1>

### Risk Management

- Strategic and Operational Risks
- Where are key risks considered

Slough Borough Council (the Council) currently maintains a Corporate Risk Register; and one for each Directorate.

These risks registers are monitored by the Risk and Audit Board, whose Members include the Section 151 Officer, the Service Lead for Governance, a Member of the PMO and a representative from the Council's internal auditors, which meets monthly. The Risk and Audit Board also monitors the reports of the Council's internal auditors and actions following the finalisation of such reports.

The risk registers are a management tool utilised to provide a snap shot of the key risks that the Council faces and how they are managed.

Effective risk management assists in achieving the Council's priority outcomes and helps to optimise the quality and efficiency of its service delivery.

The achievement of the Council's priority outcomes is underpinned by the effectiveness of the controls identified to mitigate the principal risks which could affect the outcomes.

CMT now also set the Council's "risk appetite" and all any risks exceeding the risk threshold set by CMT, which are identified by the Risk & Audit Board, are escalated to CMT immediately.

#### Scrutiny and review

- Scrutiny committees
- Audit and Corporate Governance Committee
- Budget Monitoring reports to Committee

Details of attendance can be found at

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/mgUserAttendanceSummary.aspx>

#### Corporate Management Team

- Josie Wragg is **Chief Executive**, (Head of Paid Service), responsible for all staff, and leading an effective management team which comprises all the Council's Strategic Directors.
- Neil Wilcox is the Director of Finance and Resources is the Council's **S.151 Officer** and is responsible for safeguarding the Council's finances;
- **The Monitoring Officer** is Hugh Peart and he is responsible for ensuring decisions made by the Council are legal, and are made in an open and transparent way.

#### **CIPFA/SoLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government**

This guidance is recognised as the proper practices referred to in the Accounts and Audit Regulations that we must follow and sets out seven core principals of good governance. These seven principals comprise:

Two overarching principles for good governance

- A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of the law**
- B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement**  
*and 5 principles of good governance*
- C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits**
- D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes**
- E. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it**
- F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management**
- G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability**

Set out below is how the Council has complied with the seven principals set out in The Framework.

#### **Principle A**

- ***Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of the law***

The Council has a Constitution that is updated annually – The Constitution can be found on the Council's website

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=563&MIId=6238&Ver=4&Info=1>

The Constitution is updated annually. The updates are agreed by Full Council after being through a consultation process that involves a Member Panel on the Constitution, Audit and Corporate Governance Committee and approval from the Monitoring Officer.

At part 5 of the Constitution is the Ethical Framework. The Ethical Framework contains

- Councillors Code of Conduct
  - Sets out the conduct expected of it's Councillors which is enforced by the Monitoring Officer and the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee
- Local Code of Conduct for Councillors and Officer with regard to Planning and Licencing matters
  - Do's and Dont's for Councillors and Officers when dealing with Planning and licencing matters
- Local Code of Conduct for Employees
  - Sets out the standards of behaviour Slough Borough Council expects of it's staff, is incorporated in Contracts of Employment and meets the recommendations set out in the Nolan Committee's – Standards In Public Life
- Local Code governing relationships between elected Members and employees
  - Describes the roles of elected Members and employees and help all those concerned to understand the relationship between Officer and Members
- Confidential Whistleblowing code
  - Intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns within the Council rather than overlooking a problem or raising the problem outside the Council.
- Monitoring officer Protocol
  - Provides information on the monitoring Officer role and how those duties are discharged within Slough borough Council
- Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and policy
  - List of individual policies and strategies to counter fraud and corruption including the Council's Policy on acceptance of donations and sponsorships.

- Sanctions Policy
    - Sets out the council policy of zero tolerance toward fraud and commits the Council to use the full range on sanctions against anyone who is found to have committed fraud against the council
  - Joint Protocol of External Auditor regarding the legality of transactions
    - Details the arrangements for those instances where individual officers and/or members of the Authority, seek the views of the Appointed Auditor on the legality of transactions; and where the public refer questions or enquiries to the Appointed Auditor.
    -
  - Policy Statement on Corporate Governance
    - Looks at the Council’s vision and priorities and ensures that these are delivered in line with the Nolan Committee’s Seven Principles in Public Life
  - Guidance on Housing and council Tax Benefit
  - - For Officers and members involved in Housing and Council Tax benefit work
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## **Principle B**

- ***Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement***

All meetings are open to the public and agenda, reports and decisions are published on the council’s website, and the Council consults with the public on a wide range of topics. Active consultations can be found at <https://www.slough.gov.uk/council/consultation/> . The public can also raise concerns by using the Petition scheme, the details of which are contained within Article 17 in Part 2 the Constitution

“Citizen” is the council’s publication for residents which is delivered to homes in the borough. It gives residents information and news about the council, its priorities and work. Citizen can also be read on-line at <https://citizen.slough.gov.uk/february-2019/latest-news/welcome>

The Council disseminates information and connects with stakeholders via Twitter @SloughCouncil and Facebook

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## **Principle C**

- ***Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits***

The rolling 5 Year Plan is refreshed and published every year and sets out

- The Council's vision
- The Council's priority outcomes
- the role of way of working of the council in making this happen

The current 5 Year Plan, 2020-2025, continues the Council's five values which are to be:

- Responsive
- Accountable
- Innovative
- Ambitious
- Empowering

These values are used to drive our behaviours and how we work. We will recruit and manage people by checking how they perform against these values.

The 5 Year Plan will be used to:

- drive the decisions made in the medium and long term financial strategy
- focus on delivery of outcomes by prioritising resources
- provide a basis for discussion with partners about the services they provide
- develop a performance framework to which services and staff will be held accountable.

The Five Year Plan is also important in explaining how and why the Council is changing. The Council have also now commenced planning for a longer term perspective by seeking to work with partners and communities across the town to set a vision for the next 20 years under the rubric "Towards 2040" and the Five Year Plan will feed into this vision.

This 5 Year Plan defines the 5 priority outcomes. The table below shows the priority outcomes and a sample of the items of progress made towards those outcomes

| <b>Priority Outcome</b>  | <b>Progress Made</b>   |
|--|--|
| <b>Slough Children will grow up to be happy, healthy and successful.</b>   | Seen incremental increases in the attainment of a Good Level of Development across Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) with the figure for Slough's children (74.3%) exceeding the national figure by 2.5%   |
| <b>Our People will be healthier and manage their own care needs.</b>   | Increased the proportion of people managing their own care needs through a Direct Payment to well above the national average   |
| <b>Slough will be an attractive place where people chose to live, work and stay.</b>                             | Begun work on two hotels and 64 new apartments on the old library site which will bring vitality to the area   |
| <b>Our residents will live in good quality homes</b>   | Refurbished temporary accommodation flats at Pendeen Court providing much improved living and communal areas for some of the most in need residents.   |
| <b>Slough will attract, retain and grow businesses and investment to provide opportunities for our residents</b> | <p>Moved the Council's HQ back to the town centre at the heart of our community.</p> <p>We've secured the approval of local businesses to the creation of A new Business improvement District which will deliver £2million of investment over the next five years.</p> |

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## **Principle D**

- ***Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes***

**Programme Management Office (PMO) work** – The PMO provides Project Management and Project Support to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach to delivery of the Five Year Plan. This includes the Project Management of projects that are considered a priority by CMT and Cabinet. The PMO’s work includes:

- Project Portfolio Management - Portfolio reported monthly, and regularly reviewed to ensure reporting meets CMT requirements
- Project Management - Project Management of key projects and Transformation Projects
- Assurance that the Council’s Project Management Methodology is being followed consistently
- Supporting the delivery of the Council’s transformation programme.

**Transformation programme** – The Council’s transformation programme is now well underway under the brand “Our Futures” and is about how we will organise ourselves efficiently to ensure our residents and customers get the best services we can afford and how will become a “world class” Council. The programme will define the future operating model for the council – and, potentially, of our key partners.

The transformation programme is driven by a key vision and a series of principles, each of which has key outcomes. The principles will guide our work and help define the programme of change and specific projects to bring it about.

Joe Carter, director of Transformation Chairs the Our Futures Board that is made up of CMT Members. This board, which meets monthly, is in overall charge of the Our Futures programme. It makes corporate level decisions about the Our Futures programme. It also provides a link to elected Members.

The Board's job is to provide strategic leadership and direction to the programme. It will also scrutinise the transformation work.

The Our Futures Board will be advised by the Our Futures Director and may choose to speed up some parts of the programme or to slow them down where this is necessary. The Our Futures Board will also consider how to respond to emerging issues or problems.

Below this Board are three groups:

- Design
- Delivery
- Change & Communications

A Business Case to implement the Transformation Programme and deliver a new Operating Model for the Council was approved by Cabinet on 15 April 2019. Governance of the Programme will be reviewed as required to ensure effective oversight.

### **Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge**

In February 2019 the Council invited the Local Government Association to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge review of the Council. The focus of the Corporate Peer Challenge was on the following areas:

- understanding of the local place and priority setting
- leadership of place
- financial planning and viability
- organisational leadership and governance
- capacity to deliver

The final report from the LGA included a number of recommendations and the Council will seek to address these by developing an action plan for implementation in 2020-2021. The principal findings are set out below:

| <b>Positives</b>                                   | <b>Key recommendations</b>  |
|--|---|
| <b>Recent leadership stability welcomed by all</b> | Establish a stronger sense of where the Council wants to get to.  |
| <b>Lots of ambition and energy</b>                 | Develop and deliver this vision which identifies what the future looks like for all parts of the community – for place and people |
| <b>Lots of goodwill</b>                            | Consider and articulate what a 21 <sup>st</sup> Century council will look like for Slough to build unity around a common purpose  |
| <b>Strong asset base and economy</b>               | Establish a more fundamental equilibrium between the Council's ambition for people and place, and communicate this.               |
| <b>Slough is great in a crisis</b>                 | Progress the emerging transformation agenda and invest more time in rooting   |

**Leadership speaks compellingly about the future of Slough**

this in culture change.  
Develop governance from “basic control” to good

In accordance with the recommendation of the LGA Corporate Challenge Review Team the Council invited the LGA to undertake a bespoke review of the Council’s governance arrangements, as part of its stated ambition to be a “world class” council, which the LGA conducted between 3 and 5 February 2020. The overall impression of the LGA Governance Peer Review Team was

***“...an organisation that is learning to move away from a time of crisis toward delivering an exciting new future for the Borough.”***

The findings are set out below:

| Positives  | Deficiencies  | Recommendations   |
|--|---|---|
| the Council is ambitious to improve and senior officers and members understand why governance is a key part of that  | There are still some gaps in the framework which need to be filled  | Good governance must be embedded regardless of the delivery of the transformation programme.                                |
| The Council has made significant and tangible progress on governance issues over the last 2 years. People are confident of further improvement under the current leadership. | There is more to do to embed a strong foundation of good governance and apply and own it consistently.                | Ensure Councillors are appropriately engaged and supported through active involvement in agenda planning and briefings      |
| Many of the building blocks of an effective governance framework are in place  | There are not always sufficient opportunities for members to engage in briefings and agenda setting                   | Establish a comprehensive Member training and development programme Authority.  |
| Clear lines of accountability and terms of reference have been established for committees and boards   | The external audit is not yet complete and there have been many issues flagged to the team that need to be addressed. | Ensure scrutiny is given greater status and support to enable it to focus on the key strategic issues facing the authority. |

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|---|---|--|
| <p>There are some good examples of pre-decision scrutiny and task and finish group work</p> | <p>The importance of Audit and Governance Committee is not fully understood.</p> <p>There needs to be a refreshed comprehensive member training and development programme</p> <p>Scrutiny is not enabled and supported to address the key issues facing the authority</p> |  |
|---|---|--|

The Council will develop a comprehensive plan to implement these recommendations in 2020-2021.

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## Principle E

- ***Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it***

In October 2018 the Council appointed Josie Wragg as permanent Chief Executive and she is leading and implementing the authority's ambitious plans for transformation. There is a new performance review system that came into effect on 1 May 2019 that covers all officers that identified appropriate and targeted training. There is also a new Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure that came into force in February 2019 and this is available to all staff on the Council's intranet.

A training programme for new and existing members has been continued in 2019-20 including training/briefings regarding:

- GDPR.
- Safeguarding Adults
- The Overview and Scrutiny process
- Crime & Disorder
- Charing skills for Chairs and Vice Chairs
- Acting as a Trustee for New sub-Committee
- Equalities, Human Rights and Cohesion

In 2018 the council launched the Slough Academy. The Slough Academy is the Council's new approach to growing and developing our staff to help build a stable and successful workforce that will serve our residents in the best possible way. This is now well underway and there are now 25 apprentices enrolled in the scheme with working continuing to create a pipeline of new recruits at all levels.

There are policies and procedures in place to ensure that Members and staff are protected against conflicts of interests

• **Council subsidiaries and other entities**

The Council has a major long term partnering agreement for the regeneration of the town via a local asset backed vehicle ("LABV") know as Slough Urban Renewal (SUR). Further information is available under the following link:

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/business/regenerating-slough/slough-urban-renewal.aspx>

The Council commissions a range of services from organisations in the voluntary and community sector. These are primarily provided through a voluntary service contract with Slough Prevention Alliance Community Engagement (SPACE) a consortium of voluntary and community organisations. Further information is available under the following link:

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/useful-adult-social-care-contact-details.aspx>

The Council's children's services are provided on behalf of the Council by Slough Children's Services Trust, a company limited by guarantee incorporated pursuant to ministerial order. Further information on the Trust is available under the following link:

<https://www.scstrust.co.uk/>

The service is provided under a service provision agreement lasting until 2021. The services provision agreement is due for review and the Council has undertaken an options appraisal for future provision of these services which it is evaluating. The children's service now has an OFSTED rating of "requires improvement to be Good". Slough Children's Services Trust has, however, faced a challenging financial period in 2019-2020 and the Council are working with the Trust company and the DfE to seek to stabilise the position and to ensure that Children's Services are not affected. The Council have also agreed to join Regional Adoption Agreements hosted by the London Borough of Harrow, who have procured the services of a major national provider of adoption services, the Thomas Coram Foundation, which will enhance the Council's adoption offer. These arrangements are expected to take effect by September 2020.

The Council's housing stock is maintained, improved and developed under a major outsourced contract with Osborne for a 7 year term which commenced on 1 December 2017. Further information is available under the following link:

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/housing/managing-service-delivery-of-rmi.aspx>

The Council has also incorporated two housing subsidiary companies, James Elliman Homes Limited, which provides homes for letting at affordable rents for persons not able to access housing at market rent and Herschel Homes Limited (presently dormant) which is intended to develop new homes for letting at market rents. Both companies are wholly owned by the Council and are local authority controlled companies within the Local authorities (Companies) Order 1995. The directors are appointed by the Council who operate under the terms of appointment agreements with the Council and within the scope of shareholder agreements between the companies and the Council.

The Council has also incorporated a new asset management company, Slough Asset Management Limited (presently dormant) which is also wholly owned by the Council and a local authority controlled company. This is intended to be used as a vehicle for holding strategic investment properties acquired by the Council as part of its investment strategy. This company is controlled by the Council's Strategic Acquisitions Board (SAB) comprising of Leader Members, the Section 151 Officer and specialist asset management officers to manage the council's portfolio of investment properties as part of its investment strategy.

The Council have now also established a commercial sub-committee of Cabinet to lead and co-ordinate the Council's commercial activities which are designed to provide prudent returns to support the General Fund.

The Council is also the holder of the entire issued share capital of Ground Rent Estates 5 Limited, a company incorporated under the Companies Acts under number 05997934. This company is the owner of Nova House, a private residential block of flats within the town with serious fire risk deficiencies. The company was acquired by the Council for a nominal sum in order to enable the Council to address these deficiencies in the most effective way having regard to its statutory duties as a regulator of private housing in its area. Plans are now at an advanced stage of progression to effect works to Nova House which will render it safe from fire risk and provide safe homes for residents.

The Council's customer services, IT services and revenues and benefits services were provided under a major contract with an outsourced provider, Arvato Public Sector Services Limited. The Council exercised an early termination provision within the contract in order to promote its transformation plans and the provision of those services was brought back in house with effect from 1 November 2019. The services have now been stabilised and enhanced for the purposes of making significant contributions to the Council's transformation programme.

The Council is also a major partner in the Frimley Health and Care System involving the NHS, local authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups providing integrated care and health services across 750,000 residents.

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## Principle F

- *Managing Risk and Performance*

The Council's Risk Management Strategy sets out the Council's approach to identifying; prioritising and controlling risks. There is a Corporate Risk Register and individual Risk registers for each Directorate. Corporate Risks are reviewed by the Risk Management Board – chaired by the Section 151 Officer on a monthly basis and it is expected that Directorate risk registers are reviewed on a monthly basis.

The figure below shows the current risks that are on the Corporate Risk Register.



Cabinet receives reports that have been to various other Boards and committees these include :

- The Corporate Balance Scorecard together with progress on the council's major projects

- is reported to Cabinet and to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis. This report also provides data on the progress made against election pledges.
  - The Statutory Equalities Report that includes the Gender Pay Gap report.
  - The Capital and Revenue monitoring report
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## Principle G

- *Implementing good practices and transparency reporting, and accountability*

## Improvements

The 2018/19 Annual Governance Statement identified various areas for improvement

| <b>Issues Reported in 2018/19</b>  | <b>2019/20 Action taken</b>   | <b>Is this still an Issue for 2020/21</b>            |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Safeguarding services and Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people (including risk assessments).</b> | The Council’s Children’s Services have in recent years been provided under independent trust arrangements mandated by ministerial order following findings of inadequacy following past inspections. The last inspection has found considerable improvements such that the service has progressed to “requires improvement to be good”. The Council will now be moving to consider options for the future of the service and its financial stability in tandem with the DfE.. The Council have also completed a complete review of its children’s safeguarding arrangements. There is now in place a grouping of service leads from all areas with safeguarding responsibilities which meets regularly to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are robust. The findings of this group are regularly considered by the Council’s Management Team. | Yes but action is being taken to address this issue. |



|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p><b>Contract Management</b></p>   | <p>The Council have now completed the re-procurement of all of its major long term contracts covering maintenance of its housing stock, highways and public realm and management of its corporate buildings portfolio and it has brought back in house its environmental services functions. A corollary of this has been better contracts and arrangements which address the deficiencies of past procurements. The Council has also effected early termination of its major revenues and benefits, customer services and ICT services contract and brought them back in house and stabilised these services The Council has started to embark on developing a commercialisation strategy to improve the Council's business acumen and obtain better value as part of its transformation programme. Part of this strategy will be to consider improving the quality of the Council's contract management proficiencies. The data around its procurement is also being considerably improved as is the rigour on the approval of procurement business cases by its Procurement Review Board.</p> | <p>Yes but action is being taken to address this issue</p> |
| <p><b>Continued Economic Instability and Turbulence at a national level</b></p> | <p>Failure to deliver a balanced budget remained on the Corporate risk Register for 2019/20 The Council is acute to the potential for economic instability and turbulence at a national level, exacerbated by the uncertainties of Brexit The Council participates in national and regional planning arrangements and it monitors the changing situation and the Council's preparedness to deal with contingencies at weekly meetings of the Council Management Team. The Council has Medium Term Financial Strategy and a Treasury</p>  | <p>Yes, but it is being monitored and managed.</p>         |

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  | Management strategy in place which are reviewed regularly. The Council is on plan to deliver balanced budgets over the next three years. The Council is also gearing up for impacts arising from the potential impacts of the spread of the coronavirus.  |   |
| <b>Managing a mixed economy workforce.</b>     | The Council now has in place an Enterprise Resource Planning system, Agresso, which is beginning to yield more reliable and robust data to serve as a management tool to enable the Council's Management Team to address such matters as gender pay gap reporting and produce strategies to address such matters.   | Yes but improvements are being made.                                  |
| <b>Partnership and Governance Arrangements</b> | The Council's major Partnership arrangement is the LABV which is the delivery vehicle for the Town's major regeneration projects. The governance arrangements are set out in a formal partnership agreement. Due to the scale and importance of this arrangement, however, as part of the Council's internal audit plan, the internal auditors are in the process of carrying out an audit of the working of these arrangements the outcome of which will be reviewed by the Council's Management Team. | Yes and an internal auditor's audit is underway.                      |
| <b>Procurement</b>                             | This continues to be an area requiring improvement. Internal Auditors' recommendations are being progressively implemented and external support has been commissioned to revise the Council's Procurement Strategy and Procurement Operating Procedures. The Council's Contract Procedure Rules have been updated update and simplified to make them more effective.  | Yes but arrangements are being put into place to effect improvements. |
| <b>Schools Environment</b>                     | In 2019/20 Slough children and young people have continued to achieve excellent results and are out-  | No.   |

|                            |   |   |
|----------------------------|---|---|
|                            | <p>performing both national averages and statistical neighbours. The Council are continuing an ambitious multi-million pound investment in school building. The Council continue to make improvements in internal controls and have worked with schools to help them adopt best practice in in safeguarding and keeping children and young people safe.</p>   |   |
| <b>Business Continuity</b> | <p>The Council has engaged external resources to support the Council's Business Continuity and Response Manager. Business Impact Analyses for service areas have been completed and have been followed up by detailed Business Recovery Plans for all areas to provide robust arrangements to secure business continuity following any disruptive events.</p>   | <p>Yes but arrangements are in place to ensure business continuity in the event of contingencies.</p> |
| <b>Voids Management</b>    | <p>The Council have now entered into a new long term contract with Osborne for the management and development of its housing stock and this is now underway. The procurement specifically sought to deal with this issue and it s now being managed by the new contractor.</p>  | <p>Yes but it is improving.</p>   |
| <b>Health and Safety</b>   | <p>The major focus of the Council has been the compliance of its housing stock, corporate buildings and buildings owned by third parties which are used to accommodate Council clients and customers with Health &amp; safety standards with respect to such matters as legionella, asbestos and fire safety. A dedicated team has been and is continuing to work through examining this portfolio for compliance on these issues to enable the Council's management team to obtain assurance in this area.</p> | <p>Yes but progress is being made.</p>  |
| <b>Adult Safeguarding</b>  | <p>The Council is now working more effectively to promote the safety of</p>   | <p>No</p>   |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
|   | <p>Slough residents. This means safeguarding adults from abuse, neglect and criminal activities including exploitation. The Council's work is informed by local intelligence, national research and experience. Partners have worked together to approach the current and emerging challenges to the safety of residents. As a result of negotiation and engagement of partner agencies during 2018/19 the Council has developed a new Safeguarding business arrangement – bringing together the key statutory partners in a safeguarding leaders group to agree and set priorities and monitor impact.</p> |  |
| <p><b>Implementation of previous Internal Audit actions</b></p> | <p>The Council have progressed further with their process of recommendation tracking to ensure that recommendations made by Internal Auditors are implemented. The recommendations are discussed at Directorate Management meetings monitored at monthly meetings of the Council's Risk and Audit Board. The progress is reported quarterly to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee. The robustness of the implementation of audit recommendations has continued to improve</p>   | <p>Yes but improvement is progressing.</p> |

**2018/19 and 2019/20 External Audit Recommendations**

These External Audits have been delayed due to resource challenges at the External Auditors. Any recommendations arising from these Audits will be addressed in 2020/2021.

| <b>Issue</b> | <b>Management Response</b> |
|--------------|----------------------------|
|              |                            |
|              |                            |

## **Review of Effectiveness**

### Internal Audit

The Council uses a number of ways to review the effectiveness of its governance arrangements. One of the key statements is the annual report and the opinion of the Head of internal audit.

During 2019/20 The Head of Internal Audit has issued 24 assurance reports of which 14 (58 %), were deemed a “positive assurance”. Of the 10 that received a negative assurance 1 area was provided with “no assurance”. This was:

- Debtors Management

The other 9 areas that received negative assurance were:

- Health & Safety
- Safety Advisory Group
- James Eliman Housing
- Rent Arrears Recovery
- Temporary Accommodation Strategy
- Regulatory services – Cash Handling
- Asset Register

The Head of internal Audit’s opinion for 2019/20 is :

***“The organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control.***

***However, our work has identified further enhancements to the framework of risk management, governance and internal control to ensure that it remains adequate and effective.”***

### External Audit

Grant Thornton are currently undertaking the statutory audits of the 2018/19 and 2019/20 statements of accounts.

Other areas that contribute to monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the Council are:

- The Risk Management Board
- The annual assurance statements produced by Service Leads
- The work of
  - the Audit and Corporate Governance committee;
  - the Standards Sub-Committee;

- Internal Audit;
- Overview and scrutiny Committee.

**Conclusion**

The Council operates by seeking all appropriate professional advice and seeks to have regard to all appropriate guidance and to act in a prudent way and is satisfied that appropriate governance arrangements are in place; however it is committed to at least maintaining and, wherever possible, improving these arrangements, in particular ,by addressing issues identified by Internal and external Audit as requiring improvement

**James Swindlehurst**  
**Leader Slough Borough Council**

**Josie Wragg**  
**Chief Executive, Slough Borough Council**

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## APPENDIX COVID-19

In late February and March 2020 the Council was incrementally made aware of the risks and the potential consequences of the spread of the Covid-19 disease.

The Council immediately adopted a strategy for dealing with the predictions of the possible spread of the disease and established a hierarchy of critical, priority and other services in respect of its statutory and discretionary functions and directed all staff that could carry out their duties from home, to work from home and equipped them to do so. The Council also immediately set up a response room and implemented a streamlined decision making process to enable quick, co-ordinated and responsive decision making, based on the “Gold” and “Silver” emergency decision making model to take charge of the Council’s essential response to the emerging pandemic for the protection of its residents and people working or visiting its area. The Response team immediately established a register of decisions taken to provide a record of the Council’s essential response.

The Council speeded up its transformation programme plans for adoption of new technology and quickly adopted the necessary applications to enable officers, members and senior managers to communicate effectively.

The Chief Executive kept constant communication with Lead Members on all decision and quickly established a weekly video conference meeting to enable all Members to be kept apprised of all developments and to enable Members to feed back to the Chief Executive and Directors on matters affecting their individual wards.

As soon legislative changes enabled the Council to do so, the Council established a system enabling Members to attend meetings of the Council, Cabinet and other committees and panels by remote access and quickly resumed its calendar of meetings with minimal cancellations of meetings. It was able, therefore, to hold its Annual Meeting and to resume democratic and transparent decision making with minimal disruption. The Council also immediately sought ratification of all significant decisions taken for by officers during the hiatus before the holding of formal meetings was resumed.

The Council also quickly established pages on its website and intranet to disseminate essential information and guidance to local residents and businesses on matters related to the pandemic, steps to stay protected and how to access Council help and services during the emergency.

The Council set up a financial task force which met weekly to constantly monitor the financial impacts on the Council of the pandemic and to oversee the distribution of financial relief to local businesses affected by the pandemic and to the local care sector to enable control of the spread of infection. The Council also kept Lead Members constantly apprised of the continuing effect of the pandemic on the Council’s finances and financial strategies.

As soon as legislative changes enabled the Council to do so, the Council also quickly established a system to enable the holding of appeals against school place allocations which could be attended remotely by panel members, parents and guardians.

The Council also took account immediately of guidance issued by the Cabinet Office by way of Procurement Policy Notes to assist suppliers in its supply chain who were at risk and to assist the longer term recovery and transition from Covid-19.

The Council in collaboration with its neighbouring authorities also developed plans and strategies for dealing with local outbreaks of Covid-19 and adopted its own Local Outbreak Management Plan.

The Council immediately made arrangements to secure accommodation to protect homeless persons within its area.

The Council effected all necessary guidance from Central Government, Public Health England and the Health & Safety Executive to protect the health and well being of its staff and the people residing, working or visiting its area.

In the context of the need to deal with the immediate consequences of the pandemic the Council also started planning for the longer term recovery and transition from the pandemic and of the needs and opportunities and developing a strategy for that purpose.