

Democratic Governance Action Plan

Update – 1 November 2022

Actions

The actions taken to date and proposed are designed to primarily address the following Directions:

3.b. “An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of democratic services [understood to mean ‘democratic governance as a whole’], to include rapid training for council officers, a revised term of reference for the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee, and the agreement of an Annual Governance Statement for 2020-21.”

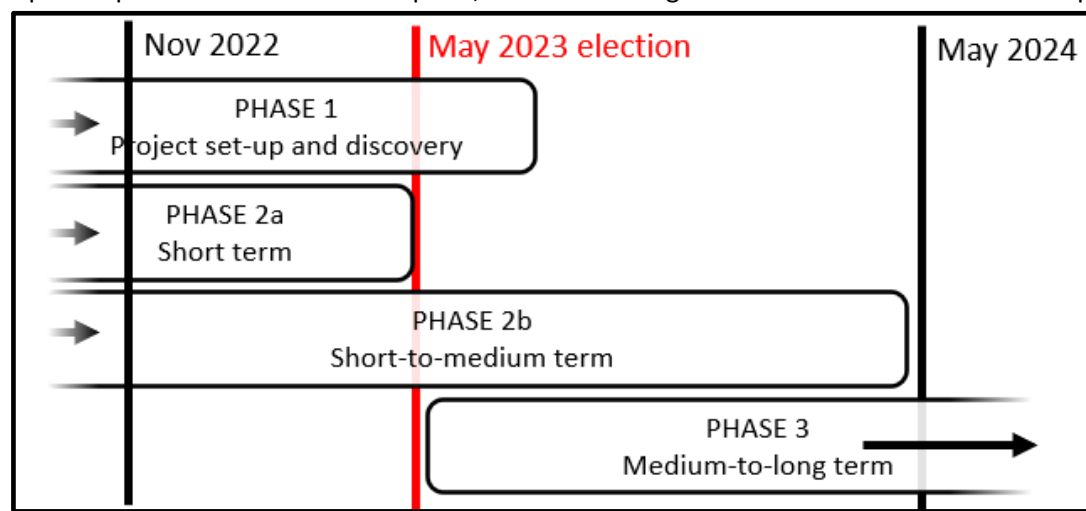
3.g. “A suitable officer structure and scheme of delegation for the Authority which provides sufficient resources to deliver the Authority’s functions in an effective way, including the Improvement Plan and its monitoring and reporting, prioritising permanent recruitment and/or longer-term contract status of interim positions.”

7. “In the first six months take steps to enable better and evidence-based decision making, including enhancing the data and insight functions to enable better evidence-based decision making.”

Due to the nature of the plan and required improvements, there is overlap between this and other directions, including the directions relating to scrutiny, audit and culture change. In addition, some actions are covered in separate action plans which overlap with the above Directions, for example relating to governance and financial management, contracts and procurement and internal audit.

Timescales

Full project and resource planning will be part of phase 1. Until this is complete, the timescales given are broad and indicative. All phases are expected to overlap.



No.	Headline action	Detailed actions	Action Owner	Indicative timescale/priority of future actions
1.	Set up formal project management and reporting arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align plan, materials and reporting with whole-council approach to recovery action planning and reporting • Seek programme/project management resource • Create informal 'Democratic Governance Improvement Group' chaired by Monitoring Officer, populated by key governance roles across the council and action owners from this plan, to collaborate on, oversee and propel delivery of this plan • Assess baseline and benchmark via survey of staff and members • Put in place formal reporting to relevant elected member meetings 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 1
2.	Continuous ongoing development of this plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify further actions by reviewing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ governance framework (CIPFA/SOLACE guidance) ○ outstanding internal audit actions ○ Business Continuity and emergency planning arrangements ○ major corporate systems and their business impact / risks etc. 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 1
3.	Continue to improve forward planning of decision-making, including early engagement with members and other stakeholders	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Internal corporate schedule produced and reviewed weekly at CLT and SLT</i> • <i>Internal corporate schedule reviewed at Lead Members and Directors meeting</i> <p>Next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set and cascade clear expectations regarding EDs' and ADs' responsibility to brief members regularly • Create and deliver further Slough-specific training on working in a political environment, for senior leaders and frequent report authors 	Chief Executive / Monitoring Officer	PHASE 2a
4.	Improve effectiveness of, and compliance with, formal decision-making processes	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Senior officer training programme to improve report writing</i> • <i>Clear timescales and clearance processes published and promoted throughout council</i> • <i>Cabinet reports reviewed at CLT and LM&Ds</i> • <i>Published and publicised internally a guide to cabinet and committee lead-in dates</i> 	Monitoring Officer	

No.	Headline action	Detailed actions	Action Owner	Indicative timescale/priority of future actions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lead members briefed and presenting reports at Cabinet meetings</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve quality of Cabinet and Committee reports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comms campaign for senior officers and drip-feed messages at weekly CLT/SLT Corporate Schedule item ○ Put in place protocol for seeking Chair's permission if report is proposed to be issued late ○ Consider reporting to CMT about late reports, by directorate ○ Ensure clearance / sign offs are received for all reports ○ Reports without full sign-offs recorded in report template, not to be published without specific authority of Leader and Chief Executive • Review whether single member decision-making should be introduced. • Review processes for significant officer decision-making 		<p>PHASE 2a</p> <p>PHASE 2b</p>
5.	Further improve quality of formal reports	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Officer training to top three tiers on report writing</i> • <i>Improved clarity and timeliness of clearance processes and discussion at CLT re: cabinet reports</i> • <i>Improved early briefing of lead members</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver further bite-size sessions about report-writing for lead officers • Create self-service guidance for officers about formal report writing and decision-making processes • NB further improvements in process, timeliness and engagement (elsewhere in plan) will further improve quality 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 2a
6.	Establish agreed and documented expectations and consistent processes for commissioner decisions	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Meeting between chief of staff, former MO and COO</i> • <i>Discussion with other local authorities under statutory intervention for example frameworks</i> 	Monitoring Officer	

No.	Headline action	Detailed actions	Action Owner	Indicative timescale/priority of future actions
		<p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with the commissioners and their chief of staff, devise a framework for consistent, robust and transparent commissioner decision-making, advice and guidance. 		PHASE 2a
7.	Ensure effective introduction to local government decision-making and processes as part of induction are in place for all new starters and those promoted including senior officers.	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Bespoke training session on essentials of local government decision-making for top three tiers</i> <i>Feedback captured from above event and actions discussed and agreed at CLT</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review induction processes and introduce session on 'governance in a political environment' for new starters Review management and senior officer development programme to incorporate support for officers who have been promoted within the organisation 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 2a PHASE 2b
8.	Ensure effective and respectful member officer relations	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Training session for top three tiers on member officer relations protocol</i> <i>Externally facilitated workshop between CLT and lead members</i> <i>Review of member casework system</i> <i>Report to Standards Committee on various matters on ethical framework, including member complaints</i> <i>Meetings between statutory governance officers and leaders of groups</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather feedback from staff and members, via methods to be decided eg surveys, workshops etc Governance culture workshop for top two tiers with external facilitator using CfGS toolkit Link to wider culture change action plan, eg could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review effectiveness of local Standards regime Review purpose and practice of Lead Members & Directors meeting, ensure it is working effectively Reinforce arrangements for clear Member ownership of decisions 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 1 and PHASE 2b PHASE 2a PHASE 1 and PHASE 2b

No.	Headline action	Detailed actions	Action Owner	Indicative timescale/priority of future actions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adopt ‘no surprises’ message as a principle of member/officer relationships, including as part of member / officer training ○ Introduce very regular all-member briefings by senior officer/member leadership (links to Scrutiny improvement) ○ Review relationship between member/officer relations protocol and actual member/officer behaviours ○ Consider implementation of a portfolio management approach in the cabinet office with an improved, non-political support offer wrapped around the relationship between exec members and their key stakeholders and other contacts. ○ Reset expectations with CLT and SLT around proactive engagement with councillors 		
9.	Assess and improve how the council’s real situation compares to its sense of self	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Training and self-assessment for Audit committee members</i> ● <i>Training and annual report for scrutiny members</i> ● <i>Externally facilitated workshop between CLT and lead members and regular lead member briefings and meetings</i> ● <i>Annual report on complaints data taken to Audit and Corporate Governance</i> ● <i>CLT Assurance meetings to review performance data</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct workshop with external facilitator funded by LGA based on CfGS’ seven characteristics of good governance with officers to assess how the council’s real situation compares to its sense of itself from a governance perspective ● Conduct further workshops involving members (and senior officers) to be supported by LGA. ● Review and improve how officers and members monitor and act on data about the council’s performance ● Review approach to resident / public participation in decision-making ● Review options for gathering residents’ views on satisfaction with services. 	Chief Executive / Monitoring Officer	PHASE 2b

No.	Headline action	Detailed actions	Action Owner	Indicative timescale/priority of future actions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and improve how members self-assess their performance. <p>[Links to wider culture change and resident engagement action plans]</p>		
10.	Improve organisational awareness of Slough's particular political dynamics	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Training on local government decision-making for officers to include governance arrangements, political influence and roles and responsibilities</i> • <i>CLT report on feedback from officer training agreeing next steps</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance and political awareness built into officer induction programme • Put in place Member-Officer relationships and culture development programme • Leadership development to include political awareness and skills 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 2b
11.	Revise directorates' internal schemes of delegation in line with recently reviewed Scheme of Delegations	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Revised scheme of delegations agreed</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise directorates' internal schemes of delegation in line with recently reviewed Scheme of Delegations 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 2b
12.	Improve Member Development	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Bespoke training for scrutiny members</i> • <i>Bespoke training for Audit and Corporate Governance Committee members</i> • <i>Welcome induction event and handbook for new members</i> • <i>Briefings with chairs and vice-chairs of scrutiny</i> • <i>Briefings in advance of formal member meetings</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree 4-year member development strategy, designed with input from councillors • Agree annual member development plan aligned to strategy, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ New council induction programme from May 2023 ○ Cabinet member support and mentoring ○ Scrutiny and other Chairs targeted support and mentoring 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 2a

No.	Headline action	Detailed actions	Action Owner	Indicative timescale/priority of future actions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specialised intervention/support for Scrutiny members from CfGS ○ Regular bitesize training approach embedded in new, frequent, all-member scrutiny briefings outside of formal committee meetings 		
13.	Improve provision of information to Members	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Review and communication on member casework, agreed with leaders of groups</i> ● <i>Weekly member bulletin</i> ● <i>Briefings with lead members and scrutiny members</i> ● <i>Confidential budget papers available to scrutiny members in advance of budget scrutiny</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create intranet or sharepoint pages dedicated to information for Councillors ● Improve weekly member newsletter ● Implement regular programme of ‘all member scrutiny briefings’ 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 2a
14.	Deliver accurate and efficient all-out election and maximise the intended benefits of the change to four yearly elections	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Council decision to move to whole council election</i> ● <i>Boundary review</i> ● <i>Polling station review (underway)</i> ● <i>New Returning Officer and senior leads for election management</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Complete polling places and polling stations review ● Identify and maximise the intended benefits of the change to four yearly elections, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Savings from electoral services function ○ Constitutional measures to allow for stability and progression of roles amongst councillors ○ effective member induction and ongoing member development programme, ○ develop and implement a longer-term strategic planning and delivery cycle linked to the four-year municipal cycle 	Returning Officer	PHASE 2a
15.	2022/23 Annual review of Policy Statement on Corporate Governance	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>New Policy Statement on Corporate Governance based on CIPFA framework approved by full council</i> 	Monitoring Officer	

No.	Headline action	Detailed actions	Action Owner	Indicative timescale/priority of future actions
		<p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct desktop analysis of organisational governance eg annual review of Policy Statement on Corporate Governance in line with CIPFA/SOLACE guidance, assessing any gaps or weaknesses in governance framework and adding associated improvement actions to action plans. 		PHASE 1
16.	Review and reprioritise use of Democratic Services Team's limited resources	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Recruitment of senior interim lead for governance and scrutiny, including fulfilling statutory scrutiny officer</i> • <i>Commencement of recruitment to scrutiny role vacancy</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish recruitment to vacancies including new scrutiny posts created in response to Government intervention • Review of service provision with a view to streamlining offer, eg options to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduce/contain frequency of some committees' meetings ○ Rationalise number and frequency of committees ○ Review statutory school appeals cost/benefit • Review of support for partnership meetings linked to wider work on effectiveness of statutory partnerships 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 1 PHASE 2a PHASE 2b
17.	Ensure document storage and retention arrangements are robust	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Review of deeds by legal team, including advice on deeds packets</i> • <i>Review and plan for storage of existing physical deeds</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review circumstances around deeds and storage of legal documentation by SBC in-house • Review arrangements for electronic deeds storage 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 2b
18.	Implement annual review of constitution	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Rolling review of the constitution based on needs</i> <p>Next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult on whether any further elements of the constitution require to be updated with a view to adoption at the Annual Council (note action elsewhere re: scrutiny-related changes) 	Monitoring Officer	Phase 2a / 2b

No.	Headline action	Detailed actions	Action Owner	Indicative timescale/priority of future actions
19.	Strengthen community engagement in the council's recovery and improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review community participation and engagement in local democracy / decision-making, including consideration of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public question time at committees/cabinet/council ○ Scrutiny's approach to involving communities in their work ○ Review effectiveness of consultation and engagement in decision-making through eg formal consultation and public participation 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 2b
20.	Improve how the council looks to the future to assure its own viability and set its decision-making priorities	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>New five year corporate plan linked to recovery themes</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build cycle of short/medium/long term corporate planning into corporate schedule), and communicate the intended pathway to the organisation ● Long-term options for future viable governance of the authority explored and assessed, in light of medium/long term pressures/challenges 	Monitoring Officer / Executive Director for Strategy	PHASE 2b PHASE 3
21.	Improve quality of local (external) partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review partnerships governance 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 3