

Progress towards becoming a  
Best Value Council, including  
progress against the Directions to  
the Council

*A review after two years of  
recovery activity*

December 2023

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[Note – Appendices A to F are not included in the Reference report from Scrutiny to Cabinet, April 2024](#)

## 1. Functional Capability Assessments

In the first six months of intervention, the council completed a Functional Capability Assessment across the council. This assessment was used to inform the council's Improvement and Recovery Plan, as captured in the Doing Right By Slough Corporate Plan, which was approved by Council in 2022.

This Direction was confirmed as Complete at that point in time. No further detailed commentary is therefore given in this paper.

## 2. Avoid Poor Governance or Financial Mismanagement

Detail to follow in papers for Finance Board scheduled on 21<sup>st</sup> December.

## 3a. Financial Sustainability Action Plan

Detail to follow in papers for Finance Board scheduled on 21<sup>st</sup> December.

### 3b. Democratic Governance Action Plan

WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL DIRECTION TO THE COUNCIL?

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*An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of democratic services, 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.*

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*NB - With the early agreement of commissioners, this direction has been read as referring to 'democratic governance' rather than only the Democratic Services Team.*

A range of other sources have informed the democratic governance improvement action plan including, but not limited to, Jim Taylor's governance review, self-assessment workshops facilitated by third parties, audit findings, surveys of councillors and officers, and professional assessment by officers.

As presented to commissioners at the Improvement & Recovery Board in June 2023, the council plans to assess the strength of its own governance arrangements using recognised external frameworks and both qualitative and quantitative data in order to build up evidence which would demonstrate good "business as usual" governance to ourselves, to our external auditors and, in turn, Commissioners and the Secretary of State. These were to include:

- our annual review of our Code of Governance as part of the Annual Governance Statement process (more information below)
- a self-assessment by the wider leadership team based on the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's 'seven characteristics of good governance' (we laid down a baseline a year ago and will repeat the exercise once the current restructure is completed), and
- a survey of councillors (the follow-up survey has just completed).

In addition to this, the recently published draft Best Value Guidance has identified Governance as one of the seven 'best value themes'. This describes the characteristics of a well-functioning authority and indicators of potential failure. It provides helpful guidance on the outcomes that should be evidenced in relation to democratic governance, and the council has assured itself that its democratic governance improvement action plan is aligned to these outcomes, which include:

- A well-run council will have clear and robust governance and scrutiny arrangements in place that are fit for purpose, appropriate to the governance arrangements adopted locally, understood by politicians and staff alike and reviewed regularly.
- Decision-making processes, within clear schemes of delegation, should be transparent, regularly reviewed, clearly followed, and understood, enabling decision-makers to be held to account effectively.

- There should also be evidence of decisions following good public law decision-making principles (reasonableness, proportionality, fairness, etc.). Codes of conduct and HR processes should be to sector standard and ensure effective support for whistle-blowers.

## SUMMARY

Overall, the council has moved from a position of significant governance weakness, with major red flags in its governance framework and culture, and new and historic governance issues surfacing frequently without some of the basic control and assurance mechanisms in place, to a position in which the fundamentals of the governance framework are sound, while areas of weakness are known and risk assessed. Processes and procedures are now in place to deliver further improvements as set out in the project plan, and the council has set out how it intends to monitor and maintain the strength of its governance arrangements in future.

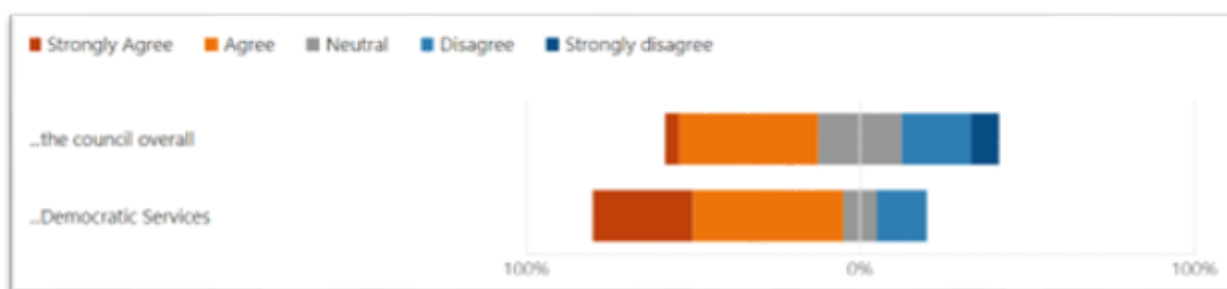
## PROGRESS SINCE JULY COMMISSIONERS REPORT TO DLUHC

- ✓ Following completion of the first two phases of the democratic governance improvement plan, the Monitoring Officer produced a plan for the following six months' delivery and Commissioner Curran met with the Monitoring Officer and Statutory Scrutiny Officer on 7 September to review progress and next steps including a view of both the project workbook and 'plan on a page'.
- ✓ Completion of Annual Governance Statement (AGS) 2022/23 including review of governance arrangements and creation of AGS action plan; mid-year progress review against the AGS action plan.
- ✓ Established effective relationships and ways of working between lead Members and lead officers, which proved resilient through two cabinet reshuffles.
- ✓ Very proactive involvement of the Monitoring Officer in incidents of poor behaviour involving councillors, with political-group-led resolution as the preferred outcome to help establish self-governing systems for the duration of the municipal cycle. However, all formal processes followed as necessary for complaints under the council's Code of Conduct.
- ✓ Robust intervention continues behind-the-scenes where necessary with individual members, committee chairs and group leaders, to address governance risks and assist in the development of a positive leadership culture in the new council. This includes provision of additional training, extra pre-meetings and agenda-setting sessions led by the Statutory Scrutiny Officer, regular meetings with Group Leaders by various key governance officers and the bedding-in of new working relationships within the Democratic Services Team between the cabinet office, democratic services, and political group support officers.
- ✓ The Leader and Chief Executive attended Standards Committee on 10 October 2023 to reiterate their commitment to high standards of conduct. The committee is engaging with its brief, having now also input into the forthcoming survey of councillors and commissioned a Member Development Working Group.
- ✓ The council reinforced awareness of respective roles of officers and members, for example this is supported by a new draft Member/ Officer Relations Protocol which has been presented to IRB for review as part of wider report on member behaviour. The protocol has been debated and agreed by Member Panel on the Constitution and commissioners were complimentary about the re-drafted access to information provisions, highlighting members legitimate rights to access information. Following review by members of the Standards Committee, it is intended this will be submitted to Council in January 2024.
- ✓ Various improvements to cabinet office processes and support as the new cabinet has settled in and their working relationships with lead officers have matured; this has included e.g. regular cycles of 1:1s for all lead members, allocation of lead support officers to cabinet

members, and stronger demand-led agenda items for Lead Members & Directors meetings (and the format of this meeting remains under observation by the Leader).

- ✓ Programme of governance training for officers has run throughout intervention and continues to develop; most recently incorporating governance sessions for all new starters and a weekly 'Governance Leadership Learning' programme which has been running for the wider leadership team since July 2023. The 'Governance Leadership Learning' programme continues with up to 30 members of the extended CLT attending each week and videos made available afterwards. Topics have included e.g. Risk Management, Working in a Political Environment, Good Scrutiny, Officer Code of Conduct, 'Confidential' reports, and Report Writing for Success.
- ✓ Further steps taken to support Executive Directors with timely production of reports for stakeholder engagement, clearance and sign-off. Including more training, developments to corporate schedule (reviewed weekly at CLT), updating arrangements for commissioner clearance using a single-point-of-contact, and in December the launch of a corporate SharePoint site to assist with monitoring, collaboration, and clearance of reports. This work is ongoing to encourage consistency across service areas.
- ✓ Created opportunities for members and officers to exchange ideas in informal settings, to help build trust and a positive culture of cross-party working post-election in e.g. pre-meetings for Scrutiny and Audit Committees.
- ✓ In November 2023 Council appointed three new independent co-opted members to the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee which fills all four co-opted vacancies for the first time in memory and will bring a wider pool of expertise and independent oversight to the work of the committee. Furthermore, the Audit Committee has had a bespoke member development programme with lots of additional officer support and in November 2023 Council appointed a Labour Group member to the position of Vice Chair to the Liberal Democrat Chair.
- ✓ Audit Committee has dealt with a range of key items such as an updated risk management strategy, improved progress against historic internal audit actions, update on AGS action plan progress and an SCF governance update - providing evidence of improved internal control, audit, and governance.
- ✓ Design and advertisement of new Monitoring Officer role as part of leadership restructure.
- ✓ Second Member Survey launched November-December 2023 which will be reported to Officers and Members in the New Year. The responses are broadly encouraging, for example, the percentage of councillors agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement: "I am satisfied by the quality of the member support provided by the council overall" has increased from 45.9% to 73.4% since January 2023. Only one single councillor reported dissatisfaction with the member support provided by democratic Services.

January 2023 “I am satisfied by the quality of the member support provided by...”



Dec 2023 “I am satisfied by the quality of the member support provided by...”



#### NEXT STEPS

- 2024 will see delivery of phase 2b and phase 3 of the council’s Democratic Governance Improvement plan, which includes a wide range of actions not fully replicated here as commissioners have direct access to the project documentation.
- The council proposed to commissioners at the Improvement and Recovery Board in June 2023 how it intended to monitor the strength of its own governance arrangements. This would in turn provide assurance for commissioners when considering progress against this direction. The democratic governance improvement action plan has continued on this basis. Therefore, as set out at IRB 29 June the council intends to measure progress through a mixture of:
  - a. effective annual review of the council’s governance arrangements (per CIPFA/SOLACE framework);
  - b. structured self-assessment by members and officers of the health of the council’s governance culture (per CfGS ‘delivering good governance’ characteristics of good governance); and
  - c. continuous ongoing (BAU) monitoring of governance health by the Corporate Governance Working Group chaired by the Monitoring Officer.
  - d. The November/December councillor survey will also be a useful source of data.
  - e. More recently, the draft Best Value guidance has been published, which also provides a description of effective governance which the council is reflecting in its improvement objectives.
- Review of SBC’s governance framework for the 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement is to be upgraded further during 2024 by gathering service assurance statements and updating the ‘policy statement on Corporate Governance’ into a more standard ‘code of governance’ – again, the purpose is for SBC to further assure itself of the strength of its governance arrangements, but the commissioners should be able to draw assurance from this in turn.
- The next phase of the Member Development Programme will take place, following the successful induction programme. The content of this will be strongly influenced by feedback



from the councillor survey. Further consideration to be given to formalising all-member subject-matter briefings as part of this.

- Improvements to the way we provide information to councillors e.g. on SharePoint and the council's intranet to allow councillors to self-serve (building on recent launch of SharePoint document repository for scrutiny committee members).
- Recruitment of permanent Monitoring Officer.
- Consideration of the outputs from the 'resident engagement and rebuilding trust' scrutiny task and finish group, with a view to any potential developments in democratic engagement by and with communities, including better leveraging the role of individual councillors in their communities.

#### PROGRESS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS

- ✓ Overall, the council has moved from a position of significant governance weakness, with major red flags in its governance framework and culture, and new and historic governance issues surfacing frequently without some of the basic control and assurance mechanisms in place, to a position in which the fundamentals of the governance framework are sound, while areas of weakness are known and risk assessed. Processes and procedures are now in place to deliver further improvements as set out in the project plan, and the council has set out how it intends to monitor and maintain the strength of its governance arrangements in future.
- ✓ The council resolved to move to four-yearly elections to assist with political stability; requested and then implemented an electoral review of ward boundaries moving from three-member to two-member wards; and successfully carried out elections on those new ward boundaries with new voter identification requirements in May 2023.
- ✓ Relatively seamless transition of Labour majority administration to a Conservative administration with no overall control underpinned by a Con/LibDem co-operation agreement (with a draft Corporate Plan agreed for consultation at the May meeting of the new administration, showing how successfully this transition was handled by lead officers and Members, maintaining momentum).
- ✓ Successful delivery of the first two phases of the council's Democratic Governance improvement plan, comprising a range of actions set out in this document which address governance culture and behaviours as well as process and procedures (as per evidence provided to the commissioners in a 'deep dive' at the Improvement and Recovery Board on 29 June 2023).
- ✓ Corporate Governance Working Group meets monthly and oversees project delivery as well as corporate governance health of the organisation, boosting the council's overall self-awareness about good governance.
- ✓ A cultural shift towards ensuring that finance and legal are appropriately central to decision-making, supported by a range of actions designed to improve effectiveness of, and compliance with, formal decision-making processes, such as via forward planning of

decision-making, early engagement with members and other stakeholders about better quality reports. Training about all this embedded in the employee induction programme.

- ✓ Range of actions taken by lead members and officers to ensure respectful member/officer relations and improve organisational awareness of Slough's particular political dynamics.
- ✓ Revised and updated Scheme of Delegations, along with internal schemes per directorate consistently dealing with financial, HR and procurement delegations and adjacent amendments to contract procedure rules and financial procedure rules.
- ✓ Reviewed and reprioritised Democratic Services Team's limited resources, including filling key vacancies, rationalising number of committees, improvements to procedure.
- ✓ A range of priority-informed constitutional changes and an ongoing programme of constitution review.
- ✓ New Executive Procedure Rules were approved by Council in July 2022 which promoted greater democratic participation by introducing new public speaking rights to Cabinet for the first time. They also established a new process for taking urgent key decisions in a far more open and transparent way.
- ✓ In October 2022, a new governance approach for asset disposals was agreed that ensured all major decisions on assets were taken in public by Cabinet and therefore were subject to all the controls and processes associated with a well-functioning Cabinet decision-making process.
- ✓ A new Standards Committee was split off from the Audit Committee, it has reviewed the whistleblowing policy and procedures against best practice, reviewed data about member support and heard from the Chief Executive and Leader about the steps they are taking to lead an authority with high standards of behaviour. Complaints reports capturing themes and learning were presented to the Audit committee.
- ✓ Enhanced Member Induction programme implemented with strong emphasis on behaviours (Nolan Principles) and (Code of) conduct, including swift adaptation post-election to equip the 22 new councillors (out of 42) to carry out their duties as members. The overwhelming majority of the councillors who responded to the recent councillor survey were satisfied by the induction they had received since May 2023, with only two councillors expressing any dissatisfaction.
- ✓ The Leader of Council has shown strong overt support for importance of mutual respect between members and between officers and members (e.g. email to all staff and members, roadshows etc).

## RISKS, ISSUES AND MITIGATIONS:

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The quality and timeliness of decision-making reports, and early involvement of key stakeholders, is not consistent across service areas. Good forward planning should help promote improved Member, community and public engagement and support an effective decision-making structure.

MITIGATION - Using the existing mechanisms such as the Corporate Schedule which is reviewed at CLT every week, CLT are taking personal and collective accountability for ensuring that reports do not miss deadlines except in legitimately exceptional circumstances. Exec Directors and report authors will be held accountable for the consequences of any delayed items due to missed deadlines. A service planning cycle is underway with clear links back to the corporate plan.

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The action plan from the 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement outlined several significant governance issues to be monitored through 2023. An update against that action plan was reviewed in public by the Audit and Governance Committee on 22 November 2023, outlining the progress on all fronts and further actions to be taken or areas of ongoing risk. The items on that action plan, and therefore covered by that update, are:

- Council Plan and compliance with DLUHC statutory direction
- Children's Social Care
- SEND (special educational needs) services
- Financial management / sustainability
- Asset Disposal Project
- Closing of statement of accounts
- Housing management
- Company governance arrangements
- Supporting new and inexperienced councillors
- Organisation and culture
- Resident engagement
- Performance and risk management

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Without an organisation-wide leadership induction / development programme and pipeline (a dependency to be delivered by HR), the council's high staff turnover may be allowed to erode the value of the extensive governance training efforts undertaken over the past two years.

MITIGATION - The Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement is currently reviewing plans for a leadership induction & development programme, with a view to identifying resources for it or reshaping the programme to be deliverable within existing resources. Meanwhile, leadership induction and development are conducted via the all-staff corporate induction and induction checklist including all-staff and manager-specific mandatory e-learning, with primarily ad-hoc ongoing personal development (with some

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good service-specific or subject-specific exceptions e.g. 'governance leadership learning' programme, which is recorded and available to new starters, and self-directed CPD for those in professions). The recommencement of 'extended CLT' and other wider leadership/management forum meetings soon, which have been paused during the current restructure, may also provide an opportunity for the council to develop a mutually supportive leadership team with a culture of helping new starters get up to speed.

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Recruitment – we need to recruit to two key statutory governance posts; namely the Monitoring Officer role which has been held on a part-time interim basis, since October 2022, and the Democratic Services Manager position as the current postholder has recently resigned. It is intended that the Democratic Services Manager be appointed as the Statutory Scrutiny Officer in due course subject to the agreement of the Commissioners.

MITIGATION – A national recruitment campaign has been carried out by Starfish for the Monitoring Officer role and interviews are to be held over the next month with an appointment intended to be made by the Commissioners (should they so wish to exercise that power) and endorsed/approved at the January Council meeting.

As far as the Democratic Services Manager post is concerned, an extensive recruitment exercise will be commenced in the New Year. In the meantime, a contingency plan is in place in the event of the current postholder leaving before the end of his notice period.

### 3c. Scrutiny Action Plan

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*“An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of the scrutiny function, to include a review of the Authority’s strategic risk register to make it fit for purpose.”*

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Directions: “...to secure the Authority’s compliance with the requirements of Part I of the 1999 Act, in particular: To... achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of democratic services, scrutiny... thereby delivering improvements in services and outcomes for the people of Slough”

A range of other sources have also informed the scrutiny improvement action plan including, but not limited to, Jim Taylor’s governance review, a scrutiny review by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, councillor surveys, audits, and professional assessment by officers.

#### SUMMARY

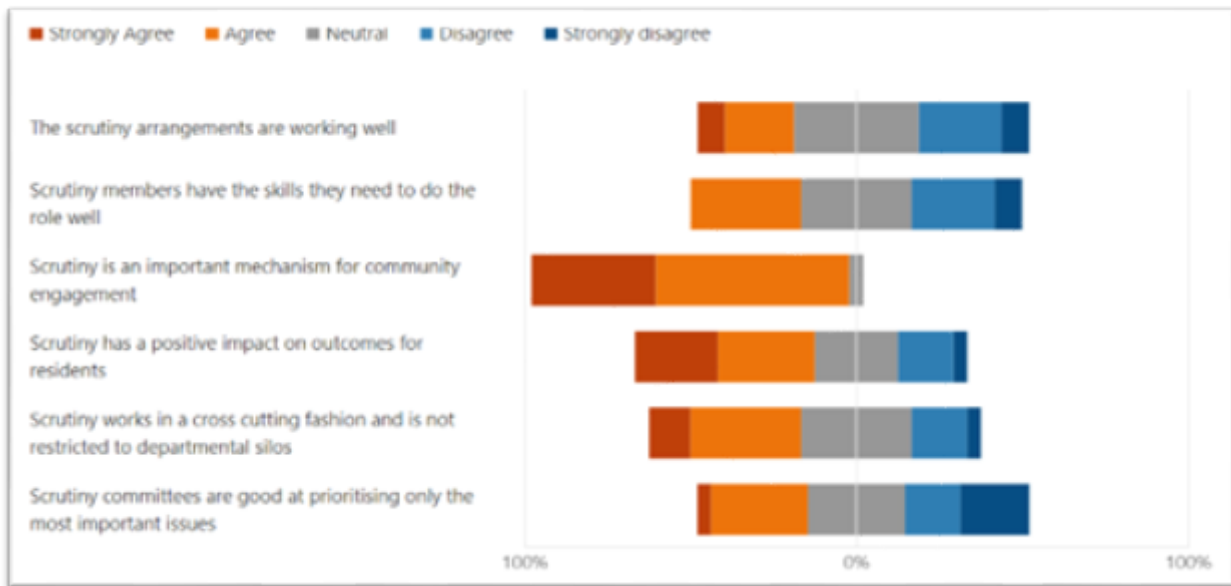
Overview and Scrutiny in Slough Borough Council has changed completely over the past two years. Its structure, focus, procedures, style, and constitutional basis have all been overhauled to give councillors the best possible opportunity to assist in the council’s improvement and recovery. While most of the big structural step-changes happened around the May 2023 election, lots of incremental work before and since has added up to the biggest achievement: the beginnings of a cultural shift towards councillors and senior officers better recognising the value of scrutiny, with the council putting the right conditions and individuals in place to allow it to blossom over the coming years of this municipal cycle. During this improvement journey councillors have done their best to hold the executive to account and ‘task and finish groups’ have delivered recommendations which the cabinet has adopted in full. An induction programme delivered with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) has helped to get the current committee, which includes several new councillors, up to speed and they must continue to hone their new skills and work programme as the year progresses. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) will be doing a mini review in January 2024 to help SBC assess progress and plan for scrutiny’s continued improvement.

#### PROGRESS SINCE JULY COMMISSIONERS REPORT TO DLUHC

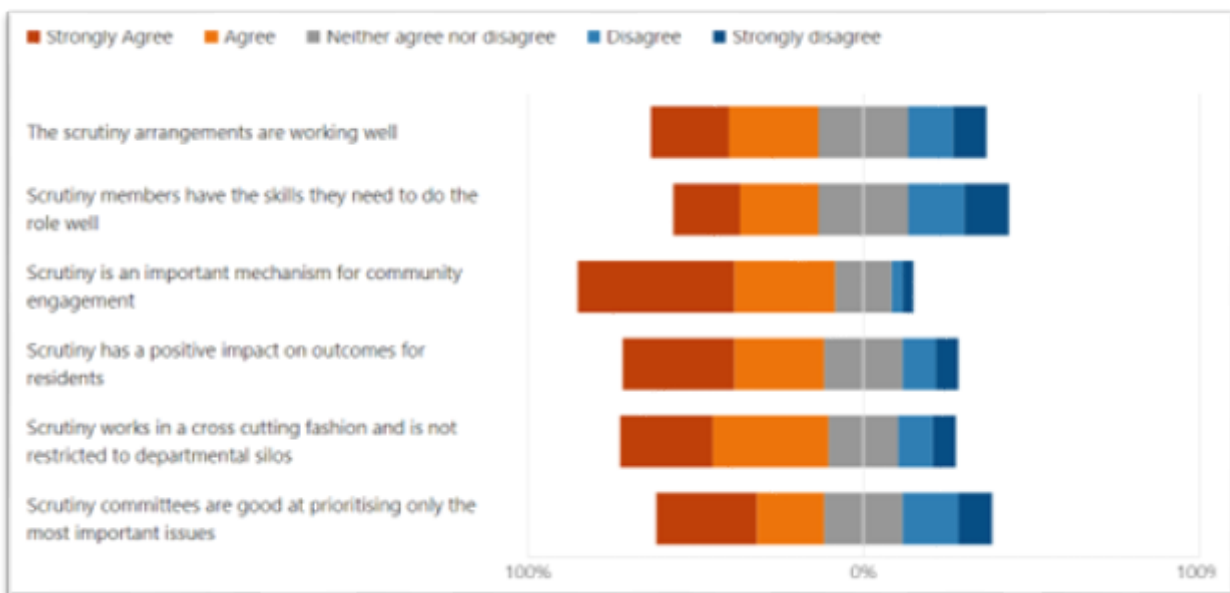
- ✓ Work programme agreed in September 2023 after a development process lasting several months, informed by workshops facilitated by Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, including two public drafts with Member and commissioner feedback and input from across the wider leadership team of the council. The work programme has continued to evolve since, showing positive development of the committee.
- ✓ System of pre-meeting workshops established, showing benefits both for improving committee performance and team building between members – later the model was applied to Audit Cttee pre-meetings too, based on this success.
- ✓ The Committee continues to develop as a team, improving their critical and questioning skills, learning more about the council, developing a better understanding of their role and learning how to plan and execute effective scrutiny.

- ✓ A system of agenda planning meetings established, allowing the Chair to meet report authors and shape the detail, purpose, and preparation for scrutiny items two months in advance.
- ✓ The new model for pre-decision (policy development) scrutiny, which is based on more task & finish group work outside of full committee, has got off the ground.
  - Recommendations by a 'Preparedness of Adults Social Care for an assessment by the Care Quality Commission' Task and Finish Group on were endorsed by CISC on 28 November 2023 for recommendation to Cabinet. Note this was chaired by an opposition member and helped advance cross-party ways of working. Members learned that the service anticipates an adverse inspection finding and made mitigating recommendations.
  - A second T&F group has been launched on 'resident engagement and rebuilding trust,' a priority area for the council's improvement and recovery. This launch showed lessons learned from the first task and finish group e.g. an improved scoping document format, and progress towards best practice e.g. it plans to co-opt a member from outside the council.
- ✓ Recommendations tracking mechanism introduced, allowing scrutiny to publicly track implementation of formal recommendations and actions agreed.
- ✓ A SharePoint repository of key documents and information launched for committee members to self-serve.
- ✓ Successful permanent recruitment of a Scrutiny and Governance Officer – a role which had been hard to fill.
- ✓ The leadership of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee has changed in December 2023. The former Vice Chair is now chair, and a new committee member has been appointed Vice Chair. The new Chair represents continuity, having been the Vice Chair and having done all the induction/training alongside the outgoing Chair. That appointment may indicate that the council's political leadership is giving good consideration to the appropriate skills for a chair of scrutiny.
- ✓ The council has conducted a second survey of its councillors, in November/December 2023. It is difficult to draw firm conclusions from comparisons with the previous survey results (conducted January 2023) since half the individuals on the council have changed and the electoral context and political balance of the council is so radically different. Most importantly, there were somewhere between 20 and 30 councillors on scrutiny committees when the previous survey was conducted, and only 10 now. Having said this, the 30 responses received to date do paint a picture. It seems that councillors' perception of the function is more polarised than it was 11 months ago, however the overall picture is of progress: the percentage of councillors agreeing or strongly agreeing that the scrutiny arrangements are working well has increased from 29% to 50%, and the percentage agreeing that it is good at prioritising only the most important issues has risen from 33% to 50%.

January 2023 results:



November/December provisional results as of 7 Dec 2023:



NEXT STEPS

- In January 2023, the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny will be conducting a progress review, following up on their 2021 review. This is as per the plan, set out to commissioners at the Improvement and Recovery Board in July 2023, for Slough to seek its own sources of assurance and self-awareness about its scrutiny and democratic governance improvement and recovery journey.
- The ongoing Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan should be updated to reflect whatever is learned from the CfGS review and delivery against that plan can be expected to continue. A decision will be needed after that review as to whether the council’s improvement journey in this area can yet be considered ‘business as usual.’

- Delivery against the committee’s continuously evolving work programme, which prioritises areas subject to directions and other key drivers of improvement and recovery identified by the council.
- Continued evolution and improvement of the work programme as the committee gains confidence and knowledge, including via a 13 December 2023 ‘mid-year’ workshop and a May 2024 ‘annual refresh’.
- Continued improvement of the quality of the committee’s output as the committee gains confidence and knowledge.
- A data workshop and training exercise in December 2023 should lead to better use of corporate performance information and KPIs by scrutiny councillors.
- Widening the horizons of committee members through increased contact with other local authority scrutiny functions, as part of the ongoing member development programme.
- Scrutiny will review its own approach to involving communities in its work, beginning to build a more outward-looking way of working, starting with the task and finish group launched in November 2023 on ‘resident engagement and rebuilding trust’. This group will also be encouraged to consider members’ appetite for participative or deliberative forms of democratic engagement.
- A further improved budget scrutiny process.

#### PROGRESS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS

- ✓ Achieved significant performance improvement of O&S Cttees before the election through close support of O&S Chair and committee, laying groundwork for step-change in May 2023.
- ✓ Established new Scrutiny arrangements in May 2023, in line with Centre for Governance and Scrutiny recommendations, with cross party support, following successful and impactful pilots of new ways of working (including e.g. Task and Finish groups) pre-election.
- ✓ The terms of reference for the new committee, and the deletion of subsidiary committees, provides for a strong, single-minded focus on the council’s financial and non-financial improvement and recovery, and allows the council to focus its limited resources on ensuring that the single scrutiny committee is effective.
- ✓ Council agreed an Independent Remuneration Panel’s recommendation to increase the allowance for Scrutiny Chair and Audit Committee Chair to a level close to that of Cabinet Members, to assist with appointment of quality candidates.
- ✓ Thorough, CfGS-assisted (LGA-funded) scrutiny induction/training programme for members of the new Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee, cabinet, and officers ran from May-October 2023.
- ✓ See bullet points above for further progress since July 2023.

#### RISKS, ISSUES AND MITIGATIONS:

A majority of the members of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee were first-time councillors in May 2023. Their learning curve has been, and will continue to be, very steep. As they learn, however, their ability to conduct valuable scrutiny will continuously improve, and the frequency of impactful scrutiny recommendations will increase.

MITIGATION - Further training and development for the committee should continue through the municipal cycle, and the new SharePoint repository of scrutiny resources will continue to grow including videos of prior training. The Committee will be supported formally and informally to keep its work programme under constant review.



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The committee has expressed a wish for more bespoke information rather than copies of cabinet reports. An area the committee intends to develop is in commissioning more targeted information on key issues where it has the knowledge to be proactive. This may stretch the organisation's capacity to provide such information.

MITIGATION - the scrutiny team and incoming Chair are building relationships with exec directors and other officer stakeholders, including via regular agenda-planning meetings with senior officers, to plan and make sure scrutiny's needs can be addressed in a way which is as sensitive to the organisation's resource pressures as possible while still achieving good scrutiny outcomes.

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Scrutiny of the draft Budget is inevitably constrained by timescales. There have been elements of good practice over the past two year's budget-setting cycles but there is more work to do for 2024/25 budget-setting to enable a meaningful and informed scrutiny of the draft Budget. Overall, the budget scrutiny process is still some distance from 'best practice.'

MITIGATION: The 2024/25 budget-setting process has involved good work to build the financial scrutiny skills of new councillors and the new committee, with a number of context briefings based on in-year outturn information, plus various rounds of finance scrutiny training both in-house and with CfGS assistance, and a public discussion of two specific areas of in-year overspend in November with a conscious eye on the implications for budget-setting. A draft budget will be provided to scrutiny in January with further associated briefings and training.

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The committee has shown assertiveness and an awareness of best practice by already beginning a discussion with the cabinet member and executive director early (reiterated most recently in their November 2023 public meeting) about their expectation of greater openness and a better budget scrutiny process overall for 2024/25.

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### 3d. Internal Audit

WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL DIRECTION TO THE COUNCIL?

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*“An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of internal audit, which addresses outstanding management actions and includes the commissioning of an independent review of the internal audit contract and a fully costed plan for establishing an internal audit function that reflects best practice.”*

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#### SUMMARY

In summary, the overall direction has, and continues its journey with a view that all high-rated internal audit actions for FY2021/22 (and all prior years’ actions) are closed. An audit plan for FY2023/24 was approved at Audit Committee (19 July 2023) and the plan continues to be delivered. Capability and capacity issues remain constant, but these are being addressed with an offer of employment for the Senior IA appointment who also has an IT audit experience. AN EOI exercise has been undertaken to fill the Head of Financial Governance, Internal Audit, Counter Fraud, Risk, and Insurance role.

#### PROGRESS SINCE JULY COMMISSIONERS REPORT TO DLUHC

- ✓ Recruited two additional Internal Auditors to the Internal Audit team.
- ✓ Progress continues to be made on closing actions on the tracker. FY2021/11 July 2023 had 118 overdue audit actions, November reported 65 overdue audit actions. FY2022/23 July 2023 had 81 overdue audit actions, November reported 56 overdue audit actions. All 27 audit reports for FY2022/23 have been finalised. The overdue actions continue to reduce month on month.
- ✓ Implementation of the AuditBoard system (go-live December 2023).

#### NEXT STEPS

- Finalise recruitment to fill current vacant posts in the Internal Audit team.
- Increase in capability – delivery of a wide-ranging, value add audit plan on a new system that will allow Head of Financial Governance, Internal Audit, Counter Fraud, Risk, and Insurance to provide an annual Internal Audit Report and Opinion.
- Reduction in internal Audit actions – no audit actions outstanding from FY2021/22 and no more than 30% of the total audit actions outstanding from FY2022/23.

#### PROGRESS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS

- ✓ Set up the in-house Internal Audit function from March 2023 with Head of Financial Governance, Internal Audit, Counter Fraud Risk and Insurance, Internal Audit Manager and Senior Internal Auditor.
- ✓ Progress is being made on closing actions on the tracker. FY2021/11 March 2023 had 161 overdue audit actions, July reported 118 overdue audit actions. This continues to reduce month on month. FY2022/23 March 2023 had 45 overdue audit actions, July reported 81 overdue audit actions. 15 audit reports had been finalised and a further 10 audit reports were in draft status as at end of November 2023.
- ✓ Creation of the Audit Universe which led to the Audit Plan being reviewed and updated by in-house Head of Financial Governance, Internal Audit, Counter Fraud, Risk, and Insurance in Q1 2023/24.

#### RISKS, ISSUES AND MITIGATIONS:

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Resource capacity – the Head of Financial Governance, Internal Audit, Counter Fraud, Risk and Insurance and the Senior Internal Auditor roles are vacant affecting the delivery of the Audit Plan agreed by the Audit Committee on 19th July 2023.

MITIGATION – EOI underway for the Head of Financial Governance, Internal Audit, Counter Fraud, Risk, and Insurance role and offer of employment made to an individual for the Senior IA role.

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Resource capability – current resources do not have Council-wide experience to undertake deep dive or specialised audits such as IT audits (in areas like Cyber Security).

MITIGATION – Potential Senior IA appointment has IT audit experience, awaiting final confirmation of employment checks.

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Audit Board may take time to bed in and affect short-term delivery after initial launch.

MITIGATION – parallel run of system with current IA process and procedures.

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## 3e. Procurement

WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL DIRECTION TO THE COUNCIL?

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*“An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of the procurement and contract management function, which includes an independent review.”*

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### SUMMARY

We have continued to strengthen the foundations of procurement within the organisation following independent review of our processes. The framework along with the process mapping have helped ensure the Council is better positioned to continue with the improvement work we have already started to embed across the organisation. We know that this is a continuous process that we will focus on and ensure that the culture needs to be further embedded in. The development and implementation of a Commercial Strategy will help pave the way forward.

### PROGRESS SINCE JULY COMMISSIONERS REPORT TO DLUHC

- ✓ Developed a framework to ensure there is co-ordinated and consistent approach to contract management, including learning from other local authorities and local partnerships.
- ✓ Completed procurement and contract management process mapping with local partnerships. Recommendations regarding streamlining of processes and procedures are being embedded.
- ✓ Embedded sustainable improvement in the service by successfully recruiting to key procurement, contract management and commercial roles.
- ✓ Engaged in the London Procurement network to share learning and best practice and re-invigorated the Berkshire procurement network.
- ✓ Piloted a social value policy in the procurement team, to ensure it is fit for purpose.
- ✓ Engaged with small and medium enterprises at SME events, to ensure SME's have visibility on how to do business with the council and oversight of its procurement forward plan. Also engaged with micro-businesses, voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs). We recognise the importance of engaging with these types of services and have clearly articulated this intention in our recently completed strategy for the Commercial Services.

### NEXT STEPS

- Development and implementation of a commercial strategy which expands on the strategy developed in 2021, to include commercialisation and contract management.
- driving up contract management standards by developing assurance processes.
- review of the contract procedures rules to ensure they are fit for purpose in relation to the council's governance arrangements, and the 2023 procurement act.
- enhancements to internal systems and processes supported by the Procurement officer.
- continuing the staff training programme, courses take place every two months.
- To further support our commitment to effective contract management, the contracts team is currently developing a contract management toolkit. This toolkit will provide practical

guidance and tools to help us implement the contract management element of the Commercial Services strategy effectively.

#### PROGRESS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS

- ✓ Reviewed and improved the council's contract procedure rules and improved procurement and contract management governance and decision making.
- ✓ Embedded the training programme, by training 145 staff to date. The training ensures staff are aware of the council's contract procedure rules, thresholds, and governance processes.
- ✓ Implemented a centralised contracts register which has not been in place for 10 years. This has improved the management and oversight of contracts and has allowed the council to pipeline plan procurement activity more effectively, which drives better value for money.
- ✓ Moved away from relying on expensive consultancy support from RSM. Recruited a permanent in-house team and procured better value, specialist consultancy support resources.
- ✓ Reviewed all council contracts and identified opportunities to drive savings of £1.8m.

#### RISKS, ISSUES AND MITIGATIONS:

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Recruitment and retention – two procurement category manager roles remain vacant.

MITIGATION - Timely progress has been made with most of the team with the intention to ensure the team is filled with permanent staff. Work is underway in determining the best way to recruit the remaining skilled staff we need e.g. via a tailored recruitment strategy. This is so that the Council can attract prospective candidates.

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Regional networks – the practical and operational challenges associated with collaboration.

MITIGATION -To date the team has made every effort to capitalise on networking opportunities. This has included attendance at a conference for Procurement. Going forward, this will need to continue with a specific aim of collaboration where possible.

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Social value – the need to ensure that social value applied, is measurable, links directly to the residents of Slough and is included in key performance indicators and contract management.

MITIGATION - This is still at its infancy stages, having been piloted recently. The aim is to embed this further in by ensuring it is included in the KPI reporting and contract management. This way the Council can measure the social value aspect along with clear links to the residents of the Borough.

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Contract management - ensure resources are concentrated on the right contracts, contracts will be categorised, and risk assessed so time is spent the highest risk contracts to the council.

MITIGATION - Balancing resource allocation is key e.g. ensuring resources are diverted to where it is needed. Going forward, the team will build upon the work on process mapping to ensure the Council strikes the right balance.

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## 3f. ICT

WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL DIRECTION TO THE COUNCIL?

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*“An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of the Authority’s IT.”*

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### SUMMARY

There is a clear and consistent improvement in the delivery of IT services across the council, supporting the achievement of this direction. A more detailed action plan for 2024 has been developed. An initial Plan-on-a-Page (POAP) has been created but is subject to final sign-off pending several factors, including budget approval, dependencies with other projects and service area priorities. Therefore, the summary captured in POAP presented here is liable to change.

### PROGRESS SINCE JULY COMMISSIONERS REPORT TO DLUHC

- ✓ Data centre relocation (to a government approved Ark tier 3 data centre) - total saving around £60k per annum.
- ✓ Wide area network (SD-WAN) rollout – total saving around £120k per annum
- ✓ Azure Landing Zone (Microsoft Cloud) Setup
- ✓ Mobile Data and Telephony replacement – total saving on telephony for SBC around £300k per annum
- ✓ Implementation of an application tracking system for HR (Talos 360)
- ✓ Improvements to mobile device management (Microsoft Intune)
- ✓ First phase of laptop auto-build process and laptop Intune device management
- ✓ Implementation of robotic process automation in support of Revs and Bens
- ✓ Upgrade of core digital platform (Jadu)
- ✓ Draft code of connection (CoCo) completed and will be submitted in December.
- ✓ Implementation of improved translation functionality on the Slough Council website
- ✓ Initiated IT improvements to customer services.

### NEXT STEPS

- Completion of the implementation of the Arcus cloud based regulatory and licencing application (replacement of Flare and Lalpac).
- Completion of phase two of the NEC Northgate Housing system.
- Update to roles and responsibilities across the ICT&D team based on learning and needs of the next phase of improvement.
- Implementation of disaster-recovery-as-a-service (DRaaS) **(Pending financial approval)**.
- Implementation of backup-as-a-service (BaaS) **(Pending financial approval)**
- Replacement of Firewalls.
- New resource, governance, and roadmap for social care platforms **(Pending financial approval)**
- Implementation of a managed service for Wi-Fi across SBC locations

- Implement a new approach to secure email.
- Continuing to decommission old, legacy servers and infrastructure (move to the cloud where possible)
- Implementation of system monitoring platform to detect issues more rapidly and prevent service outages.
- Implementation of security logging platform to detect potential cyber threats.
- Growth in the use of the core service management system to support HR processes e.g., workflow for team changes, onboarding, and induction to ensure consistency by managers.
- Delivery of laptops to new managed standard including always-on VPN security
- Replacement of Slough intranet (use of Microsoft 365 Viva Connections)
- Supporting accommodation changes
- New vehicle inspection and routing system for waste management to improve efficiency.
- Consolidation of Microsoft 365 platform to reduce reliance on locally hosted infrastructure.
- First steps in the replacement of legacy Citrix (thin client) architecture – potential move to Microsoft Azure Virtual Desktop (AVD)

#### NEXT STEPS

- ✓ Adoption of new ICT&D 3-year adaptive strategy (due for annual review in Q1 2024)
- ✓ Restructure of the ICT&D team to provide capacity for change.
- ✓ Building of new standard operating procedures to drive consistency in support and technology management.
- ✓ The building of project and programme management controls to manage the high levels of concurrent change.
- ✓ Service reporting processes implemented that provide transparency to senior staff and members.
- ✓ Storage Area Network (SAN) (primary document storage) replacement
- ✓ Core networking switch replacement
- ✓ Implementation of new IT service management system (Astro) and related processes and ways of working e.g., Astro hub
- ✓ Implementation of full Microsoft M365 services for email, SharePoint, and Teams
- ✓ ScanStation (document scanning services) implementation (and now extension to other service areas)
- ✓ Contact centre telephony replacement
- ✓ Firewall upgrades
- ✓ Modern.gov migration to the cloud
- ✓ Academy Revs & Bens migration to the cloud
- ✓ ICON chip & pin upgrade rolled out.
- ✓ Capita One education system migrated to the cloud.
- ✓ Move of core ERP (Agresso) to new hosting provider leading to saving of around £200k per annum
- ✓ Implementation of Bullwall ransomware prevention
- ✓ Implementation of a microcell within Observatory House to improve O2 mobile signal.
- ✓ Completion of phase one of the NEC Northgate Housing system implementation (retirement of previous Capita housing system)
- ✓ Delivery of new standard of laptops to Members
- ✓ Removal of BlueJeans video conferencing- adoption of full Microsoft Teams.



**RISKS, ISSUES AND MITIGATIONS:**

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Acquiring skilled resource to undertake the complexity and volume of work remains challenging.

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Financial position of Council means that money may not be available (leading to lower ability to automate/digitise and the need to live with a higher level of risk for longer)

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Depleted resource in the organisation means that departments are unable to engage with ICT&D to move automation/digitisation forward.

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Ambiguity around estate and the future of OH means that it is difficult to plan substantial improvements in a cost-effective way.

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## 5. Culture

WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL DIRECTION TO THE COUNCIL?

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*“In the first six months devise and then implement a programme of cultural change to rebuild trust between officers and members, to the satisfaction of the Commissioners. This should make sure both Members and Officers understand the scale of the challenge and their respective roles in driving improvement and the way in which the Authority and its activities are regulated and governed and the way in which this is monitored, and breaches rectified.”*

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### SUMMARY

The Culture change programme has been established since December 2022, with a Plan on a Page (POAP) created and approved. First actions on each workstreams complete focused on getting the council culture change ready. Members, Leadership Team, and Officers of the council engaged throughout the programme. Clear actions and outcomes have been driven from the questionnaires conducted and workshops run. Improvement solutions developed have been co-created and informed by colleagues throughout the organisation.

### PROGRESS SINCE JULY COMMISSIONERS REPORT TO DLUHC

- ✓ Full Council adopted the new Corporate Plan in September 2023, which provides the Purpose for the purpose-led Culture Change.
- ✓ Equalities Objectives agreed by Cabinet in November 2023. Public consultation to take place early in 2024.
- ✓ Employee Engagement survey to gain insight into the current issues and provide baseline against which culture change outcomes will be measured against.
- ✓ Lunch and learn sessions held for Senior managers to support their development and opportunity to collaborate with peers.
- ✓ Refreshed Hybrid Working Policy launched in October 2023.
- ✓ CLT team development progressed, including profiling to support their effectiveness as a team and identifying development opportunities. Workstream supported by the Local Government Association (LGA).
- ✓ Senior Management Restructure complete, with recruitment of Directors underway. The Directors will support the strategic leadership of the council.
- ✓ Directorate and service-specific culture change underway according to need e.g. All Directorate staff briefings and Viva Engage online communities, and HR process implementation in the DSO.
- ✓ FITT analysis workshops underway across the council to establish root cause for issues raised within staff survey and develop solutions in collaboration with employees of SBC.

## NEXT STEPS

- Developing the next stage of the cultural change programme, informed by the FITT workshops, and in line with the development of a Target Operating Model and delivery of the approved Corporate Plan.
- Roll-out of new on-boarding process, which will start the employee's cultural journey before they join the council.
- Continue to deliver staff surveys and pulse surveys to develop an on-going understanding of staff morale, behaviour, and culture, and can act accordingly.
- Employee engagement to collectively develop a plan that addresses the changes required, how best to support staff through this change, and create an opportunity to engage with the staff to shape the change journey. The Recovery champions are pivotal to driving this change on the ground.
- Outcomes from the FITT workshops with staff will inform the on-going delivery of the culture programme.
- Use outcomes of FITT workshops to consider whether a refreshed set of values and behaviours are required. Take an employee-led approach.
- Further develop and invest in leadership and management across the council to build trust and confidence.
- Identify training and development needs through the appraisal process, which will adopt a Gold Thread from senior managers through to department leads and staff teams. Focus on uptake and quality of appraisals.
- Embed a performance driven organisation that celebrates the success of outcomes achieves and manages poor performance.
- CLT development based on Emergenetics profiling and workshop.

## PROGRESS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS

- ✓ Culture Change programme approved in December 2022, including four workstreams focused on getting the organisation culture change ready.
- ✓ Programme delivery underway throughout 2023, aligned to culture change programme.
- ✓ Frequent CLT Roadshows, Vlogs, Blogs, and Right Council News internal communications.
- ✓ Staff networks formed and contributing to change – REACH (Race Equality and Celebrating Heritage), Womens, Menopause, Carers
- ✓ Improved Officer Member protocols in place.
- ✓ Microsoft-based collaboration tools launched and rolled out, with dedicated in-house support.

### RISKS, ISSUES AND MITIGATIONS:

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Lack of TOM, which provides clarity of where SBC aspires to be in the next 5, 10, 15 years' time so that strategic decisions can be made and steps to achieve this planned and delivered.

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Staff attrition, where the council loses high calibre staff during the reorganisation which could be managed through improved engagement and communication.

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Delays in delivering clear strategic objectives that align service delivery to the TOM with clear milestones and outcomes that are measurable and lead to improved management of finances and resources and ownership of how one's work impacts the overall change.

SBC reputation and trust forming a barrier to further partnership working across council services, partnering organisations and service providers to deliver targeted and coordinated services

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Poor behaviours that underpin the cultural change not embedded within the organisation, resulting in reverting to old practices.

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## 6. Subsidiary Company Review

WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL DIRECTION TO THE COUNCIL?

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*“Following the review by the Authority of their companies within six months consider the roles and case for continuing with each subsidiary company of the Authority (except Slough Children First). For those companies that it is agreed to continue, make sure that the Directors appointed by the Authority are appropriately skilled in either technical or company governance matters to make sure each Board functions effectively under the terms of an explicit shareholder agreement and a nominated shareholder representative. For those companies which it is determined not to continue with in this form, to establish a plan to internalise, close or sell as appropriate.”*

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### SUMMARY

In progress. Directors appointed where required. Updates at October Cabinet, with further updates due at January Cabinet Committee. Decisions on sales and closures are in process. Direction expected to be complete by end 2024.

### PROGRESS SINCE JULY COMMISSIONERS REPORT TO DLUHC

- ✓ Slough Children First (SCF):
  - Business and Improvement Plan for 2023-26 approved at September Cabinet. Decisions taken:
    - *That the SCF’s Business and Improvement Plan for 2023 to 2026 is approved.*
    - *That the requests for funding of deficits from 2021/22 and 2022/23 at a total of £5.312m from the budget equalisation reserve be approved.*
    - *That the increase in the contract sum for 2023/24 of £4.447m, taking the total contract sum to £40.514m using in-year contingency budgets be approved.*
  - New Chair of the Board appointed via process ran by DfE (Department for Education).
  - Further skills audit of the board to inform review of board composition and appointment of Council directors.
  - Business and Improvement Plan for 2024 submitted in draft and to be approved at December Cabinet, alongside new contractual key performance indicators.
  - Third governance review update presented to Audit and Corporate Governance Committee in November 2023 with Chair of Board, Chair of SCF Audit and Corporate Governance Committee and Chief Executive of SCF attending to answer questions from the committee.
- ✓ Ground Rent Estates 5 Ltd (GRE5)
  - Established company directors and governance in place.
  - Remedial works now very well advanced with a good level of certainty over the outstanding period and costs

- SBC's financial exposure has been significantly reduced with a successful outcome from the legal case with the insurer.
- Update report presented to Cabinet Committee in September 2023
- ✓ James Elliman Homes (JEH) and Development Initiative for Slough Housing (DISH)
  - Interim Company Directors appointed.
  - Interim Director recruited to lead the review of these two housing companies.
  - Update reports drafted for January 2024 Cabinet Committee.

Development Homes for Slough Initiative (DISH)

- Interim Director recruited to lead the review of these two housing companies.

NEXT STEPS

- Update reports for all Property related companies will be presented to Cabinet Committee in January 2024 and on a quarterly basis, thereafter.
- Review reports, containing options appraisals, to be presented to Cabinet Committee for JEH and DISH by April 2024.
- SCF Contract Sum to be set in February 2024 to align with the Council's MTFS.
- SCF to submit an annual report for 2023/24 by July 2024.

PROGRESS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS

- ✓ The council has reviewed each of its subsidiary companies taking account of the Directions and developed a forward plan.
- ✓ The companies fulfil very different functions and have various levels of risk. In addition, Slough Children First Ltd is delivering services under the statutory intervention of the Department for Education. Not all companies are shareholder companies and there are bespoke agreements in place to reflect the distinct functions. Reviews conducted have been specific to how the subsidiary company is constructed, what its aims are, its current position, and how it aligns to the council's new Corporate Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

**RISKS, ISSUES AND MITIGATIONS:**

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There are outstanding accounts that need to be filed for DISH.

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## 7. Evidence Based Decision Making

WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL DIRECTION TO THE COUNCIL?

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*“Take steps to enable better and evidence-based decision making, including enhancing the data and insight functions to enable better evidence-based decision making.”*

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### SUMMARY

Direction has been met, assuming the analyst function growth bid is accepted through the 24/25 Budget setting process, as this decision is critical to meet the second part of the Direction.

### PROGRESS SINCE JULY COMMISSIONERS REPORT TO DLUHC:

- ✓ Completion of all 2022/23 activity and performance statutory returns on time for Adult Social Care, Education, SEND, Housing.
- ✓ SBC Adults Social Care Client Level 23/24 Q2 statutory data return to DHSC (Department of Health and Social Care) rated ‘Excellent’ by the national programme.
- ✓ November DfE Formal Review meeting for the SEND Written Statement of Action acknowledged that Priority 3 (‘robust management information for decision-making’) has delivered the progress required.
- ✓ Quarterly strategic performance report re-introduced and discussed at October Cabinet.
- ✓ Performance Management session at CLT-Cabinet Away Day.
- ✓ Internal GIS software upgraded, and access to new portal provided to all service areas.
- ✓ Inform Cabinet-level decision-making papers including Estates Strategy, EV (Electric Vehicle) Charging Model, Corporate Plan, and Corporate Performance.

### NEXT STEPS

- Consolidate progress made so far by repeating and continually improving data management and reporting processes.
- Focus on performance management at strategic and operational level, through strengthening the link between performance insight and action planning.
- Learn from, and inform, the evidence-based decision-making approach of the new Director and Heads of Service cohorts.
- Embed a ‘Hub and Spoke’ model for analyst capability, through re-embedding analyst posts in service areas alongside maintaining strategic expertise in the corporate department.
- Publication of more datasets and search tools online, enabling greater *Open Data* for residents and businesses.
- Completion of Workforce Data Task and Finish Group, which is part of the Workforce Improvement Workstream.

PROGRESS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS:

- ✓ Established a Data Strategy Group in June 2022, which has been chaired by a senior lead from ICTD or Data functions.
- ✓ Developed a Data Strategy, which outlines the principles, governance, roles, and responsibilities for how data is captured, managed, and used.
- ✓ Improved data technology governance through review at the Data Strategy Group and the ICTD Technical Design Authority.
- ✓ Consolidated analyst posts into a single, cross-departmental team, to focus learning and improvement for the first two years of recovery.
- ✓ Recruited a Geo-Spatial Data Lead to deliver strategic spatial analysis for Cabinet decision-making, as well as improvements to GIS systems use and processes across services.
- ✓ Informed Cabinet-level decisions with strategic insight and impact analysis, including boundaries review, future of children’s centres, future of libraries.
- ✓ Monthly strategic performance reporting available to Corporate Leadership team and the Improvement and Recovery Board. Quarterly performance reporting re-introduced at Cabinet. Performance data made available to Scrutiny.
- ✓ Resident engagement consultations are now run through a single portal, Citizen Space.

WHAT RISKS AND ISSUES REMAIN?

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Recruitment and Retention – half of the current analyst team are on interim arrangements.

MITIGATION - A growth bid has been submitted to retain those posts (which deliver for Education, SEND, and Adult Social Care). Decision is pending through the budget process.

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Technologies – application robustness remains variable, and Data Transformation and Engineering is not consistently resourced.

MITIGATION - Further investment in data management and reporting technologies (e.g., Data Warehouse, Power BI) is predicated on budget decisions for 24/25. Decision is pending through the budget process.

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## 8. Recruitment

### WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL DIRECTION TO THE COUNCIL?

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*“With effect from 1 September 2022 and following the Commissioners’ initial six-month report, the Minister expanded the Directions in Annex B of the Directions to include the following: “All functions to define the officer structure for the senior positions, to determine the recruitment processes and then to recruit the relevant staff to those positions.” ‘Senior positions’ is defined in Annex B of the Directions as ‘direct reports to the Chief Executive and their direct reports, and their Group Managers – tier one, tiers two and three.’”*

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### SUMMARY

Direction added in September 2022. Direction was added to speed up effective recruitment of senior management posts. In 2023, Executive Directors were appointed, and a senior management restructure has taken place. Director roles are out for recruitment in a well-managed programme being delivered by the council’s recruitment team and supported by an external recruitment agency, Starfish. Over the last six months very significant progress has been made and the recruitment offer is unrecognisable compared to when former commissioners requested the power. While there is still work to do, a clear trajectory of improvement is now visible and having results.

### PROGRESS SINCE JULY COMMISSIONERS REPORT TO DLUHC

- ✓ The Executive Director team were subject to a consultation process in June / July, which resulted in job matching to the ED roles.
- ✓ The senior management structure below the ED level has been changed through a consultation process, whereby the Associate Director level has been deleted and replaced with two new tiers of Director and Head of Services. These two new tiers now reflect tiers 2 and 3 of the organisation hierarchy.
- ✓ Employer Brand refreshed before recruitment started.
- ✓ External recruitment agency, Starfish, engaged to work alongside SBC recruitment team.
- ✓ The appointment process for these new tiers is underway and commissioners are engaged in the process.
- ✓ The first five Director posts were posted for recruitment in November, and longlisting for those roles has commenced. High interest and quality of candidates submitting applications so far.

### NEXT STEPS

- Discussing the closure of this Direction to the council with Commissioners.
- Exit strategy for the Associate Directors who are leaving the council.
- Recruitment to all Director and Heads of Service posts listed in the new senior management structure.

- Effective on-boarding of people appointed to those vacant posts.

#### PROGRESS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS

- ✓ The additional Direction was given the council from September 2022.
- ✓ The last formal appointment to a post in this level was the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services (section 151 Officer).
- ✓ A report was tabled at Cabinet in March 2023 that acknowledged limited progress had been made at the time, but that a new action plan was in place.
- ✓ This update paper shows the results of that action plan, with a new structure approved and recruitment underway.
- ✓ Commissioners have been involved in all appointments captured under this direction. This has been at the Chief Executive and Executive Levels.

#### RISKS, ISSUES AND MITIGATIONS:

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Quality of candidates presented to the organisation.

MITIGATION - Use of external recruitment partner (Starfish) to sift through candidates and undertake technical interviews will help with identifying good calibre candidates for interview

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Level of organisational change

MITIGATION - the senior management change will complete and then stabilise the organisation, with securing good calibre leaders to lead through the recovery journey in 2024 and beyond.

## Key Improvement Area - Workforce Development

WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL DIRECTION TO THE COUNCIL?

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*“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.”*

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### SUMMARY

The directions related to the Council having a ‘suitable officer structure’ in place has been met and now the implementation process of securing the right level of candidates is in place. Commissioners will be involved in this process.

Commissioners have also been involved in all the appointment of the current ED’s and the Chief Executive. The last appointment taking place in March 2023. Following this appointment, a further executive leadership restructure took place in the summer where the current new directorate arrangements were approved.

### PROGRESS SINCE JULY COMMISSIONERS REPORT TO DLUHC

- ✓ Senior management reorganisation completed.
- ✓ Recruitment to Director posts from w/c 23<sup>rd</sup> October has commenced.
- ✓ Roll out of new Applicant Tracking System November 27.
- ✓ Reviewed and revised mandatory training proposal for CLT to review and agree, streamlining the number of courses from 8 to 5, yet still meeting our core requirements – October 13<sup>th</sup>.
- ✓ Developed a management training proposal submitted to Strategy & Improvement director to review and approve to upskill our management population – awaiting approval.
- ✓ HR Data management plan within Agresso, so real-time information can be achieved on establishment, staff attrition, absence, and tenure which are linked to budget management.
- ✓ Review of HR statutory and non-statutory returns driven from centralised databases
- ✓ Roll out of Hybrid Working Policy.
- ✓ Review of HR policies and procedures
- ✓ Procured a new temporary labour contract.

### WHAT IS FORECAST TO BE ACHIEVED IN 2024?

- Strategy for HR defined in line with TOM.
- Workforce strategy and plan.
- Performance Management framework that aligns to the strategic objectives and outcomes.
- Streamlined HR processes that are driven by self-serve.
- Agile organisation that works alongside hybrid working and cross organisational working to break down the silos across departments.
- Review HR policies and procedures to be in line with best practice.

- Review the Trade Union Framework.
- Review the Agresso system to ensure payroll elements are streamlined.
- Develop a training and development strategy aligned to the performance cycle.
- New onboarding programme to be initiated.
- Revised mandatory training programme to be delivered and launched.
- Management development programme to be agreed, commissioned, and scheduled.
- Manage risks through defined accountabilities, measures and key values and behaviours.
- Empower staff through devolved decision making, making staff accountable for their work and be performance driven.
- Look at reward and recognition in place to ensure it is fit for purpose.
- Deliver further savings from a reduction of agency usage and spend.

#### NEXT STEPS

- ✓ Programme managed the restructure of the Finance Team and ICT to enable the services to be fit for purpose and to address the gaps in the service created by previous processes and the reasons for the intervention.
- ✓ Supported two Senior Management reorganisations to create a suitable officer structure as outlined in the original direction.
- ✓ Recruited to the new ED team with support from an external recruitment partner.
- ✓ Supported organisational change programmes within directorates i.e. Libraries services, Reablement services.
- ✓ HR Improvement plan underway – Identified tactical opportunities for improvement across the HR service, which is defined as ‘Fixing the Basics.’
- ✓ New applicant tracking system for the recruitment process has been implemented – went live on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> November, to replace manual processes and streamline the process for both candidate and managers.
- ✓ Onboarding processes being reviewed in line with CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development) guidelines and best practice – these covers from the advert to becoming a fully-fledged employee (end of probationary period).
- ✓ Updated the corporate induction format and content to improve engagement and ensure new employees understand the workings of the Council in its current state, content to highlight useful tips and content oof our intranet site etc.
- ✓ Re-established the Recovery Change Champions to support communications and engagement across the organisation for example staff survey.
- ✓ Revised, consulted, and implemented the Hybrid Working Policy
- ✓ Contract management in relation to the agency contract were reviewed and realigned with greater scrutiny of the use of agency spend in the Council.

#### RISKS, ISSUES AND MITIGATIONS:

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Resourcing - staffing pressure in HR and recruiting to the new Senior Management Team in HR with a new Director and 3 Heads of Services. Looking at recruiting permanent staff to the vacant roles in HR – this is in process.

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Organisational compliance with HR processes i.e. termination forms being sent after a staff member leaves! The lack of compliance in some areas is causing extra pressure on HR to resolve the concerns which transpire. Mitigation - Liaising with ED's to call out non-compliant areas.

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Supporting the organisation in governance processes associated with change programmes – the level of change programmes is increasing following the SM structure.

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Budget pressures – HR are also having to comply with requests for further savings causing budget pressures.

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Reporting – workforce reporting is being affected by the Agresso system and due to changes in Finance this is now causing major concerns as no reports are being able to be produced in a timely manner.

MITIGATION – Workforce Report Task and Finish Group has been set up to resolve these issues.

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## Key improvement area - Estates Strategy

WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL DIRECTION TO THE COUNCIL?

No Direction specific to Estates, however this has been a key component of the Transformation Programme to enable the council to deliver a set of recovery objectives, including:

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*“An outline action plan to achieve financial sustainability and to close the long-term budget gap identified by the Authority across the period of its Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).”*

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### SUMMARY

Not under a formal Direction. Progress made with assets disposals during 2022 and 2023. A clear and revised process for continuing the asset disposal programme as per September Cabinet approval. Estates Strategy strategic options decision due at Cabinet, which will be followed by an Outline Business Case to Cabinet by April 2024.

### PROGRESS SINCE JULY COMMISSIONERS REPORT TO DLUHC

- ✓ A review of the Operational portfolio carried out, resulting in a conceptual Estates Model being developed. This model is being presented to December Cabinet as the Phase I Estate Strategy. The paper also describes the work and cost necessary to develop a full strategy (Phase II) and implementation plan.
- ✓ The Estate Strategy identifies opportunities for additional disposals. It also identifies revenue related financial benefits.
- ✓ A case has been made to remain at Observatory House. It is anticipated that this decision will be ratified at December Cabinet. An outline business case is being developed to determine the basis of this occupation.

### NEXT STEPS

- Approval of the Estate Strategy together with the implementation plan for it.
- Introduce the governance, resourcing etc that will be necessary to a) implement the Estate Strategy (i.e. transition work) and b) the substantive operating model for Property Services.
- Approval of the full business for Observatory House, providing clarity based on SBC's future occupation and the investment needed to achieve this.

### PROGRESS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS

- ✓ Three Property experts appointed (interims) to accelerate progress, to provide a stronger client function of Avison Young etc and to identify additional opportunities to drive further financial benefit from the property portfolio.

- ✓ Created a new focus on the Asset Disposal Programme with an individual from Property and one from Finance dedicated to the programme. Also created a higher level of collaboration between Finance and Property.
- ✓ £220m of capital receipts secured, as of November 2023.

#### RISKS, ISSUES AND MITIGATIONS:

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The accountancy treatment of HRA (Housing Revenue Account) assets; the risk being that there will be less financial benefit to the General Fund than previously anticipated.

MITIGATION – On-going HRA review by accountants.

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Clarification on the financial target for the programme.

MITIGATION – Cabinet approval.

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Clarification on the calculation and application of the financial ‘break-even’ point for sales.

MITIGATION – Property department to oversee ‘break-even’ analysis.

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The ability to achieve high levels of capital receipts is heavily dependent on the condition of the market/economy.

MITIGATION – active market insight, and management where possible.

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The ability to maximise the number of assets that can be disposed of from the Operational portfolio could be limited by SBC’s willingness and ability to aggressively adopt and take forward ‘Channel Shift’ to have more resident demand met through Digital services and to have far fewer customer facing buildings.

MITIGATION – Transformation programme aligning Channel Shift and Estates Strategy workstream.

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## Key improvement area - Customer Experience

WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL DIRECTION TO COUNCIL?

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*"Improving customer experience to deliver Best Value."*

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### SUMMARY

Since July 2023, there has been a significant increase in the pace of change and the monthly data demonstrates a consistent positive trend in key metrics. This picture should continue as a new Interactive Voice Response system went live on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023, allowing the Customer Services team to focus on only calls that are unable to be dealt with purely via the website and/or self-service.

### PROGRESS SINCE JULY COMMISSIONERS REPORT TO DLUHC

- ✓ Good progress made since July 2023, with a refreshed focus on Customer Services improvement and a new Transformation Team in place to drive insight, planning, and delivery.
- ✓ The first of a series of deep dives looking across key parts of the Council are helping to identify transformational changes to the ways customer service interacts with the residents of Slough.
- ✓ The first deep dive focused on housing due to its strategic importance and the volume of resident engagement and calls it attracted. Four key areas were identified as the first phase priority to address.
- ✓ Immediate follow-on deep dives will happen with Adult Social Care (in early January 2024), and these will continue throughout the last quarter of 2023/24.
- ✓ Improvement initiatives are being developed with a new Interactive Voice Response system in place by 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023. This will allow Customer Services to focus on those calls which are unable to be dealt with purely via the website and/or self-service.
- ✓ Additional improvement initiatives including a chatbot, digital self-service actions and other channel-shift projects are proactively being implemented.

### NEXT STEPS

- In 2024, the 2024-27 strategic plan will be drafted and socialised with CLT members and other stakeholders.
- Deep Dives with individual service areas across the council with the highest call volumes will continue in the first quarter with a view to co-designing and implementing sustainable solutions that should improve customer experience.
- Considerations will include service improvements, rightsizing, consolidation, and delivery options analysis.
- Recruitment to key posts will be undertaken, including the head of customer services.



## PROGRESS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS

- ✓ Concerns over the speed of progress before July 2023 led to a proactive refresh of the Customer Services Team, skills and experience involved, transformational support and an increased focus on the imperative to deliver improved customer experience to the residents of Slough.

## RISKS, ISSUES AND MITIGATIONS:

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Approval not received to extend additional staff until service improvements are delivered, leading to increased pressure on existing staff and reduced customer service.

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Service changes do not consider impact on Customer Services (e.g. additional customer contact, high call volume leading to increased resource pressures).

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Ability of departments to collaborate on more efficient customer service practices due to low resource or pending adoption of new technologies.

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## Appendix A – Getting to Good Board Executive Report - November 2023

Refer to supporting documents.

## Appendix B – Getting to Good Board indicators report October 2023

Refer to supporting documents.

## Appendix C – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Written Statement of Action Department for Education Meeting Progress Presentation – November 2023

Refer to supporting documents.

## Appendix D – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Written Statement of Action Progress Report to the Department for Education – November 2023

Refer to supporting documents.

## Appendix E – Adult Social Care Improvement Delivery Board Pack – November 2023

Refer to supporting documents.

## Appendix F – Adult Social Care Improvement Scrutiny Report – November 2023

Refer to supporting documents.