



Improvement and Recovery Plan

2025-2026

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1. Foreword

Cllr Dexter Smith, Leader of Slough Borough Council

Since becoming Leader in May 2023, I have been committed to improving the council for the good of all who live, work and study in the borough. These priorities for the council are set out in the Corporate Plan adopted in 2023. At the heart of this plan is a vision for an economically productive and prosperous town that is more vibrant and fun as a place to live and as a destination.

There has been no quick or easy way to turn round the council's fortunes. The situation we are dealing with has been years in the making and so it will take years to resolve. We know there is no quick fix to reducing the extremely high debt levels, or to getting the council to live within its means and deliver best value services. The extension of the Best Value Intervention of Slough Borough Council until November 2026 is therefore welcome, as is the introduction of the Managing Director Commissioner role.

By then we must have shown that we are on the right path to delivering services that are effective and value for money, in a sustained way. Successfully adopting an operating model that helps deliver the corporate plan and live within our means is key. Residents need to start to see the evidence of this progress from now and feel the benefits on council services.

This is why adopting this full two-year Improvement and Recovery Plan is so important, so that the whole council is focused on the steps that we need to take towards that. This will help the whole organisation focus and work together more consistently, harnessing the good will and commitment that is evident in staff and members who love Slough and understand the potential for this to be a great place to live, work and study.

The plan is informed by the review of progress made which was published in November 2024 and by the initial six-month milestones adopted in January 2025.

This plan includes a commitment to be clearer with residents about communicating the progress being made and engaging residents directly in feedback about this progress.



Will Tuckley, Managing Director Commissioner

Being a Best Value Council means having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the way that a council exercises its functions, underpinned by a commitment to continuous improvement. This improvement and recovery plan sets out the council's absolute commitment at political and officer level to focus on improvements needed.

The plan sets out how the council will work towards better governance, leadership and a positive organisational culture, financial improvements and effective risk management.

For Slough Borough Council to be sustainable, it must do more than improve - the council is struggling to meet statutory requirements and deliver on its priorities within its budgets. A new operating model, that is aligned to medium term financial plans is needed. Alongside service improvements, the operating model will identify changes to the way the council operates internally and in partnership with others.

The council is also preparing for a series of inspections over the next few months, and it will be important that responses form part of ongoing corporate and service improvement plans.

This Improvement and Recovery Plan sets out the key consultation and engagement opportunities when the council will seek feedback on progress against this plan and invite views on future priorities, the budget and the operating model. There is a clear opportunity to change, improve and deliver more effective service by listening and building on resident ideas and insight.

In the next few years there will be re-organisation in local government. Slough Borough Council will be expected to join a larger strategic authority that would be able to deliver functions that might otherwise be led by national government - such as transport, housing and economic growth. It is also expected that the council will need to merge with other councils, as it is a small unitary authority. It is important that the focus remains on improvement and recovery and on a sustainable operating model for Slough, to ensure that, moving into any re-organisation, the council knows its residents' needs and is already delivering well for them.

In this plan are a bold set of success measures that help keep the political and corporate leadership focused on where the council is trying to get to. These measures will be reviewed periodically, to ensure the detailed actions in the plan are enabling the council to improve in the timescales needed. The ultimate test will be if resident views and service performance improves.



The success of the plan is down to the whole council, but there are individual teams named who will lead on the different programmes. Additional investment is also being made through an additional £2m of funding for transformation, improvement and recovery.

2. Introduction

The council's current improvement and recovery began in late 2021 when the government sent commissioners in to oversee the management of the council. The government intervention began after it was found the council had failed to meet its Best Value Duty and was under performing in key areas. Councils have a Best Value Duty to continuously improve through a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. In October 2024, the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced Slough Borough Council will stay under government intervention for a further two years until November 2026.

The council's children's social care functions have been delivered under the statutory intervention of the Department for Education (DfE) since 2014, when the council was directed to set up an independent trust to deliver its children's services. This trust is Slough Children's First (SCF). Whilst the council is the sole owner of SCF, the DfE have the right to be consulted and consent to key decisions and to determine when services can return to the council. The last direction relating to children's services was issued in August 2023, which identified the functions that had to be delivered by this separate company and with compliance and cooperation with the DfE and the appointed DfE commissioner. In addition, in August

2023, the Secretary of State for Education issued a direction in relation to special educational needs and disability (SEND) services, following a joint area inspection. Whilst these primarily relate to the council's education services, the inspection highlighted failings in relation to social care services delivered via SCF to children and young people with SEND.

The action plan presented in this report sets out how the council will respond to the MHCLG directions and take action to become a Best Value Council. The improvement plans in relation to the DfE directions are reported separately. The plan presents the complex process that the council needs to go through to put the foundational work required in place to be a Best Value Council which involves building its data, systems and capacity to deliver the basics well, improve, recover, and transform. This is set against the extremely difficult financial position that Slough is in. This action plan needs to take account of the interventions relating to children's services and ensure one approach to corporate improvement, to the development of a new operating model and to achieving sustainability.

Alongside this, the council will also need to transform, to meet resident needs and improve the borough, to meet rising demand and extremely challenging resourcing constraints. This is the focus of the

operating model. The Improvement and Recovery Action Plan and operating model need to be considered together, along with Medium Term Financial Strategy and Corporate Plan. This plan sets out the main steps needed to develop a new operating model and address financial sustainability. The plan also the corporate improvement programmes that have been identified:

Main improvement and recovery programmes

- Vision and evidence-based decision-making
- Political leadership and governance
- A high performing workforce and culture
- Financial improvement
- Engaging with communities and with partners

Supporting programmes

- Complaints handling
- Improving the digital and technical capacity
- Strategic commissioning
- Risk maturity

The Improvement and Recovery Plan will help the council sustainably make progress against the council's priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan:

Purpose: Closing the healthy life expectancy gap, by focusing on children

A borough for children and young people to thrive - embedding Slough Children's Services' vision for children to be happy, safe and loved and thriving

- Providing quality services for vulnerable children and those with SEND.
- Improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people.
- Tackling high rates of child obesity.
- Increasing children and young people's participation in decisions and in shaping the future of Slough.



A town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives

- Working with partners to target health inequalities and promote wellbeing.
- Supporting residents to be as independent as possible, whilst providing quality services for the most vulnerable adults.
- Improving community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour.



A cleaner, healthier and more prosperous Slough

- Affordable, safe and healthy homes - improving the quality of council housing stock and the private rented sector.
- Improving air quality, promoting active travel and sustainable forms of transport, and taking action to prevent or minimise the impact of climate change.
- Providing clean, quality public spaces and working with developers to deliver a modern town centre.
- Engaging with businesses to create new employment opportunities.





Building on progress made

The council continues to face huge challenges to improve at pace and move into a sustainable operating model that meets residents' needs. We need to build on the progress that is being made:

Service improvements and impact on outcomes

- In children's social care with the number of children looked after by the council reducing because of investing in prevention and good social work practice.
- Delivering an increase of 10 percent in care packages for vulnerable adults, with a high and growing proportion (compared to the national position) through personal budgets that maximise the control and independence of those receiving care; overseeing an increase in children of a healthy weight, reversing the rise in obesity.
- Adding an extra 40 school places at Arbour Vale special school and agreeing to a further 35 at Millside/Haybrook College for students with special educational needs and deciding to transfer four council buildings to schools to add a further 40 nursery places.

- Having some of the most effective urban schools in the country with an enviable record at supporting young people and helping them overcome disadvantage and excel.

Leadership

- The political leadership has brought stability.
- The council has recruited to a cohesive and permanent managerial leadership structure, now led by a Managing Director Commissioner, providing stability and confidence for the workforce, learning and development investment has been made in all line managers across the business, supporting them to understand the impact of their leadership and supporting their teams through change.
- Staff turnover has reduced to normal levels (moving from 8.47 percent in Sept 2024 to 7.74 percent in Jan 25).
- Staff sentiments in the annual staff survey have in some areas improved on last year and are in line with national benchmarks such as management and diversity.

Financial stability

- The council is nearing the end of a process of uncovering all of the financial issues in the past and that were built into assumptions about the current and future financial position. Alongside this, tighter financial management and control has been established. A balanced budget has been agreed, which has included some difficult decisions, but has been achieved with a lower council tax increase and decreasing reliance on exceptional financial support from central government.
- The council has successfully disposed of surplus assets of £230m to help reduce inherited debt, including finally clearing space at the council's old town hall and putting a second former headquarters on the market.
- This has helped cut the cost of repaying debt from 30 percent to 19 percent of the revenue budget, freeing up more headroom for services.
- The budget setting process for 2025/26 also enabled the council to invest in services for the most vulnerable; increasing budgets for adult social care and homelessness; cutting the number of temporary

staff, encouraging the community or private sector to run services, such as advice services, or facilities, such as the football stadium at Arbour Park, where they are equipped to do this better or more efficiently than the council.

Place leadership

- Slough Borough Council is the only council in England to have a Simplified Planning Zone, encouraging businesses to locate here and winning substantial direct investment in the environment and facilities.
- Long term guaranteed support is in place for the very strong community and voluntary sector in Slough, using the Better Care Fund to add additional funds. Slough Town Centre's Business Improvement District was successfully renewed through a business ballot.
- Delivering public and private investment in the town has started the £9m 'destination Farnham Road' levelling-up project, refurbishing Nova House at a cost of £28m and creating a vision for future growth, providing a healthy environment for continuous investment by key partners including Berkeley Homes and SEGRO (who own Slough Trading Estate).



3. Key measures of success for improvement and recovery

1. Slough Borough Council is committed to becoming a Best Value Council

Within the timeframe of this improvement and recovery plan, the council expects to have made progress towards embedding its long-term vision, delivery of its corporate priorities and to be meeting its statutory obligations as well as sustaining continuous improvement and transformation and improvement. Priorities will set out how the council meets the diverse and intersectional needs of Slough's community.

This is all reflected in a corporate delivery plan, transformation plan and medium-term financial plan that is tied to service planning and delivery, creating a golden thread between strategic priorities and delivery.

The council wants to have satisfied government that everything possible has been done to develop a sustainable operating model. This will identify, if needed, a credible case for further investment or for alternative options for the future of the council.

Leaders, both political and officers, should be operating as confident leaders of place - and progressing delivery with partners across sectors and across the system, and working together to build prosperity. The leadership is starting to focus on tackling root causes to support prevention and early intervention and encouraging behaviour change.

The council will have demonstrated a track record of sustained capacity and capability to continue to improve and become a best value council. Leadership is clear about journey and direction of travel, and capacity and capability required.

The council leadership (members and senior officers) will be confident engaging with the community and can engage with diverse communities in open and targeted ways to ensure good reach (e.g. young people, private renters).

How this will be measured

This view is shared by senior officers, members and commissioners. It is validated by an LGA Peer Review and external auditors. It is reflected in inspections and will also be seen in:

- An increase in residents who strongly agree or tend to agree that the Slough Borough Council provides value for money - baseline - 21 percent, benchmark - 46 percent.
- An increase in views that respondents understand the council's vision and plans, and how they contribute to them (staff, residents, partners, businesses) - Staff: 2024/25 - 70.57 percent.
- Members' views and staff views of senior officers and senior officers' views of members are becoming more positive.
- Key corporate performance indicators show a positive upward trend.
- Views in residents' survey - show a positive move upwards, including for specific groups including children and young people.

2. The council sets out and proactively progresses a clear vision and priorities for how it meets the diverse and intersectional needs of Slough's community

This vision and priorities can be seen in the delivery of the corporate plan, transformation plan and medium-term financial plan and in service planning and delivery, creating a golden thread between strategic priorities and delivery. This is also reflected in partnership plans as leaders, both political and officers, are confident leaders of place.

The council uses credible benchmarked data - business analytics, predictive data, insight and contextual data to improve services, performance manage, set priorities, target resources against need, and make decisions in short, medium- and long-term time frames.

Decision-making documents use credible council data to support decision-making and this is evident in documents such as Cabinet reports and supporting documentation such as equality impact assessments. This helps create greater transparency in decision-making.

The corporate performance management framework is well understood and owned by senior officers and members. It has embedded key measures of success for improvement and recovery and resident views of council and satisfaction and helps the council be transparent about its approach to service improvement and performance management.

Members are well positioned to initiate drive and lead policy - whether as cabinet members, members of scrutiny or as backbench members. There is an annual cycle of executive decision-making that is underpinned by statutory and regulatory framework and corporate priorities.

How this will be measured

That view is shared by senior officers, members, commissioners and is validated by an LGA Peer Review and external auditors. It is reflected in inspections and benchmarked performance data shows good value for money and it is also seen in:

- Executive Decision-Making Forward plan.
- Members and staff saying they understand the reason for decisions that the council has had to take.



3. The council has made progress towards building an inclusive high performance and resident focused leadership culture that invites continuous feedback, learning, and improvement

This has been successfully integrated into the heart of the council's operating model. There is more evidence of a learning culture and of staff at all levels being inspired to do their best to continuously improve, in a more agile and adaptive way, maximising their impact, even with reduced resource. Members' behaviour is constructive and focused on becoming a best value council and on the long-term vision.

How this will be measured

- Staff work to objectives which link to the corporate performance framework and service plans, and this is reviewed periodically and annually in appraisals.
- Leadership is stable, staff retention is good, vacancies are filled in reasonable timescales, and there is a strategy for hard to fill roles.
- Through the delivery of a workforce strategy that focuses on organisational health and creates a stable and resilient workforce.
- Residents are starting to find it easier to navigate council systems - with fewer and more consistent points of access, and those able to use digital and self-serve having options to do so, freeing up more time for those who need focused attention.
- More evidence of getting things right first time.
- Percentage increase in members' and in senior managers' views that there is a healthy culture and good ways of working overall between members and officers (Current Members survey: 2023/24 - 38 percent 2024/25 - 40 percent).

4. A new operating model and sustainability

Introduction

To satisfy central government that sufficient progress is being made towards being a Best Value Council is set out in the 2026 Directions. The council needs to work at pace to develop:

- A new Target Operating Model (TOM) that enables both financial stability and the delivery of core services and priorities.
- A refreshed rolling Medium-Term Financial Strategy, Capital Strategy, and Treasury Management Strategy, aligned with the new TOM and transformation plan and demonstrating the council's financial sustainability and resilience, over the period of the strategies.

Within the timeframe of this improvement and recovery plan, the council is committed to making progress to embed its long-term vision, deliver its corporate priorities and meet its statutory obligations into the corporate delivery plan, transformation plan and medium-term financial plan. Corporate priorities need to set out how the council meets the diverse and intersectional needs of Slough's community.

These plans also need to show how the council is working to sustaining continuous improvement and transformation and improvement beyond the life of the current intervention.

The Fifth Commissioners' Letter drafted in April 2024 (and published after the General Election in October 2024 with [an update](#)) concluded that the council had not demonstrated through its annual forecasted financial outturn and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), Treasury Management Strategy and Capital Strategy that it can meet its asset disposal targets, deliver a debt structuring programme and sustain itself to support its core obligations and priorities. The letter set out the need to address the historic uncertainty in its balance sheet and accounts in a timely manner. It also needs to evidence that it remains stable, adaptable, and effective in the short term and viable and resilient in the medium to long term, in the face of pressures from growing demand, tightening funding and an increasingly complex and unpredictable financial environment. Scenario planning and the development of the operating model will be pivotal to this. The council has not demonstrated that it has the right mix of skills, capability, and capacity to deliver the

priority objectives and programmes. Inconsistency is evident in the council's ability to recruit, nurture, and retain talent, and ensure managers are equipped with tools, resources, data and insight for informed decision-making.

The council needs to demonstrate that it can become sustainable and resilient without exceptional financial support. This means living within its means, driving down costs, reducing debt and delivering the required asset disposal target, which is proving challenging.

The Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 identifies the need to review the budget setting process and medium-term financial strategy, with an increase in opportunities for resident engagement and scrutiny involvement and ensuring effective systems are in place for holding and managing finances for separate companies and partnership, approve an estates' strategy for use of the council's operational assets, ensuring this is aligned with the council's new operating model and MTFS, increasing public reporting and record keeping on assets disposed of. The Interim Auditor's Annual Report September 2024 also recommended a review asset disposal programme.



Strategic context

Uncertainty in local government funding in recent years has remained a topical point of discussion within the public sector mainly receiving single year funding settlements and no conclusion to funding reforms. Councils including organisations representing local government have continued to lobby government on more funding following years of austerity measures and funding not keeping pace with increased demand for services and rising costs. This has made it challenging for councils to budget, beyond a one-year horizon, robustly.

Government have announced as part of the spending review that it has committed to multi-year settlements which if implemented will provide the council with greater clarity of funding over future years.

The government also published the English Devolution White paper on 16 December 2024 outlining their approach to future reforms within local government.

The government on 3 January 2025 announced an independent commission on building a National Care Service. The commission will make recommendations for how to rebuild the adult social care system to meet the current and future needs of the population.

Whilst this provides a future direction of travel within local government, this does provide both opportunities and challenges for a council in intervention and with ongoing challenges to maintain financial resilience and develop future sustainability.

Slough's financial position

- The council's financial position is supported by exceptional finance support of £348.045m including an assumption of £15.709m in 2025/26.
- At the time of preparing this report, the 2021/22 and 2022/23 Final Accounts were approved by Audit and Corporate Governance Committee on 20 February and are in the process of being published, and the 2023/24 Draft Statement of Accounts are due for to be published for public inspection imminently.
- The council still has outstanding external and internal audit recommendations outstanding including the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement action plan. Wholly owned companies GRE5 and Slough Children First have filed their 2023/24 accounts at Companies House with JEH Limited still to file. The council does have liabilities with each company through company loans and intercompany transactions; and
- Whilst the presented budget 2025/26 presents a balanced budget, the future MTFS is not balanced. Reserves remain low.

- The council's transformation programme, which sets out in phases how the council will move to a future operating model, must deliver as a minimum projected 2026/27 budget gap totalling £13.2m and identified options to close the remaining £8.6m over the life of the MTFS by autumn 2025.
- Based on where the council is on its recovery journey and the Finance Improvement Programme, it is highly likely that further risks, issues and opportunities will present during 2025/26 to be managed effectively. If financial implications arise that cannot be managed within the budget, it will be necessary to implement further internal controls including the budget.
- The council's approach to funding the Capital Direction was through disposing of assets, thus generating capital receipts to mitigate the need for additional borrowing. Previous assumptions were that some £200m General Fund capital receipts would be generated to 2027/28. Following the outcome of the asset review, as reported to Cabinet Committee in November 2024, those assumptions have had to be revised. Over the same period, it is now anticipated that some £39m of net capital receipts will be achieved, and this means that only 63 percent of the Capitalisation Directions will be funded through asset disposals, compared to the 91 percent previously assumed.

- SCF has flagged several challenges in meeting its vision and priorities. These include SBC's financial situation, as the vast majority of its funding comes from SBC, the pressures on families experiencing financial hardship, family disengagement following the Covid 19 pandemic, Slough's close proximity to London adding complexity and leading to young people being more vulnerable to exploitation and safeguarding concerns outside the home and a rising obesity issue in the borough in an already complex system where healthy life expectancy is ten years younger than in the neighbouring borough.

Demand and pressures

The published draft budget outturn reports highlight the increased cost of and demand for services particularly adult social care and temporary accommodation and continues to be a theme in 2024/25 and in setting the 2025/26 budget. In Slough, children's social care is less of a pressure than elsewhere, including demand for specialist residential care which is a growing pressure in other places. It has been difficult to determine more forensically what is driving costs and demands and better benchmarkable performance, outcomes and financial data and analytics is needed and is a priority in the improvement and recovery plan.

Future operating model

In November 2024, the Cabinet approved the key defining features of Slough's new operating model. This operating model is for all council services and therefore includes Slough Children's First.

Overall shape and feel of the council

- Be smaller and more flexible - operating out of fewer buildings.
- Offer fewer and more consistent points of access and more transparent ways to track progress and responses, getting things right first time.
- Take a resident-first approach in how it works, and understand how residents, including children and young people, interact with services, freeing up time for those who need it.
- Focus on doing the basics well and consistently right across all services.
- Use council resources appropriately - funding what it should be funded and ensuring partners play their part.
- Take a commercial and value-for-money mindset, to successfully navigate the financial and social challenges all councils face.

- Be more inclusive, with a thriving workforce who are once again proud to be able to say they work for Slough Borough Council.

Council services

- Ensure a tight grip over statutory duties, roles and regulatory frameworks, but not restricted by them.
- Be better able to understand, manage and prevent resident demand for services - addressing root causes to support preventable and early intervention responses that are appropriate to need.
- Prioritise what it delivers - ensuring universal services such as waste are provided to a consistent standard whilst ensuring specialist support is targeted to help and protect the most vulnerable.

Place leadership

- Enable and/or commission work through partners and communities.
- Focus the council on shaping Slough as a place, to build sustainable prosperity for all, help make Slough a better place to live and provide opportunity for everyone.



At the core of what Slough Borough Council is trying to achieve is working more closely with its residents and local communities to ensure it enables and empowers service users, families and communities to live better and more independent lives.

Achieving sustainability

Alongside the implementation of the operating model, which is set out below, achieving future sustainability is contingent on the following actions which were also set out in the Section 115 officer's report:

- The budget setting process is proactively driven early in 2025/26, with a base budget review is undertaken for 26/27 and to guide future years.
- Reserves are tightly controlled - new requests to draw on existing reserves should be considered in the context of the financial sustainability of the council.
- Exceptional financial support - government continues to support the council as presented within the main body of the 2025/26 budget report.
- The council needs to be back working within the usual legislative timelines for audited accounts; it has achieved approval of four sets of backstop accounts although it is important to note that these have a disclaimed audit opinion. It will be essential that there is a focus on the final approval of 2023/24 accounts.
- The council puts the basics in place to become a Best Value Council as defined in the Improvement and Recovery Action Plan, including the Finance Improvement Programme, and that resources required to deliver the programme continue to be funded as a priority.
- The council adopts high level directorate story boards and service plans that create the golden thread between strategic priorities, resources and delivery, to enable resources to align with corporate priorities.
- Change is overseen by a Design Council to ensure alignment with growth and savings and change programmes and the corporate plan, operating model and medium-term financial plan.
- Financial controls are tight, and service pressures are proactively managed.

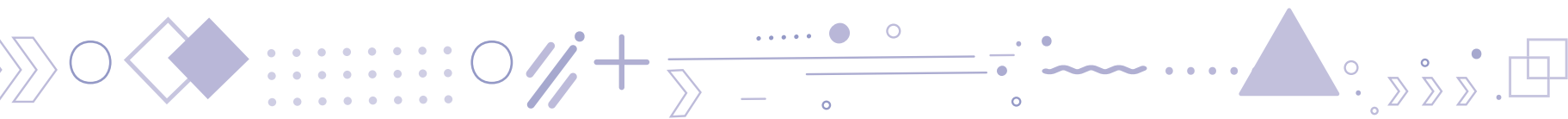


Asset disposal

A Phase 1 Estates' Strategy was approved by Cabinet in December 2023. A subsequent review has concluded that this strategy did not take fully into consideration the impairments against the assets. There is a need to reset the principles and approach to ensure that the new Asset Management Strategy does not have a negative impact on the council's finances.

This revised Asset Management Strategy is under development and complements the development of the target operating model. The principles adopted by Cabinet in November 2024 are:

1. Deliver best consideration for the council's assets in accordance with s.123 Local Government Act 1972 when disposing of an asset and best value under the Local Government Act 2003 in the way assets are utilised.
2. Consolidate buildings to support the reduction in revenue and capital expenditure on the council's property assets.
3. Carry out a yearly review of property assets and do not dispose of any property asset that will negatively impact on the council's financial position. In practice this means not to sell any asset whereby the outstanding debt is more than the market value, or where the income generated is higher than the expenditure.
4. Introduce a new Corporate Landlord Policy; a core priority for the council is to significantly strengthen the management of corporate assets and use this to ensure they are safe, compliant, and improve the quality and value for money of the service they can deliver.
5. Optimise assets to meet the council's corporate objectives: Resident focused, enabling residents and communities, strengthening partnerships, building trust, and providing financial sustainability.
6. Consolidation of operational estate into a small number of strategic hubs.
7. Provide quality modern operational buildings for staff and customers that will help the council to deliver outstanding service to customers and attract and retain talented professional staff. Operational buildings should be efficient, attractive environments that are future-proofed, flexible and support agile working.
8. Release surplus operational estate to drive capital receipts.
9. Achieve an estate that is fully compliant with statutory regulatory and health and safety requirements.
10. Support provision of a properly resourced, professional in-house property team that delivers outstanding service to internal and external stakeholders.
11. Hold a live Asset Register held in Asset Management and GIS Data Systems that are accurate, comprehensive, modernised, accessible, and transparent and ensure that information is published in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code.
12. Hold live asset information that can be easily and simply reported/communicated and properly used to strategically optimise asset management as well as respond to enquiries from members and the public disposals programme.



Implementing the Operating Model

Front door service review/Service redesign

Utilising the Systems Thinking methodology, work has already commenced of the development of a new Front Door Programme for Slough Borough Council:

- Physical front door (where residents have direct face-to-face contact with Slough Borough Council employees, such as community hubs, libraries, etc.).
- Digital front door (meaning where residents are able to complete transactions or make enquiries using electronic means).
- Complaints (exploring how to focus on getting a significantly higher first-time resolution to reduce (and preferably eliminate) complaints); and
- Workflows - focusing more on the back-office processes and streamlining how enquiries e-forms or hard-copy documents are handled and shared by residents with the council, and creating digital workflows that will allow the council or customers themselves to keep track of progress.

Core to this will be about how the council will in future view resident demand, and in particular, design services that are of value to residents. This means ensuring the most vulnerable get the support they need through targeted intervention and prevention. It also means designing out what is called 'failure demand'. This is work caused by a failure to do something or do something right for the customer. Customers come back, making further demands because the service they receive is ineffective.

The new operating principles and operating models present an important opportunity for Slough Borough Council to be proactive in reducing inequalities, reducing discrimination and building on the work already in progress in relation to the customer service 'Corporate Front Door' to improve access to services.

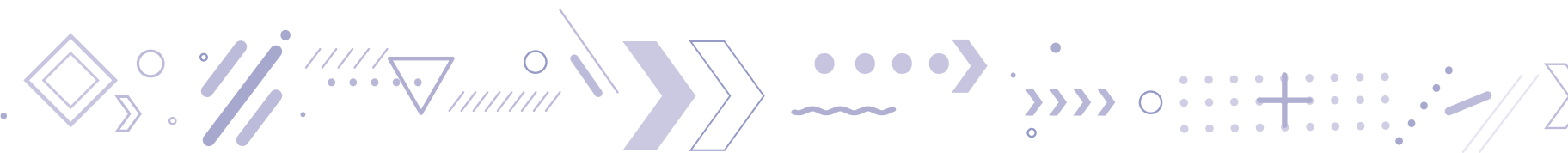
The purpose of this work is to initiate new style of more forensic two-part service review and redesign process and doing so provide the evidence base for the principles and practices of the new operating model for the council, from 2025/26 and beyond:

Part 1 - understanding current perspectives on service challenges and opportunities.

- Individual interviews to understand current perceptions of issues and opportunities.
- Conventional activity analysis.
- Conventional financial analysis.
- Documentary analysis.

Output from above steps is a Gap Analysis that informs part 2 of the work.

Part 2 - understanding the empirical problems – combining data and demand analysis – studying the work to better understand the work from the resident point of view.



This work is based on the understanding that in every service, small numbers of people - the 'vital few' generate disproportionate levels of activity and cost, but not for the reasons commonly assumed. By focusing improvement on addressing the needs of the organisation's 'vital few' residents, change occurs for the better and where it matters most, those that rely on local government services.

Transformational benefits follow better service; improved employee morale; released capacity and money saved. This identifies real root causes and answers to performance challenges. Services and systems are redesigned to work for the needs of cohorts of people.

This review will, by necessity, include Slough Children's First at every stage.

The phases consist of:

Review phase

Applying a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques to forensically understand resident/service user demand and review current system responses as the means to inform intelligent system and service redesign solutions. Analyse and synthesise what residents who use services need and design customised responses to meet these needs.

Redesign phase

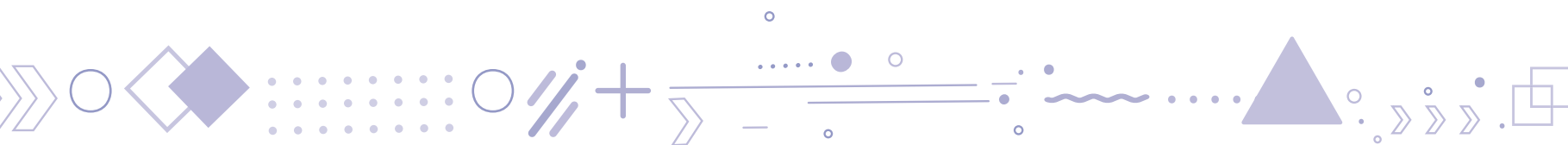
Emerging from the review phase, nimble 'proof of concepts' allows the designated service/system to test new operating principles and ways of working (data; work design and processes; performance metrics; budgets; technology; workforce) with small cohorts of residents/service users to learn to improve and improve to learn before seeking to embed and mainstream the approach. Service leaders and staff see performance issues more clearly, learn new approaches to change and build internal capabilities to achieve improved performance.

Rollout phase

Iterative improvements are expanded and sustained to embed the new ways and operating models (data; service design; performance measures; financial accounting; technology and workforce) that are more effective, responsive, integrated, preventative and efficient. Capacity and savings emerge from eliminating system and service waste - work generated by the council that does not serve original resident needs.

Redesigns of services will focus primarily on how better outcomes can be achieved more effectively with less waste and failure, on how the focus can be on prevention and early intervention and on developing strength-based models and community partnerships. The service reviews will be phased and will focus initially on those areas where there are the biggest opportunities to improve resident experience and where the greatest financial challenges exist for the council. These service reviews will be more than just reviewing how we do things, but be fundamental root and branch examinations to look at what we want to achieve with our residents and communities, and address how we do it through, where possible, co-design, co-creation and collaboration with service users and community groups.

Beyond the front door work, the operating model team have set out an ambitious timetable to look at wider service redesign work, utilising the work of the front door as the first point of entry. The table below illustration captures the proposed implementation plan for 2025-26 and 2026-27:





Consultancy support

This improvement and recovery plan identifies the work needed to increase organisational effectiveness and capacity to transform to deliver better services for residents. Over the next few months the council needs to set out much more definitively what these elements will look like in the future operating model. Alongside the in-house transformation team, consultancy support will be commissioned to assist with redesigning how we operate with regards to organisation and governance, contracts, property and estates, key business processes, budgets and finances, leadership, workforce and data and digital.

Digitally enabled change

It is envisaged that the service redesign work will inform a pipeline of complementary digital projects, whose delivery will form an enabling element of service change. Considering the findings summarised above, alongside previous analysis, that digital change is expected to have four areas of focus:

Joined-up view of the customer - enabling staff readily to see (subject to security and privacy constraints) all information about the resident or business customer they are serving. Identification will be a key issue here, so that the right information from different systems is joined up. Single sign-on for customers to digital services, which provided for in the 2025/26 MTFS, will help this;

Accessibility and clarity - making communications with customers - whether via website content, online portals or system-generated letters - centred on their needs: providing the information and services they need in terms they can readily understand and engage with. Involvement of customers in the improvement work will be critical in getting such redesign right;

Process improvement - typically using better the tools that we have (e.g. line of business systems and online portals, and the Jadu forms/workflow system) to support redesigned processes, but also applying new technologies such as generative AI where they can make a difference (an example being the process of producing first drafts of EHCPs, which is being scoped as the first generative AI pathfinder);

Data quality and availability - applying the data strategy currently under development in the redesign of services, so that decision makers at tactical, operational and strategic levels have the information they need to make decisions and can trust it.

The council's current applications, reflects a history of applications being procured by individual parts of the organisation to meet their specific requirements. This is not an unusual scenario in local government. Data is stored across multiple platforms and maintained by various providers. Consequently, there is a lack of integration and/or common data definitions between applications. This fragmentation poses challenges, relating to business process and data protection as well as technology, when attempting to create a unified view of the customer. It will be necessary to address these challenges incrementally and with agility, rather than through large-scale redesign, to maintain pace.

A principal objective of the new operating model is to start to design and build a more integrated council architectural system, starting with the three ICT digital systems used by customer services. This is something that needs to continue as the work progresses throughout the year.

Further details on progress towards developing the operating model is provided in Appendix 2.



5. Main programmes for improvement and recovery

Vision and evidence-based decision-making

Best value themes

Continuous improvement, leadership, partnerships and community engagement and service delivery

The Local Government Association Improvement and Assurance Framework:

- Monitoring against standards, benchmarks and local targets.
- Credible, quality data and information.
- Transparency, accessibility and intelligibility of information.

To be a Best Value Council

Effective leaders should have a clear vision and set of priorities for their area and play a key role in building local economic growth, social cohesion and a healthy local democracy. Service plans should be clearly linked to a local council's priorities, strategic plans and longer-term planning - a golden thread that runs through to individual objectives and accountability. Service delivery should be evidence-based, customer and citizen focused, and meet the needs of different groups within the community.

Golden thread

The Fifth Commissioners' Letter drafted in April 2024 (and published after the General Election in October 2024 with an update) states that the council "lacks a clear mission and purpose and there is no evidence of a "golden thread" of corporate objectives that cascade down through the organisation into individual performance management. Commissioners therefore have concerns that the council will struggle to deliver against its plans at the required pace" and that "Service planning is inconsistent and does not exert a strong influence on the delivery of services. Data gathering is inconsistent, and data and evidence are not widely and systematically used." A specific Direction was issued in November 2024 to "improve the systems and processes to enable better and evidence-based decision-making, including enhancing the data and insight functions, undertaking benchmarking". This builds on an earlier direction to "take steps to enable better and evidence-based decision-making, including enhancing the data and insight functions to enable better evidence-based decision-making."

In September 2024 the Local Government Association conducted an Equality Peer Review, involving members

and officers from other councils acting as critical friends and reviewing the council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion for workforce and community. The review recommended that the council establishes a corporate equalities board chaired by either the Chief Executive or the Leader to oversee the delivery of equality objectives and other delivery plans and establish the needs of the communities and then determine the required services (possibly via external delivery) to reduce long term spend.

Performance management

The council's Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 identifies the need to keep its performance indicators under review and ensure that it is benchmarking performance against national indicators and statistical neighbours. It also needs to ensure that performance is focused on outcomes and there is effective analysis of performance and that this is feeding into risk management and used as an assurance tool. The Auditor's Value for Money Annual Report in September 2024 identifies the need for the council to track and report KPIs aligned to the council plan. Develop approach to benchmarking.

Vision and evidence-based decision-making - Progress update

**September
2023**

- The Slough Insights Pack informed the Corporate Plan 2023-2027, which was refreshed following the all-out elections in 2023.

**April
2024**

- The Corporate Plan helped frame new equality objectives, which were adopted in April 2024, following consultation.
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2024/25, linked to the corporate plan were agreed jointly by corporate leadership and lead members. Progress against these KPIs is reviewed by corporate leadership on a monthly basis, and by Cabinet on a quarterly basis. This has been in place since the start of 2024/25. To support benchmarking, the council has joined LG Inform, which is a benchmarking tool.
- An initial set of Management Information (MI) dashboards have been established utilising PowerBI for corporate and service (Adults, Education, Housing, Complaints and Casework, SEND, Public Health) reporting and insight. Executive directors, senior managers, and team leaders can use data to understand trends and to take corrective action.
- The council has established a Public Health Team for Slough, under the direction of a permanent Director of Public Health, having previously had a shared service across Bracknell Forest Council and Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. This includes a Public Health Intelligence Unit. The Public Health Intelligence Unit has developed ward health profiles to inform evidence based planning, decision-making, commissioning and delivery.

**July
2024**

- Cabinet and Cabinet/CLT away days took place in July. This helped with building effective working relationships and setting a strategic direction. A longer-term vision for community and place has been set out by the leader.

**January
2025**

- Adoption of Community Safety Partnership Plan.
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment updated for Slough setting out population health needs.
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy review launched with stakeholders.
- Cabinet paper on devolution and local government re-organisation going to Cabinet.



Action plan

Objectives

- Enhance data and insight functions to support evidence-based decision-making.
- Develop shared evidence base and story of place and council to support policy and decision-making.
- Embed Corporate Plan, corporate performance framework and service planning and strategy development, taking on board Leader's vision.
- Establish approach to regular review and reset of long-term vision and medium-term plans.

Benefits

- The council uses credible benchmarked data – business analytics, predictive data, insight and contextual data to improve services, performance manage, set priorities, target resources against need, and make decisions in short-, medium- and long-term time frames.
- Decision-making documents use credible council data to support decision-making and this is evident in decision-making documents such as Cabinet reports and supporting documentation such as

equality impact assessments. This helps create greater transparency in decision-making.

- A shared evidence base supports policy and service decisions.
- Corporate Performance Framework is used to identify corporate priorities for service improvement.
- Whole council and whole place approach to implementing the corporate plan and to driving the long-term vision and keeping it under review. Longer term planning will allow the council to better plan resources and demands on staff.
- Regular and accurate performance reporting to Cabinet and stakeholders.

Responsible officer:
Director of Strategy, Change and Resident Engagement

Vision and evidence-based decision-making - Action plan

| Objectives | Task | Start | End |
|--|--|-----------|-----------|
| Enhance data and insight functions | Implement and embed data maturity improvement plan having: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertaken a review of data in line with Local Government Data Maturity Assessment Tool • Developed data maturity improvement plan | 1 Apr 25 | 30 Sep 25 |
| | Implement changes to corporate performance management framework and reporting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand Power BI dashboards to cover all service areas • Develop benchmarking and trend analysis | 31 Mar 25 | 31 Jul 25 |
| Develop shared evidence base and story of place and council to support policy and decision-making | Develop shared evidence base and story of place and council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That puts profile of place in Slough Insights Pack into context of progress against corporate plan and challenges - integrating resident views and insights • That integrates Joint Strategic Needs Assessment • Builds one shared evidence base and one shared understanding of issues • Develops Slough Insights Pack into more rounded profile of current and future population and place | 1 Apr 25 | 30 Sep 25 |
| Embed Corporate Plan, corporate performance framework and service planning and strategy development, taking on board Leader's vision | Adopt and implement an Equality Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch community conversations to collate resident insight about what is driving inequality in Slough • Deliver proactive actions to tackle inequality across partnership • Embed into service plans and workforce strategy | 3 Feb 25 | 30 Nov 26 |
| | Corporate Delivery Plan and full service planning is aligned to the medium term financial strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop directorate story boards as high level service plans • Undertake update of corporate plan ahead of State of the Borough event • Adopt full service plans | 1 Mar 25 | 30 Sep 25 |
| Establish approach to regular review and reset of long term vision and medium term plans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and embed approach to regular review and reset of long term vision • Review and reset of long term vision undertaken | 1 Jun 25 | 31 Mar 26 |



Strengthening political leadership and governance

Best value themes

Continuous improvement, leadership and governance

The Local Government Association Improvement and Assurance Framework:

- Clarity: understand who is accountable for what.
- A culture of assurance and accountability.
- Proportionality: assurance activity must add value, be cost-effective and be proportionate to the level of risk.
- A whole-council approach.

To be a Best Value Council

The council must demonstrate proper democratic accountability, transparency, public scrutiny and audit of all its activities. This requires good governance, including a positive organisational culture across all functions and effective risk management. Effective political and administrative leaders with a clear vision and set of priorities are key to a healthy local democracy and all members and officers should uphold their duties and maintain high standards. Clear and robust governance and scrutiny arrangements to

meet local need are essential and need to be understood by members and officers alike, reviewed regularly and accurately described in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS). Arrangements should include clear decision-making processes and schemes of delegation, and evidence of decision-making in accordance with public law principles. Systems and procedures alone cannot ensure good governance, it is necessary to ensure that the relationships, balance of power and culture also support good governance.

Political leadership

During the time that the intervention in Slough has been in place, there has been a change of administration. The current administration, a minority Conservative-led administration, will have been in place for two years in May 2025 and the next scheduled (all out) election is in May 2027. During this time, there have also been two cabinet reshuffles, which has meant new lead members have had to be onboarded and supported to develop into their role. Earlier in 2024, an Independent Group was formed from seven former Labour Party members. One former Conservative member stands as an independent, not in any group.

The Fifth Commissioners' Letter drafted in April 2024 (and published after the General Election in October 2024 with an [update](#)) observed that the administration being in no overall control leaves the council vulnerable to de-stabilising changes, which could impact the effectiveness of the change needed to improve and recovery. Whilst there are dynamics which cannot be managed by this improvement and recovery plan, it is important to do everything possible to support stability - through strengthening political leadership, building positive member-officer relations and good governance.

This fifth letter reported that, despite having a minority council administration, the political leadership of Slough Borough Council has established generally good relationships with officers and is providing a positive environment for officers to work in. This will be built on over the next two years. As with all local authorities, political change is a reality, even more so in the current climate. To that end the organisation is reviewing the member development programme. Additionally, from 2026 work will need to commence on the member induction programme for the all-out elections in 2027 and to be ready to take account of any local government re-organisation that may impact on Slough.

Member officer relations

Despite the encouraging comments from the commissioners, we do not wish to be complacent and are looking to strengthen good relations. One way we will test this is through surveys. Whilst results evidence things are improving there is still more to be done. Officers need to continue investing in relationships with group leaders and supporting members on specific committees as well as establishing an effective system for briefing and receiving feedback from all elected members. There is an opportunity to establish consistent systems for directors to update lead members and to utilise the established meetings to have strategic discussions on vision, delivery and performance.

Governance and executive decision-making

The Annual Governance Statement has identified the need to develop understanding and ownership of governance across the council and support the process of deliberation and consideration that should underpin decision-making. This is a key focus for the next two years, is reflected in the actions in the plan and covers improvements to processes and procedures as well as training for officers and members. Embedding systems

are key to support continuous improvement. The AGS assessment needs to be informed by a wide range of information and be used as a key improvement tool to support good governance.

Scrutiny of the council is an important part of better decision-making. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) undertook a review of the council's scrutiny function from January to February 2024. The report found that scrutiny was steadily improving after a fairly slow start, with support from a specialist officer, and a new chair with the skills and capacity to effectively lead the committee. The report recommended more discipline and prioritisation around scrutiny's work programme and to focus on improvement and recovery and that Cabinet members, rather than officers, were expected to be the focal point of scrutiny questioning and accountability.

The updated Directions require the following:

- Improving the systems and processes to enable better and evidence-based decision-making.
- Re-examining the review by the authority of their companies and improving company governance.
- A review of progress to risk maturity and how well its functions and processes enable risk-aware decisions that support the achievement of strategic objectives.



Strengthening political leadership and governance - Progress update (further detail is provided in the report to Audit and Corporate Governance Committee in December 2024)

- The member-officer relations protocol was updated, based on a good practice model code, and approved by Full Council in January 2024.
- The members' register of interests was published and the refreshed and a report on this was presented to Standards Committee in March 2024, including follow up actions to a previous internal audit report.

- Lead members given access to dashboards to support oversight of performance of services.
- Regular portfolio meetings between Cabinet members and their respective lead officers covering performance and recovery and strategic planning.
- A cross-party Member Development Working Group has agreed a programme of all-member training sessions to be provided by a mixture of LGA and in-house providers, in line with the Member Development Plan.

- The 2023-24 Annual Governance Statement (AGS) was presented to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee in July 2024 and has been updated every quarter to support continual improvement.
- The Chief Executive meets the leaders of the respective groups on a regular basis. This is helping to embed collaborative working between members and officers as well as fostering understanding.

- A meeting of group leaders has also been launched on a monthly basis to share updates and seek input at an early stage - for example there have been discussions on devolution and community engagement.
- Lead Members and Directors meetings include a more thematic session, for example on communications as well as a review of upcoming decisions.

- The Constitution has been subject to an annual review and specific aspects have been discussed with members and updated, including contract procedure rules, treasury management, terms of reference for audit and corporate governance committee.
- An in-person member-officer relations event was held with senior officers and members discussing how to support each other using a case study approach.



Action plan

In order to deliver improvement, the action plan as it relates to Scrutiny and Governance comprises of the following four key objectives:

1. Build a strong, self-sustaining culture of good governance by focusing on high-quality councillor leadership, and governance behaviours (across all councillor groups and roles).
2. Build a strong, self-sustaining culture of good governance amongst members and officers, by focusing on high quality officer-member relationships and behaviours.
3. Build a strong, self-sustaining culture of good governance amongst by focusing on high quality officer governance behaviours.
4. Develop fit for purpose governance-systems and processes.

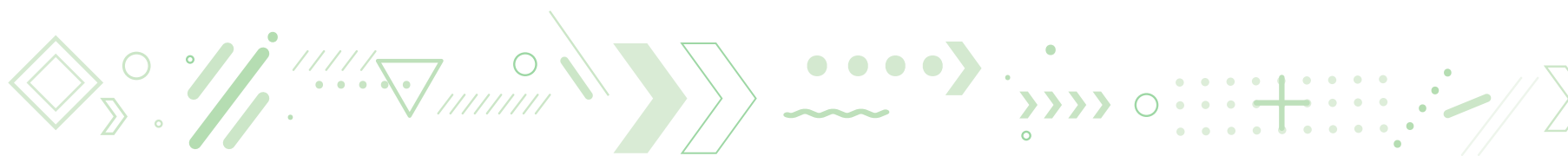
The purpose of these objectives is to deliver the following benefits:

- Increased level of understanding of good governance principles amongst members and officers and a culture that encourages review and improvement.
- Improved decision-making arrangements to encourage and promote good governance.
- Strengthened officer and member relations with a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.
- An organisation that is committed to the highest standards of conduct and behaviour.

Responsible officer:
Director of Legal and Governance Services

Strengthening political leadership and governance - Action plan

| Objectives | Task | Start | End |
|--|--|--------|--------|
| Build a strong, self-sustaining culture of good governance by focusing on high-quality councillor leadership, and governance behaviours (across all councillor groups and roles) | Review support to members including mentoring provided by the LGA to ensure effectiveness and to ascertain the need for follow up | Feb 25 | Apr 26 |
| | Review Member Development programme for 2025-26 to ensure good governance practices are covered and reinforced | Feb 25 | Apr 25 |
| | Design Member Development Programme for all-out elections in 2027 whilst being mindful of potential LG reorganisation | Sep 26 | Apr 27 |
| | Consider applying for Member Development Charter/Charter Plus | Sep 26 | Apr 27 |
| Build a strong, self-sustaining culture of good governance amongst members and officers, by focusing on high quality officer-member relationships and behaviours | Build on Lead Member and Director meetings and monitor outcomes - are they enhancing strategic planning, early oversight of key issues, information sharing | Jan 25 | Jun 25 |
| | Embed close working by promoting close collaboration through improved decision-making arrangements, such as ensuring consistency in the provision of lead member briefings | Jan 25 | Apr 27 |
| | Review briefing arrangements and the provision of information to members generally | Mar 25 | Apr 25 |
| Build a strong, self-sustaining culture of good governance amongst by focusing on high quality officer governance behaviours | Provide governance support to officers with training on procedures, expectations and best practice (ongoing) | Mar 25 | Mar 27 |
| | Review effectiveness of governance training content in the officer induction programme | Mar 25 | Apr 25 |
| | Provide dedicated training for officers on scrutiny arrangements and expectations | Feb 25 | Jun 25 |
| | Provide support to officers on working in a political environment, with CLT and director attendance | Feb 25 | May 25 |



| Objectives | Task | Start | End |
|--|---|--------|--------|
| Develop fit for purpose governance-systems and processes | Review structure of democratic services team | Nov 24 | Apr 25 |
| | Review sign-off arrangements for committees including Cabinet | Mar 25 | Jun 25 |
| | Review scrutiny changes as per CfGS findings to ensure continued prioritisation and focus around work programming | Mar 25 | Apr 25 |
| | Conduct an assessment of whether the information listed in the Improvement and Assurance framework is being received by the appropriate people and bodies in the organisation, and address weaknesses | May 25 | Jul 25 |
| | Implement a Management Assessment process to inform the AGS assurance process | Mar 25 | Apr 25 |
| | Support Audit Committee to undertake a self-assessment to inform the annual report | | Jun 25 |
| | Review governance arrangements for companies associated with SBC | Mar 25 | Sep 25 |
| | Be ready to provide proactive input to discussions on LG reorganisation and consider governance arrangements including transition | Mar 25 | Apr 27 |



Developing a high performing workforce and culture

To be a Best Value Council

Modelling positive and effective leadership behaviours at all levels has an impact on the council's overall culture and governance. Statutory officers working together to contribute their perspective will greatly improve the council's stability. High turnover in these roles and the wider leadership group may be indicative of wider issues of concern in the council's leadership culture. The continuation of focus on the culture of the council to support stability and create the environment for leaders to act in a unified and cohesive way, rather than in siloes will be key, enabling them to thrive and contribute to creating a high performance culture is key to sustaining success. Capacity constraints should be identified and recruitment to fill key posts prioritised. Succession planning should be considered, with a longer-term view as to when there might be a gap in experienced senior officers. Special severance payments should only be considered in exceptional cases.

Leadership

The Fifth Commissioners' Letter found that the organisational leadership was not collegiate and prevented the pace of recovery and change that was needed, although there were signs of potential improvement with a new organisational structure, agreed in 2023, being underway. The update letter observed a sense of commitment to driving change, openness, and transparency in the corporate leadership team and signs of working more collegiately and developing a more strategic approach to improvement. There were signs of staff being more confident in their leaders, but a recognition that this continued to be precarious and an urgent requirement to have a high-performance culture programme and a comprehensive workforce strategy, focused on permanent recruitment, development and retention. The Interim Auditor's Annual Report September 2024 echoes the need for permanency and stability of leadership.

In September 2024 the Local Government Association conducted an Equality Peer Review, involving members and officers from other councils acting as critical

friends and reviewing the council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion for workforce and community. The review confirmed that there was growing confidence in the new leadership but also pressed for the need to focus on retention of permanent leadership and of having a workforce strategy.

A staff survey was conducted in 2023 and again in November 2024. The 2024 survey sought to standardise questions so they could be benchmarked against other local government surveys and wider workforce surveys. This means that it is not possible to fully analyse results on a trend. The staff survey is provided as an appendix to this action plan.

Views on leadership that can be analysed on a trend have increased:

- Our leadership is committed to development of its people - from 43 percent to 49 percent.

In 2024, there is an aggregated score for questions relating to vision including questions about leadership visibility and vision. These questions elicited an average positive score of 60.5 percent against a benchmark of 70.6 percent.

Workforce

The equality review drew on feedback about the implementation of the 2023 organisational structure and recommended that within this workforce strategy there was more of a focus on inclusive recruitment and supporting staff progression including work shadowing, coaching, and mentoring, to enable more staff from diverse backgrounds to progress. In response to this feedback, the review also recommended a review of systems and procedures for managing organisational change.

The review found that in 2023, staff survey results were not shared with all staff and this had impacted on confidence and trust in the leadership. Workshops exploring culture were carried out in winter 2023 and these surfaced the extent to which culture was impacting negatively and unpacked how this was playing out.

Therefore, as part of the staff survey planning in 2024, it was widely communicated that all results would be shared with all staff. The 2024 staff survey elicited a response rate of 53 percent compared with 47 percent in 2023. Staff feel more valued and recognised for what they do in 2024 (55 percent) compared with 2023 (47 percent), although some scores have reduced this may be related to the scale of reorganisation that took place

in 2024. Staff turnover rate is reviewed every month on a rolling basis. The turnover rate has reduced from an annual rolling rate of 17.1 percent in December 2023 to 15.6 percent in March 2024 to 7.74 percent in Jan 2025.

Following the staff survey (2023) it was revealed very low confidence in the leadership (44 percent) and that staff were not being empowered to implement change (46 percent), workshops were carried out to better understand the culture in winter 2023.

The council has maintained its ambition of bringing more staff back into the office and following the introduction of the Hybrid Working Policy in November 2023, there has been an increase in the number of people coming into the office regularly. In 2024, on average 229 visitors attended the office per day, indicating we require a continued focus in this area which will be supported by a refreshed hybrid working policy which is under development.



Developing a high performing workforce and culture - Progress update

**December
2023**

- Following the staff survey, workshops were undertaken to understand the culture of the organisation better.

**April
2024**

- Utilising the cultural insights and enhancing the existing contributions of an culture change working group, a 'Our People' forum was introduced, with representation from across the council. The forum has been pivotal in user testing new/revised HR products such as the new 1:1 and end of year appraisal forms and helping design the staff engagement survey.
- Alongside this, staff disability, race and women's networks are being engaged to seek the views of their members when contributing to HR products or cultural initiatives.

**June
2024**

- Tiers 1-3 (Executive Directors, Directors and Heads of Service) have been invited to quarterly sessions to support them in understanding their role as individuals and teams in improvement and recovery.

**July
2024**

- Staff Talkabout sessions, which are "roadshows" with the Chief Executive and leadership, were relaunched over summer (late July and August), with over 150 attendees. More than 90 percent of respondents said they found it useful. Corporate induction sessions have been revised and relaunched to now include a strategic overview of political and corporate priorities, progress against improvement and recovery and the future operating model, alongside more cultural aspects such as introducing staff to employee network chairs, equality commitments and ambition on culture change.

**August
2024**

- The 2023/24 appraisal cycle closed at 79 percent completion. This is a significant improvement on completion rates from previous years that averaged at 15 percent. Following this, work has been undertaken to use employee feedback to streamline the process and make it easier for staff to capture and track their 1-1 and appraisal information.

September 2024

- The restructure of senior leadership (Executive Directors and Directors) has been completed. All the tier two director vacancies are now filled with permanent appointments.
- Each executive director is now receiving a monthly HR Metrics dashboard to support directorate leadership teams to discuss their key people issues in relation to recruitment, development, and case work.

November 2024

- The Staff Equality Networks have had more formal support and connection from corporate leadership including sponsors and agreed involvement in feeding directly into equality and workforce plans.

December 2024

- The revised Staff Survey results were shared in December with all staff on the intranet. Results in some instances can be drilled down to head of service level, therefore increasing transparency with staff. The leadership team for each directorate also presented their results and immediate actions at the Chief Executive's Talkabout and at the leadership group.
- A Corporate Equality Board was launched to oversee delivery of equality objectives and Equality Peer Review findings.
- The Corporate Leadership Team is a stable team, and following recently appointments, all but one will be filled by permanent roles (with recruitment underway for the vacant post - the Director of Adult Social Care). The Management Director Commissioner proposed role was confirmed. This means that the council expects to move into a period of leadership stability as the 2024-26 improvement and recovery plan is being drafted.

January 2025

- A Line Managers essentials programme has been designed and implemented in Jan 2025. The modules are supporting managers to better understand their leadership style and impact, with a view to supporting their teams through periods of change. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive thus far.
- With the stability of directors, there has been an emergence of newsletters /away days - within business areas to bring the workforce together.
- HR now delivers monthly people metrics data to each directorate via the HRBP. This supports leaders to discuss the recruitment, retention and development of their people and supports HR to partner them in interventions that may be required to establish a high performing team.

Action plan

Objectives

Triangulating the recent staff survey results, LGA peer review and HR MI data, HR has drafted a Workforce Strategy with four pillars designed to embed a high performing culture where people thrive. The focus is on getting the basics right, developing our people and creating a positive, healthy and inclusive place to work. We will keep this as a living strategy that will continually grow over the coming years, developing and changing as needed. The current strategy is still under development at the time of publishing this report. The current draft pillars are set out below. These may change, and this will be a live strategy that will continually grow over the coming years, developing and changing as needed.

- Getting the basics right - we will ensure all our staff have access to the information, tools and support they need.
- Building trust and empowering our people- we expect all leaders and line managers to build trust and transparency and to set a no blame culture ensuring diverse ways for staff to share insight and be heard.
- Fostering a healthy and inclusive environment in which to work - we will provide the appropriate resources to support managers to build their teams and creating a sense of belonging, supporting their wellbeing and championing diversity and inclusion.
- Building a positive and transformative culture- we will take steps to create a high performing culture that creates the best outcomes for our residents, creating the conditions for staff to thrive.

Benefits

- Increased employee engagement and staff morale.
- Improved staff sentiments about leaders.
- Increased trust between staff and leadership.
- Staff have an improved vision of the council's recovery.
- Appraisal completion rates five percent higher year on year.
- Increased participation in staff survey (five percent year on year) with improvements in CLT leadership and learning and development section.
- Decrease in casework across ED areas where line managers have attended the Line Managers essentials program.
- Action plan.

Responsible officer:
Director of HR and Workforce Transformation

Developing a high performing workforce and culture - Action plan

| Objectives | Task | Start | End |
|--|--|----------|-----------|
| Strategy approval | Final Workforce Strategy approval by Employment Committee and detailed implementation roadmap completed | 1 Feb 25 | 1 May 25 |
| Getting the basics right | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create easy to understand and accessible data packs to ensure all directors can understand key HR metrics for their business area to support their people • Provide managers with the right policies underpinned by manager guidance so they can support their teams. | 1 Feb 25 | 1 Sep 25 |
| Building trust and empowering our people | Revise the 1:1 and End of Year To include ability to capture skills and talent profiles; therefore, encouraging regular dialogue between manager and staff with the ability to manage or celebrate performance | 1 Apr 25 | 1 Jun 25 |
| Building trust and empowering our people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve line manager capability and pipeline by investing in their ability to lead and coach staff through change in an inclusive style • Establish a Talent Management offer to all staff to include the offer of mentors | 1 Apr 25 | 31 Oct 25 |
| Positive Culture | Design and deliver an excellent onboarding and induction experience; to include buddy system and improved engagement of new starters with cultural initiatives | 1 Apr 25 | 1 Oct 25 |
| Positive Culture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish career pathways (both generic and detailed) for all staff • Increase the offer of apprenticeships • Provide opportunities for carers, work experience students and graduates to join SBC | 1 Apr 26 | 31 Mar 26 |
| Positive Culture | Improve culture by focusing on establishing a culture of 'our voice in action' and ensuring staff feel they have a collective ownership of responses to the staff survey | 3 Mar 25 | 27 Nov 26 |



Developing a high performing workforce and culture - Action plan

| Objectives | Task | Start | End |
|-----------------------|---|-----------|-----------|
| Healthy and inclusive | Establish a working partnership with employee networks to ensure their lived experience informs design of HR policies and tools | 3 Mar 25 | 28 Mar 26 |
| Healthy and inclusive | Establish corporate-led communications with two-way feedback and engagement | 21 Apr 25 | 9 May 25 |
| Healthy and inclusive | Integrate staff engagement networks and the Our People Forum into the culture programme through collaborative working | 12 May 25 | 30 May 25 |



Financial improvement plan

To be a Best Value Council

An effective internal control environment needs to be in place to safeguard the use of resources, and clear and effective processes to secure value for money. It must have appropriate financial management, reporting and regulation arrangements in place, in accordance with CIPFA's Financial Management Code, to govern the strategic and operational management of its investments, funding, assets and companies. Compliance with the Prudential Framework is needed in making investment and borrowing decisions and not take on excessive risk. Investment decisions must have a commensurate level of scrutiny, transparency and approval to make sure that officers and members fully understand the risks.

Financial management and reporting should be supported by robust financial systems, record keeping and quality assurance, with appropriate use of specialist expertise and independent assurance when needed.

Authorities should respond to audit recommendations and address issues identified in a timely way.

The Fifth Commissioners' Letter states that there remains a requirement to strengthen the framework and data that surrounds financial decision-making. In addition, to meet the council's and subsidiary companies, legislative and regulatory requirements in a timely manner, and provide assurance that they are managing the resources available to them effectively the council needs to ensure it performs to the required standards and rigour and is compliant with the CIPFA Financial Management Code.

The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2023/24 identifies the following financial improvement actions to ensure demonstrable and collective compliance with CIPFA's Financial Code: review of systems for recording financial transaction, ensuring financial management and governance are included in onboarding and manager development programmes, a costed programme for closing off historic statements of accounts, a review of the budget setting process and medium-term financial strategy and ensuring effective systems in place for holding and managing finances for separate companies. The AGS identifies specific actions to improve company governance.



Financial improvement plan - Progress update

A Finance Improvement Plan (FIP) is in place and contains 37 projects related to financial improvement and aligns to CIPFA's Financial Management Code. The FIP also incorporates all external and internal audit recommendations, directions and the action plan underpinning the Annual Governance Statement. The FIP is a programme not expected to conclude until May 2026 and therefore it is highly probable that further issues could materialise as the FIP evolves.

FIP Projects (Status January 2025)

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|--|----|---|--|----|---|--|
| 1 | Financial Procedures Framework | | 14 | Fixed asset register | | 27 | Anti-fraud and corruption culture | |
| 2 | Completion of Statement of accounts | | 15 | Disposals review and monitoring Fixed asset register | | 28 | Up-to-date CIPFA financial management code and other legislative changes | |
| 3 | Value for Money | | 16 | Treasury Management | | 29 | Identify current and future liabilities | |
| 4 | Capacity and skills for recovery (Corporate, Governance/Audit/Risk, Fin Mgt) | | 17 | Housing Benefit | | 30 | MTFS ensure balanced/agreed including engagement all | |
| 5 | Capacity and skills for recovery (Transactional services) | | 18 | Charitable Trusts Governance and Monitoring | | 31 | Reserves and resilience | |
| 6 | Financial Reporting and best practice | | 19 | Risk management system | | 32 | Revenues and Benefits Transformation work | |
| 7 | Budget management best practice | | 20 | Internal Audit - includes audit recommendations | | 33 | Development of finance system to be fit for purpose | |
| 8 | Companies reporting | | 21 | Procurement and contract management | | 34 | The transactional service - single view of debt and maximise collection | |
| 9 | Savings are monitored and managed and regular reports | | 22 | Annual Governance Statement (AGS) align to Statement of Accounts | | 35 | Grants register | |
| 10 | Reconciliations key systems | | 23 | Training programme - members and (non) finance officers | | 36 | Adequacy of Insurance Assurance | |
| 11 | Debtors invoices and audit trail for improved Debt Collection | | 24 | FBP strengthened | | 37 | Internal controls | |
| 12 | Debtors and Income Systems | | 25 | Financial sustainability | | | | |
| 13 | Debt reporting and performance | | 26 | Resident and stakeholder engagement | | | | |

Action plan

Objectives

1. Address items raised within the Finance Improvement action plan.
2. Implement a robust system of financial controls and reporting.
3. Compliance with the prudential framework.
4. Review key finance strategies and policies (Investment Strategy, Capital Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy).
5. Undertake a review of the governance arrangements of all council-owned companies (excluding SCF) to assure compliance, and secretarial functions are being delivered appropriately.

Benefits

1. Delivery of best practice finance systems that deliver up to date, real time data to the business to enable real time decision-making and demonstrating value for money.
2. Ability to monitor and remedy potential areas of overspend.
3. Improve financial oversight.
4. Nurture and create career opportunities for personnel across the council and development opportunities across the Corporate Resources directorate.
5. Proactively manage growth and work collectively across the council to develop and design solutions that are effective and efficient.
6. Develop robust mechanisms to validate and track savings to benefits realisation.



Financial improvement plan - Action plan

| Objectives | Task | Owner | Start | End |
|---|---|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 3. Compliance with the prudential framework | Compliance with Financial Procedures Framework | Christopher Holme | 31 May 24 | 31 Mar 26 |
| 2. Implement a robust system of financial controls and reporting | Completion of Statement of accounts | Christopher Holme | 28 Jun 24 | 30 Apr 25 |
| 2. Implement a robust system of financial controls and reporting | Value for Money | Christopher Holme | 3 Jun 24 | 28 Feb 26 |
| 5. Undertake a review of the governance arrangements of all council-owned companies (excluding SCF) to assure compliance, and secretarial functions are being delivered appropriately | Review capacity and skills for recovery (Corporate, Governance/Audit/Risk, Fin Mgt) | Dave McNamara | 3 Jun 24 | 29 Nov 25 |
| 5. Undertake a review of the governance arrangements of all council-owned companies (excluding SCF) to assure compliance, and secretarial functions are being delivered appropriately | Capacity and skills for recovery (Transactional services) | Andy Jeffs | 26 Jul 24 | 29 Nov 25 |
| 2. Implement a robust system of financial controls and reporting | Financial reporting and best practice | Christopher Holme | 25 Jul 24 | 30 Sep 25 |
| 2. Implement a robust system of financial controls and reporting | Budget management best practice | Dave McNamara | 1 Aug 24 | 31 Jul 25 |
| 3. Compliance with the prudential framework | Companies reporting | Peter Hopkins | 28 Jun 24 | 30 May 25 |
| 2. Implement a robust system of financial controls and reporting | Savings are monitored and managed and regular reports | Dave McNamara | 15 Oct 24 | 30 Apr 25 |

| Objectives | Task | Owner | Start | End |
|---|---|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Address items raised within the Finance Improvement action plan | Reconciliations key systems - cred and debtors and B/S review regular and reported on | Christopher Holme | 1 Apr 24 | 30 Jun 24 |
| 2. Implement a robust system of financial controls and reporting | Debtors invoices and audit trail for improved debt collection | Andy Jeffs | 3 Jun 24 | 31 Oct 25 |
| 2. Implement a robust system of financial controls and reporting | Debtors and income systems | Andy Jeffs | 31 Dec 24 | 31 Oct 25 |
| 2. Implement a robust system of financial controls and reporting | Debt reporting and performance | Andy Jeffs | 15 Oct 24 | 31 Oct 25 |
| 3. Compliance with the prudential framework | Fixed asset register | Christopher Holme | 3 Jun 24 | 30 Apr 25 |
| 3. Compliance with the prudential framework | Disposals review and monitoring fixed asset register | Peter Hopkins | 15 Oct 24 | 30 Jun 25 |
| 4. Review key finance strategies and policies (Investment Strategy, Capital Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy) | Treasury management | Christopher Holme | 3 Jun 24 | 30 May 25 |
| 2. Implement a robust system of financial controls and reporting | Housing benefit | Andy Jeffs | 03 Jul 24 | 30 Apr 25 |
| 5. Undertake a review of the governance arrangements of all council-owned companies (excluding SCF) to assure compliance, and secretarial functions are being delivered appropriately | Charitable Trusts governance and monitoring | Dave McNamara | 3 Jun 24 | 30 May 25 |



Financial improvement plan - Action plan

| Objectives | Task | Owner | Start | End |
|---|--|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| 5. Undertake a review of the governance arrangements of all council-owned companies (excluding SCF) to assure compliance, and secretarial functions are being delivered appropriately | Risk management system | Christopher Holme | 10 Aug 24 | 27 Feb 26 |
| 3. Compliance with the prudential framework | Internal Audit | Annabel Scholes | 25 Jul 24 | 31 Mar 26 |
| 3. Compliance with the prudential framework | Procurement and contract management | Christopher Holme | 3 Jun 24 | 31 Dec 25 |
| 3. Compliance with the prudential framework | Annual Governance Statement (AGS) align to statement of accounts. | Sukdave Ghuman | 15 Oct 24 | 31 Mar 26 |
| 3. Compliance with the prudential framework | Training programme - members and (non) finance officers | Dave McNamara | 15 Oct 24 | 31 Mar 26 |
| 1. Address items raised within the Finance Improvement action plan | FBP strengthened | Dave McNamara | 15 Oct 24 | 28 Nov 25 |
| 1. Address items raised within the Finance Improvement action plan | The general awareness of our financial sustainability and everyone's part in management of our resources | Annabel Scholes | 15 Oct 24 | 28 Nov 25 |
| 3. Compliance with the prudential framework | Resident and stakeholder engagement | Dave McNamara | 15 Jul 24 | 28 Nov 25 |
| 3. Compliance with the prudential framework | Anti-fraud and corruption culture HEAD OF GOV, AUDIT AND RISK | | 19 Mar 25 | 09/31/2025 |
| 3. Compliance with the prudential framework | Up to date - CIPFA financial management code and other legislative changes | Dave McNamara | 15 Oct 24 | 30 Jun 25 |
| 4. Review key finance strategies and policies (Investment Strategy, Capital Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy) | Identify current and future liabilities | Christopher Holme | 3 Jun 24 | 28 Nov 25 |

| Objectives | Task | Owner | Start | End |
|--|--|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 2. Implement a robust system of financial controls and reporting | MTFS ensure balanced/agreed including engagement all | Dave McNamara | 1 Jun 24 | 27 Feb 26 |
| 4. Review key finance strategies and policies (Investment Strategy, Capital Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy) | Reserves - level needs addressing (with a clear plan to recover) | Dave McNamara | 15 Oct 24 | 27 Feb 26 |
| 2. Implement a robust system of financial controls and reporting | Revenues and benefits transformation work | Andy Jeffs | 30 May 24 | 17 Oct 25 |
| 1. Address items raised within the Finance Improvement action plan | Development of Agresso system to be fit for purpose | Vicki Palazon | 15 Oct 24 | 1 Jan 26 |
| 1. Address items raised within the Finance Improvement action plan | The transactional service - single view of debt and maximise collection | Andy Jeffs | 15 Oct 24 | 1 Jan 26 |
| 4. Review key finance strategies and policies (Investment Strategy, Capital Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy) | Grants register- Maintaining the register and actively seeking grants that are applicable to the council | Dave McNamara | 3 Jun 24 | 30 Apr 25 |
| 1. Address items raised within the Finance Improvement action plan | Adequacy of insurance assurance | Christopher Holme | 3 Jun 24 | 31 Mar 25 |
| 2. Implement a robust system of financial controls and reporting | Internal controls | Annabel Scholes | 15 Oct 24 | 1 Jan 26 |



Communications, partnerships and engagement

To be a Best Value Council

Collaboration across institutions and communities is fundamental to enable places and institutions to be sustainable and thrive. Partnerships can maximise opportunities for sharing resources, achieving outcomes and creating a more joined-up offer that meets the needs of residents and local service users. Stronger and more effective partnerships can also lead to better community engagement, for example working with partners to engage more effectively. This needs to be approached openly and transparently and invite continuous learning, as well as in line with statutory requirements for partnership working and consultation.

Slough Borough Council has an ambition to build on the strengths of communities and partnerships. This will require place leadership and stronger more impactful partnership working, and more detailed considerations of other partners operating models and strategic plans so we take a consistent approach across the system, as 'One Slough.' At the heart of this ambition is to build a very different relationship with residents, their networks and communities. This means the council will look to make its community engagement activity more systematic.

The Fifth Commissioners' Letter found that the council does not have the confidence of its residents and that this goes beyond the normal reaction to a failed council that has had to impose high council tax increases. It reflects a failure of the council to give primacy to the needs of its residents and to facilitate their engagement. The letter found that findings from the LGA communications review were yet to be actioned. The letter found that work with partners is hampered by the high turnover of key staff and the excessive reliance on temporary and agency staff. The council is far from providing effective leadership of place, or fully harnessing the talents of its partners.

Communications

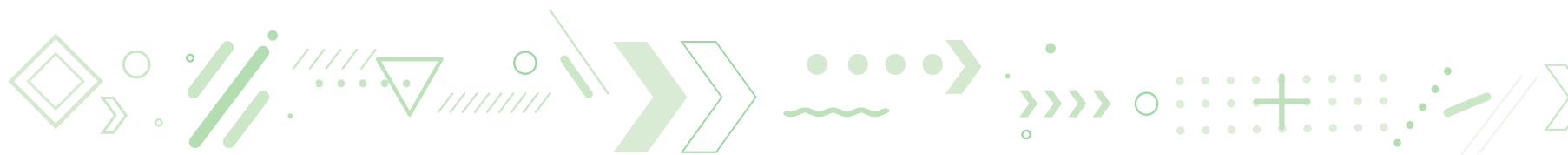
In April 2024 the LGA undertook a peer review of communications. This identified the need to get better at telling a single story for the organisation, supported by a communications strategy that focuses on the organisation's key priorities rather than those of individual departments. The introduction of digital communications platforms was recommended - segmented newsletters, consultations, and further development of social media, grounded in constant measurement of data to see which content and

channels are most effective for different audiences. It also identified the need to continue to improve internal communications. The review surfaced the opportunity to work with partners to co-create a Slough place narrative and to work more with partners on place shaping and leadership. The review recommended that the residents' survey was used as a baseline to measure future improvements in resident perceptions.

The 2024 Equality Peer Review additionally highlighted the need to ensure all communications are in plain English, ensure that there are varied engagement platforms for different communities, establish a clear vision for community engagement and formalise community feedback and insights.

Resident engagement

The council's Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 has identified the need to adopt a Resident Engagement Strategy, setting out expectations on participation, resident experience and digital inclusion, to build a programme to rebuild trust with communities, including transparent, public reporting to members on residents' survey results with action plan on improving satisfaction levels.



Partnerships and place leadership

The Equality Peer Review recommended that the council establish a strategic partnership/compact with the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) and other partners to enable more honest conversations to happen.

Both members and corporate leadership are involved in the Berkshire Prosperity Board which is helping position Slough in the wider regional economy, to help ensure benefits can be secured for Slough. There is also a focus politically and corporately on encouraging growth, shaping the town centre and securing the economic benefits from the very significant business base in Slough. There needs to be more of a focus on place leadership locally as well as regionally.

The council's Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 has identified strategic partnerships as an area for development and the need to ensure that each statutory partnership has clear terms of reference, approved strategies and appropriate action plans in place. There is also a recommended action to include public reporting to members on effectiveness of partnerships and review approach to transparency for partnership, and a consideration to undertake external reviews of statutory partnership on a rolling programme, as an appropriate way to provide further assurance. The Value for Money Auditor's Annual Report for September 2024 identifies the need to develop its role within significant partnerships.





Communications, partnerships and engagement - Progress update

September 2024

- Both members and corporate leadership are involved in the Berkshire Prosperity Board which is helping position Slough in the wider regional economy, to ensure benefits can be secured for Slough. There is also a focus politically and corporately on encouraging growth, shaping the town centre and securing the economic benefits from the very significant business base in Slough. The Single Planning Zone consultation, town centre plans and work to bring in higher education providers are all examples of this place leadership.
- The Health and Wellbeing Board is being developed further, and health and wellbeing priorities are being developed that are preventative and outcome focused and will help embed public health approaches across the system. These will be explored through informal workshops over the course of the next nine months. There is the opportunity through this to help the council, and wider system focus more on the long term outcomes in the corporate plan.
- Communications grid and forward plan: A communications grid covering the immediate fortnight's activity along with a forward plan looking ahead through the year have been reintroduced.
- Intervention and improvement communications: focus has been on supporting recovery work with a planned and cohesive approach to council communications and sharing the messaging around the budget and financial recovery work.
- Work has started to develop a more coherent, systematic approach to resident engagement, bringing together all officers in the council.
- All stakeholders who are either community stakeholders or can help convene community stakeholders have been identified and this is informing a stakeholder database.

October 2024

- There was engagement with the public on the budget including individual consultations on the council tax support scheme and libraries. This has had varying uptake and lessons learnt will be built into future plans. Findings have been shared in cabinet papers and will be added to Citizen Space. This will help build trust and confidence in process which should help increase engagement in the future, alongside a more diverse range of methods to reach residents.
- Briefing packs: A new approach to preparing a communications overview and initial communications planning for issues arising has been introduced. A briefing pack is produced which includes a summary of the situation, assessment of risks and opportunities, proposed lines for external messaging, details of key spokespersons, and consideration of channels to be used. These internal documents will create a consistent approach to managing a range of issues and subjects during the progress of developing the communications assets for distribution.

November 2024

- Initial workshops on the operating model took place in November with community stakeholders.
- Currently, the council uses the [Citizen Space](#) platform for online consultations, survey and other online engagement. As of July 2024, the council has completed 41 consultations on Citizen Space (29 public and 12 private, with two more that are currently open).
- The responses to consultations have been considered during final decision-making, for example in the decisions about children's centres and equality objectives. The "we asked, you said, we did" feature on Citizen Space, has been used which then uploads a summary of the responses and outcomes from closed consultations once the final outcomes/decisions have been made. The first of these was uploaded for the equality objectives consultation in May 2024. These summaries can be viewed on the [individual consultation pages](#) and on a [dedicated page](#).
- The recent LGA Equality Peer review identified that there was also some really good practice around service user engagement in Adult Social Care (ASC), Adult Social Care Commissioning and Education which could serve as models for other services.
- A more proactive and systematic resident engagement framework is being developed in collaboration with leads from across the council.



Action plan

Objectives

- Use resident engagement insights to inform decision-making.
- Bring partners together to work on long term outcomes and place shaping.
- Rebuild trust and confidence in the council, at a time of further change that will affect residents' experiences of the council and services.
- Build stronger more cohesive communities through systematic consultation and engagement and partnerships with residents and community partners.

Benefits

- Resident engagement: Increase in participation rates in surveys and events.
- Community insights used in decision-making: Number of policies shaped by resident input.
- Partner collaboration: Number of joint initiatives launched.
- Digital engagement growth: Online interactions with council platforms.
- Improve trust amongst residents.

Communications, partnerships and engagement - Action plan

| Objectives | Task | Start | End |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------|-----------|
| Rebuild trust and confidence in | Develop stakeholder database from existing stakeholder analysis | 31 Mar 25 | 30 May 25 |
| | Web page update for intervention and improvement | 3 Mar 25 | 31 Mar 25 |
| | Launch Resident Panel to provide feedback on improvement and recovery | 30 Jun 25 | 1 Aug 25 |
| | Develop communications strategy to guide and shape all communications | 3 Mar 25 | 31 Mar 25 |
| | Launch residents e-newsletter | 31 Mar 25 | 4 Jul 25 |
| Bring partners together | Refresh role of the council in its role as a convenor and in place leadership, linked to operating model, taking forward leader's vision/long term vision | 3 Mar 25 | 30 Apr 25 |
| | Re-launch of place leaders partnership and wider partnerships and align with development of State of Slough event: joining up agendas for statutory partners informed by partnership stocktake and strategic overview and register of existing strategic partnerships | 1 May 25 | 30 Sep 25 |
| | Establish regular partner engagement sessions focused on cross cutting issues – early help, prevention and tackling inequality | 1 Oct 25 | 30 Apr 26 |
| Use resident engagement insights | Undertake Residents Survey | 30 Apr 25 | 27 Jun 25 |
| | Develop a community insight tool | 3 Mar 25 | 27 Jun 25 |



Communications, partnerships and engagement - Action plan

| Objectives | Task | Start | End |
|--|--|-----------|-----------|
| Build stronger more cohesive communities through systematic consultation and engagement and partnerships | Develop a structured and systematic framework to guide resident engagement and adopt at Cabinet - ensuring children and young people's voice is at the heart of the framework | 3 Mar 25 | 27 Jun 25 |
| | Embed engagement framework through tools, guidance and regular sessions with key officers | 3 Mar 25 | 31 Dec 26 |
| | Put in place clearer gateway and oversight of all consultation across council | 31 Mar 25 | 4 Jul 25 |
| | Develop more systematic ways to build community relations and cohesion by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining an overview of community tensions and community relations risks, working with members • Establish stakeholder group who can help us temperature test issues and responses • Develop a better corporate understanding of specific community dynamics | 30 Apr 25 | 31-- 25 |

6. Supporting programmes

Improve complaint handling

To be a Best Value Council

The council has to have an effective and accessible complaints process and provides appropriate redress to help build trust in the council and improve council services. The council is currently non-compliant with the 'Ombudsman's code of practice' and plans are in place to address this. This has been identified in the Annual Governance Statement. Improving how the council takes on board feedback is a key issue identified by commissioners that needs to be addressed and complaint handling is a key part of this. Customer access is a core part of the operating model and complaints is an integral part of this so that the council becomes better at tackling root causes. This plan sets out the more immediate and practical steps need to improve complaint handling.

Objectives

- Review the current complaint handling process to identify inefficiencies, gaps, and areas for improvement.
- Develop a standardised, customer-focused complaint handling process.
- Ensure compliance with relevant regulations and council policies.
- Improve how we manage feedback and resolve issues in a timely fashion.

Benefits

- Reduced complaint resolution times.
- Increased customer satisfaction scores and trust.
- Improved staff confidence in handling complaints.
- Alignment with council policies and regulatory requirements; housing ombudsman, and local government and social care ombudsman code of practice.
- Decrease in number of upheld complaints.
- Reduction in compensation paid in relation to complaint.



Improve complaint handling - Action plan

| Objectives | Task | Start | End |
|---|---|-----------|-----------|
| Review the current complaint handling process to identify inefficiencies, gaps, and areas for improvement | Map the existing (as is) complaint handling process | 14 Apr 25 | 28 Apr 25 |
| | Engage staff, customers, and stakeholders | 30 May 25 | 30 May 25 |
| Develop a standardised, customer-focused complaint handling process | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Redesign and implement complaint handling policies, workflows, and customer touchpoints• Develop a step-by-step implementation roadmap• Train all staff on the new complaint process and implement tech solutions• Test the new complaint handling process in a pilot department• Implement the new complaint handling process across the council | 25 Aug 25 | 15 May 26 |
| Improve how we manage feedback and resolve issues in a timely fashion | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review historical complaint data to identify trends and bottlenecks• Compare Slough Council's process with best practices in other councils and organisations | 7 Jul 25 | 24 Aug 25 |
| Ensure compliance with relevant regulations and council policies | Ensure alignment with council priorities and regulatory requirements | 25 Aug 25 | 26 Sep 25 |

Digital and technology

Introduction

The effective use of digital and information technologies underpins Best Value and is a critical element of the target operating model.

There have been two streams of work in this field:

- Digital and Information Technology Modernisation - a programme launched in 2022 with the objective of remediating and modernising the council's ICT service.

Digital Transformation - work to use digital capabilities as an enabler of wider organisational transformation. This workstream has delivered a set of Digital, Data and Strategic Principles. These are now being applied to the digital aspects of transformation being delivered through implementation of the target operating model. Those digital aspects of transformation are being reported as an integral part of the target operating model work rather than separately.

Digital and Information Technology Modernisation

This programme was launched in 2022 in response to the initial intervention, and has the following workstreams:

- Cloud migration of line of business applications.
- Cyber security and resilience.
- End user computing.
- Replacing aged infrastructure.
- Professional and sustainable service.

By the end of calendar year 2024, it had delivered 75 projects, with notable examples including:

- Move to cloud-hosted software - reducing the need for internally managed infrastructure and improving resilience and security - for systems including the ICT service management system, housing system and finance and HR system.

- Redesign and replacement of corporate network and its security, replacement of the legacy telephone system.
- Migration of corporate data centre to Crown Commercial Services hosting.
- Moving to Microsoft 365, in particular migrating from a legacy videoconferencing solution to the use of Microsoft Teams.
- Work with the MHCLG's Local Digital Team, who are introducing the National CyberSecurity Centre (NCSC) Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) to local government, resulting in confirmation of SBC's CAF-Ready status in December 2024.



Digital and technology - Action plan

The table below sets out the remaining major projects in the programme:

| Objectives | Task | Start | End |
|--|---|----------|----------|
| Cyber-security and resilience | Procure backup and disaster recovery managed services | Nov 2024 | Mar 2025 |
| Resilience | Implement backup managed service | Mar 2025 | May 2025 |
| Resilience | Review ICT disaster recovery planning across organisation | Feb 2025 | Sep 2025 |
| Resilience | Implement online disaster recovery managed service | Mar 2025 | Jul 2025 |
| Cloud migration of line of business applications | Migration of LiquidLogic | Apr 2025 | Sep 2025 |
| Cloud migration of line of business applications | Data migration to Microsoft SharePoint | Apr 2025 | Sep 2025 |
| End user computing | Establishment of structured digital upskilling programme focused on Microsoft 365 and coupled with SharePoint migration | Apr 2025 | Sep 2025 |
| Professional and sustainable service | Asset management of hardware and software assets | Oct 2024 | Sep 2025 |

Digital transformation

Early tactical progress has been made on the digital enabling of business transformation. Progress of note in 2024 includes:

- Experimental deployment of an automated chatbot on the council's website. The effectiveness and future potential of this tool will be considered as part of the TOM.
- Website improvements implemented as a result of the "Project Room" deep-dives into savings opportunities for temporary accommodation and adult social care.
- Work on translation capability and on the accessibility of our website, which has moved Slough from being in 250th place for accessibility amongst UK councils in 2023 to 20th place.

Alongside this, a set of strategic principles for digitally enabled change has been agreed, shown in the figure opposite.

In particular, these are being applied in the design of the digital elements of the target operating model, which are described the section on operating model earlier in this document.

Digital, Data and Technology Strategic Principles

The strategic principles below shall be applied in all digitally-enabled change, unless exception is specifically agreed by CLT. They will be applied immediately to new services and will guide remedial and improvement action on existing services.

Digitally enabled services are user-centred, holistic and joined up

- An end-to-end view of customer journeys, from the triggered of need to its fulfilment is taken
- Design considers people, process, technology, data and facilities- not 'digital transformation' but rather 'digitally enabled service transformation'
- Single, accessible, transparent view of the council (and, where appropriate, partners)
- User-centred approach to implementation

Sound data informs decisions

- Quality of data is a design and operational (eg training, quality assurance) objective of digitally-enabled services
- Data is used robustly to inform decision making at policy, strategy and tactical levels to optimise delivery and to identify opportunities for early interventions to avoid failure demand

Services are trusted

- They are well-tested and delivered using reliable technology
- They are firmly founded (eg data that is relied on is robust)
- Security, privacy and ethics are assured (including across partner collaborations)

Services deliver assured value for taxpayers' money

- Use the tools we have well, and don't duplicate them
- Base business case and procurement decisions on evidence of value: be a fast follower rather than an early adopter and solicit deep learning from other users
- Actively challenge overspecification (gold-plating, local configuration)
- Plan, resource, do and monitor realisation of benefits

Delivery is agile

- Incremental delivery at pace
- Prioritised by benefit
- Learning from delivery, eg failing fast



Strategic commissioning

To be a best value Council

The approach to commissioning, contracting and contract management needs to be strong to ensure quality public services that represent value for money. A strategic commissioning approach is therefore key to the council's improvement and recovery and operating model. The council is under direction to produce an action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of the procurement and contract management function.

Key objectives

- Understand the as-is process to commissioning across the council and SCF.
- Embed the new to-be commissioning process across the council and SCF.

Benefits

- Coherent approach towards undertaking commissioning across the organisation and with SCF.
- Better interface and governance between commissioning function(s) and commercial.
- Delivery of savings through clarity of commissioning forward plans and contracts registers in place and realisation of opportunities to combine, consolidate or cease contracting arrangements.

Strategic commissioning - Action plan

| Objectives | Task | Start | End |
|--|---|-----------|-----------|
| Understand the as-is process to commissioning across the council and SCF | Initial data gathering: collect and review existing policies, contracts, procurement frameworks, and performance metrics | 24 Mar 25 | 11 Apr 25 |
| | Review of the governance and facilitation of procurement review board | 24 Mar 25 | 11 Apr 25 |
| | Conduct a risk assessment of current commissioning and contract management practices | 14 Apr 25 | 25 Apr 25 |
| | Map out existing processes for commissioning and procurement | 28 Apr 25 | 30 May 25 |
| | Analyse the effectiveness of the current commissioning strategy/model | 24 Feb 25 | 30 May 25 |
| | Review existing contracts to assess performance, compliance, and alignment with council priorities | 30 Jun 25 | 31 Jul 25 |
| Embed the new to-be commissioning process across the council and SCF | Identify opportunities for improvement in contracting processes (eg, standardising templates, improving negotiation strategies) | 4 Aug 25 | 29 Aug 25 |
| | Hold stakeholder workshops to validate findings and identify improvement opportunities | 6 Oct 25 | 31 Oct 25 |
| | Develop a new commissioning, procurement, and contract management framework | 24 Nov 25 | 9 Jan 26 |
| | Prepare a financial impact assessment of the proposed changes | 16 Feb 26 | 13 Mar 26 |
| | Develop an implementation plan with timelines, resources, and training requirements | 4 May 26 | 26 Jun 26 |
| | Pilot the new framework and processes with selected departments or contracts | 29 Jun 26 | 31 Jul 26 |
| | Roll out the new commissioning and contract management framework across all departments | 31 Aug 26 | 9 Oct 26 |
| | Establish a system for regular performance reviews and feedback | 28 Sep 26 | 23 Oct 26 |



Risk maturity

To be a Best Value Council

Robust systems need to be in place and owned by members for identifying, reporting, mitigating and regularly reviewing risk.

Internal audit functions need to be challenging, robust, valued and contribute to the efficient delivery of public services. Public reporting on value for money, performance and the stewardship of resources is completed in a timely and understandable way, with transparent responses to recommendations from internal and external audit, and regulators.

The Fifth Commissioners' Letter found risk management is not integrated into business operations and is often separate from discussions about strategy and performance. The directions issued in November 2024 require the council to undertake a review of the council's progress to risk maturity and how well its functions and processes enable risk-aware decisions that support the achievement of strategic objectives. There is an earlier direction requiring an action plan to be adopted 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 objectives.

The council's Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 includes a commitment to prepare 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.

An earlier direction requires the council to produce an action plan to achieve a well-resourced, independent internal audit function that is planning and delivering audits that provide risk-based assurance, insights and value in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

Objectives

- A well-resourced, independent internal audit function that is planning and delivering audits that provide risk-based assurance, insights and value in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

- Review of the council's corporate risk dashboard to make it fit for purpose.

Benefits

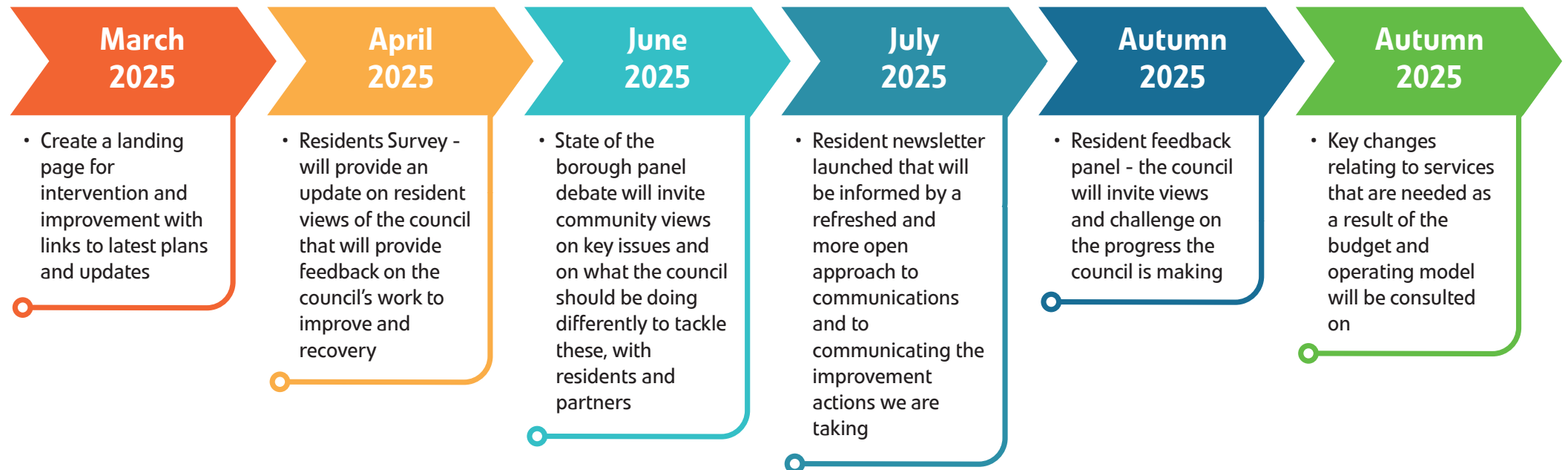
- Conforming with Global and Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.
- Identify and assesses risks proactively, allowing the council to mitigate threats before they materialise.
- Strengthens governance structures by ensuring compliance with policies, regulations, and best practices.
- Promotes a culture of continuous improvement by identifying best practices.
- Corporate risk dashboard for each corporate risk and actively used.
- Executive level risk owner identified for each dashboard.
- Each corporate risk is accurately risk assessed and scored.

Risk maturity - Action plan

| Objectives | Task | Owner | Start | End |
|---|---|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Review of the council's corporate risk dashboard to make it fit for purpose | Draft new risk taxonomy | Interim Risk Manager | 24 Feb 25 | 21 Mar 25 |
| | Reviewing and improve risk tool - March - April 2025 | Interim Risk Manager | 3 Mar 25 | 2 May 25 |
| | Business as usual activity: Quarterly risk management board Quarterly risk review Ongoing training for officers BAU: Quarterly review of corporate risk dashboard | Interim Risk Manager | 3 Feb 25 | 1 Jan 27 |
| A well-resourced, independent internal audit function | Q4 Audit Plan delivery | Head of Internal Audit | 20 Jan 25 | 28 Feb 25 |
| | Completion of a self-assessment against the Global Standards | Head of Internal Audit | 1 Apr 25 | 30 May 25 |
| | Delivery of Head of Internal Audit annual report and opinion | Head of Internal Audit | 1 Apr 25 | 30 May 25 |
| | Review current internal audit resources, capacity, and independence | Head of Internal Audit | 20 Jan 25 | 31 Mar 25 |
| | Development and sign-off of audit 2025/26 Plan | Head of Internal Audit | 10 Feb 25 | 31 Mar 25 |
| | Engage with stakeholders to align audit priorities with council objectives | Head of Internal Audit | 10 Feb 25 | 31 Mar 25 |
| | BAU: Review and enhance audit processes, policies, and procedures | Head of Internal Audit | 6 Jan 25 | 1 Jan 27 |
| | Review of Audit Board (council audit system) | Head of Internal Audit | 10 Feb 25 | 30 May 25 |
| | BAU: Implement audit tracking and reporting tools | Head of Internal Audit | 6 Jan 25 | 1 Jan 27 |
| | BAU: Train internal auditors on meeting Global and Public Sector Internal Audit Standards | Head of Internal Audit | 6 Jan 25 | 1 Jan 27 |
| | Implement a stable, suitably resourced and effective operating model for Internal Audit within Slough | Head of Internal Audit | 5 May 25 | 31 Dec 25 |

7. Communicating and engaging residents in improvement and recovery

The council is committed to improving the way it communicates and engages with residents. As part of this work, the council is putting actions in place to improve the way residents and partners are engaged in the improvement and recovery action plan.



8. Governance

Governance arrangements are being refreshed in line with the new Improvement and Recovery Action plan to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms for governance, programme controls, appropriate member officer roles and resident feedback.

Cabinet



Improvement and Recovery Plan 2025-2026