

Doing right by Slough - Corporate Plan 2022-2025

Context

Slough has the youngest average age (33) of any large town or city in the UK. It is also one of the most ethnically diverse places in the UK and has attracted people from across the world for over a century shaping it into a major trading area. The town remains very well connected, situated 25 miles west of central London with major transport routes and the UK main international airport in close proximity.

Its location has helped create an £8 billion economy, with around 7500 businesses, the highest concentration of UK headquarters of global companies outside of London and the second largest concentration of data centres in the world. Slough's top three specialised employment areas are warehousing and logistics (4.1 times greater than the national average), utilities and waste, and ICT media and creative services.

However, Slough's business and connectedness has not brought prosperity to all its residents. While it has the second highest average workplace earnings after London, deprivation is high across much of the borough. In April 2021, 23% of the working aged population in Slough were claiming government-based benefits. The recent pandemic affected Slough particularly badly with increases in claims for unemployment-related benefits and with an average rate of 89 in 1,000 persons aged 16-64 claiming unemployment support. There is a recognised need to increase the skills of local residents – particularly with NVQ3 qualifications and above – so that Slough's communities can be competitive and secure productive jobs.

Despite comparatively low levels of skills, Slough has a range of excellent primary and secondary schools. In 2019 57% of pupils achieved GCSE grade 5 or above in English and Maths, better than the national average of 43%, putting Slough consistently in the top 10 best performers in the country. But at A-level further progress remains important. 12.3% achieved grades AAB or higher, below the national average of 14.1% and the Council needs to understand the difference in outcomes between 16 and 18, and work with schools and partners to find ways to address this gap.

Geographically small, by comparison to other unitary council areas, Slough is a collection of formerly distinct villages and neighbourhoods, which still retain their distinct identity and characteristics today as clearly defined residential suburbs. House prices are relatively high, with affordability challenges contributing to high levels of deprivation, and in some parts of the borough the quality of housing is poor. There are high number of individuals requiring temporary housing, and the management of the housing stock including Slough's repairs service is not good or responsive to its tenants.

With deprivation and challenging housing conditions often comes poor health and this is particularly true in Slough. Life expectancy is significantly below the national average and women on average can expect to live the last 24 years of their life in poor health (compared to 20 years on average in England), while men can expect to live the last 18 years of life in poor health (compared to 16 years in England). Key health and wellbeing challenges for the borough include ensuring a healthy start to life, improving childhood obesity, oral health, smoking, physical inactivity, diabetes, TB, alcohol and substance misuse, mental health issues and early deaths from cardiovascular disease.

Slough faces significant safety challenges in some areas with crime levels high when compared to other parts of the Thames Valley. There are specific concerns around violent crime including domestic violence which is high.

While Slough has a small footprint and is tightly bound, it does have a significant number of public green spaces and leisure facilities which have been invested in and improved. These, along with facilities in neighbouring areas, do provide opportunities for the local population to be active. While the quality of much of the public realm in Slough is good, there are some areas where more needs to be done to elevate the image of the town. There are also pockets where air quality is poor, and Slough's carbon footprint is relatively high, while recycling rates are low.

Slough's strategy for improvement

To address these challenges Slough Council must start its journey to being a 'good' Council and develop the following characteristics:

- Clear, informed, realistic and achievable priorities, that are deliverable within our means
- Sound, informed and transparent decision making that stands up well to good scrutiny
- A positive and inclusive culture of learning and accountability
- A motivated, diverse and capable work force that delivers
- An organisation connected to and informed by the diverse communities it serves
- Systemically outward looking, networked and collaborative
- Reliable and fit for purpose organisational systems and processes

As the internal and external oversight of Slough has clearly demonstrated, a number of important weaknesses persist in the Council. At a high level, these present the following challenges:

- A severely damaged organisation that is lacking a coherent structure and has extremely limited capacity and capability - inhibiting its ability to recover
- An unprecedented financial position that will that has, and will continue to, affect service standards for several years to come
- There are instances of service failure and poor performance
- We have a damaged brand with our residents, partners and the local government sector

While these are very significant challenges for any organisation, much of the improvement plan is focused upon building back many of the rudimental elements of a normally functioning Council. The financial context is unique but the individual steps and decisions that will be required are not. While the scale and timescales for change may appear exceptionally difficult, this plan aims to break the challenge into individual manageable steps.

The Council's approach to improvement and recovery, as outlined in this corporate plan, can be described across two dimensions: four Council priorities; and seven themes for the organisation to progress to be the best council for Slough.

Outcome focused; the four Council priorities describe the outcomes that the Council is striving to deliver or what it is attempting to deliver to the communities of Slough. These were determined by the Council's political priorities, as well as an interrogation of data on Slough including the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Index of Multiple Deprivation, Service level data on people and place, survey data and engagement feedback.

The seven themes described in the 'Best Council for Slough' describe the principles guiding its operating model or how it will deliver the priorities previously described. In addition, the evidence that informed the priorities, they are heavily informed by the internal and external diagnostic reviews undertaken at Slough, including those undertaken by CIPFA, Jim Taylor, the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, and the Local Government Association.

The organisational improvement described in the plan will take several years, and the financial recovery, in particular, is likely to take at least four years. This is not a short-term turnaround project, and it is expected to take place over four phases:

- Stabilisation
- Operating model
- Partnership building
- Community co-produce

These four phases are not sequential, for example, some services at Slough are stable, have built strong partnerships and will continue to make progress from a different starting point. However, overall, these attributes are not consistent and a great deal of work is required to ensure they are endemic.

The corporate centre of the council, for example, is weak and needs to go through a period of stabilisation. The Council, its capacity and capability are severely damaged and needs a far more stable context in which to operate before significant steps forward can be taken. This period will enable it to get the correct skills, knowledge, behaviours, and infrastructure in place to begin its improvement journey in earnest. Only then will the whole council be in a position to agree a long-term operating model which fits both the needs of the residents of Slough and the financial context in which it finds itself.

With that long-term operating in place and being embedded, the Council will be in a stronger position to engage proactively with its strategic partners, agree shared priorities and common goals. In turn, it will also be better placed to engage local communities in a mature conversation about provision, co-produce their design and share responsibility for the delivery of some services.

That is not to say that conversations with partners and Slough communities are not important throughout the improvement journey. The plan includes an important commitment to engagement, not least because if we are to successfully navigate our way to becoming a good council, we need to build trust and confidence now, so that partnership building and community co-production takes place on fertile ground.

Council priorities

The Council's priorities for 2022-25 are:

- A council that lives within our means, balances the budget and delivers best value for taxpayers and service users
- An environment that helps residents live more independent, healthier and safer lives
- A borough for children and young people to thrive
- Infrastructure that reflects the uniqueness of Slough's places and a new vision for the town centre

A council that lives within our means, balances the budget and delivers best value for taxpayers and service users

Slough council's first priority is to live within its means, balance the budget and deliver best value for taxpayers and service users.

It will do this by building upon the steps taken in recent months when it has completely reviewed its approach to financial management and started to put in place the building blocks of the future financial recovery.

In the coming months the Council will forensically review every service area's budget. Framed by the priorities identified in this plan, the Council will continue to identify a programme of savings that ensures a balanced budget is set every year with a focus upon providing the best quality core service that the Council can afford. We will also progress our programme of asset disposals and use the capital receipts generated to improve our debt position.

This recovery plan will result in an organisation that looks very different but whatever the impact on individual services the Council will focus on providing best value to its residents. That includes being more responsive to customer contact, making it easier to report problems to the Council online and ensuring the organisation is learning from the information it receives from its citizens reducing the need to contact.

The Council will also publish its improvement plan and keep residents updated on progress creating a six-monthly update on progress for employees and residents.

Key improvement areas of focus:

- *Delivery of agreed savings (% of agreed savings value identified as high risk)*
- *Delivery of asset sales – by value and date*
- *Delivery of accounts – by when and material errors*
- *Zero Based Budgeting – proportion enabled per quarter*
- *Overall variances of outturn against budget*
- *Annual Resident Satisfaction Survey reintroduced from November 2022*

An environment that helps residents live more independent, healthier and safer lives

Disparities in the length of life expectancy and healthy life expectancy between our most deprived areas and the national average are perhaps the most serious impacts of poverty for our residents. We will aim to reduce these inequalities while also improving healthy life expectancy rates for everyone in the town, enabling our residents to live healthy lives and reach their full potential. Our approach will be to support you to be as independent as possible whilst still ensuring we will be provider of services for the most vulnerable.

Poor quality housing for some of our most deprived residents is a significant challenge that can lead to poorer health outcomes in later life. In addition, access to secure and affordable housing is crucial to ensuring that residents can remain financially sustainable. This target outcome will focus on making sure we create more affordable homes for residents and drive-up standards in the quality of housing where this is poor, improve the service and response times for housing repairs – with more jobs ‘fixed on first visit’ and continue helping tenants of social housing get access to better, faster broadband connections

Providing greater support for mental wellbeing will be an important aim, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this target outcome we will also focus on reducing social isolation affecting people of all ages, including carers and some of our most vulnerable residents.

Our universal services also make a significant contribution to the health of our residents. In recent years we have invested in the quality of our public spaces, and we will continue to work hard to keep our public spaces safe and keep our parks and environment clean.

The council will work with the police and residents’ groups to improve neighbourhood safety, promote neighbourhood watch and better co-ordinate action against anti-social behaviour, domestic violence, littering and environmental crime.

The council will also continue to promote sustainable transport and reduce Slough’s carbon footprint. This includes sourcing external funding for key new cycleways and improve walking routes, as well as working to bring down local air-pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and ensure Council homes and council buildings are energy-efficient

Key improvement areas of focus:

- *Recycling rates to increase year-on-year over the next three years. A new action plan to be created by July 2022, which would set an aim to achieve a target rate of at least 40%.*
- *Move from 5 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMs) in 2022 to zero AQMs by 2030*
- *Reframing of public health strategy to achieve better outcomes for weight management, smoking prevalence, and substance misuse*
- *Aim to reduce recorded crime through active involvement in the Safer Slough Partnership*
- *Work through the Health and Social Care Partnership to ensure effective implementation of integrated health and social care for outcomes*
- *Better leveraging of our powers to improve quality of housing stock in public and private sector landlords*
- *Increase in the effectiveness of reablement services that enable people to live independently for longer*

A borough for children and young people to thrive

As the town or city with the youngest population in the UK, it makes the opportunities to go as far as your talent and hard work takes you even more important in Slough.

All the Borough's children and young people should be able to access services that keep them safe and secure. Building on our improvement plan for children's services, we will work with everyone in our town to protect all our children and young people from harm and enable them to enjoy happy and fulfilling childhoods. By creating a new approach to children services focused upon family hubs delivering preventative help to children and their families, we seek to make an impact on breaking the cycle of disadvantage.

Children and young people with SEND should have the same opportunities as non-disabled children and young people. To create a town for children and families to thrive, we must ensure that this is inclusive for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Slough SEND approach must improve and will seek to ensure that children and young people with SEND can grow up happy and healthy, with a voice that is heard and the same opportunities to play, socialise and reach their full potential as other children and young people.

For our young people to thrive in later life we will focus on raising aspirations as well as achievement to match. Through our education approach we will protect the excellent performance of our local schools, work collaboratively to broaden the aspirations of our young people and to ensure that all children attend good or outstanding schools that enable achievement.

Slough's local economy, coupled with its connections to wider opportunities, should bring greater opportunities to young people and prosperity to residents throughout their lives. Although the town has attracted well paid jobs over recent years, residents are less likely to occupy these jobs than people from outside of Slough. The Council want to see job continue to come to Slough, but we will also focus on supporting more of our residents to access these better paid jobs by improving skills and reducing barriers to employment. We will seek to play a more active role in co-ordinating local skills and training activity to help Slough residents find and get the jobs they need.

Key improvement areas of focus:

- *Effective management of the contractual relationship between SBC and SCF*
- *Delivery of written statement of action improvements for SEND local area by May 2023, with outcomes for children with SEND improving year-on-year until 2025*
- *Completion and approval of a business case for improved prevention and early help for children by June 2022, and then improved outcomes year-on-year until 2025*
- *Targeted focus on addressing gaps in inequality of attainment within the education system*
- *Refresh Slough School Effectiveness Strategy by July 2022*
- *Produce Young Persons Skills Strategy by December 2022*

Infrastructure that reflects the uniqueness of Slough's places and a new vision for the town centre

In setting priorities, it will be important to recognise Slough remains a collection of distinct neighbourhoods including a distinct town centre that itself needs to find a new role. This means ensuring that the infrastructure, both real and virtual, and the services that the council delivers reflect all those distinct places and the communities within them.

Building on a shared sense of responsibility and civic pride is essential if we are to all recognise and play our part in delivering for Slough. This will focus on empowering residents to take an active role in improving the borough and supporting their community through volunteering and actions that support our local economy, our most vulnerable residents and our natural environment.

Our voluntary and community sector organisations play an important role in supporting some of our most vulnerable residents. This target outcome will focus on adopting a new community hub model that enables residents to become more resilient and self-sufficient.

The challenges facing town centres have been rapidly accelerated during the pandemic, with traditional retail outlets on the high street in decline. Through a new vision for the town centre, we will work together with developers and partners to provide a more diverse mix of uses that meets the needs of our residents.

The Council will also seek to build on the borough existing digital connectivity so that our residents and tenants can access opportunities and the key personalised services that they require efficiently when and where they want to use them.

Key improvement areas of focus:

- *Agree a new community hub model by September 2022*
- *Implement the agreed community hub model by December 2023*
- *Drive our digital by default strategy, where appropriate, to see 90% of repeatable first contacts to be digital by December 2023*
- *Redefine the future for the town centre, in collaboration with partners*

The Right Council for Slough

We will be a council that uses the resources available to best serve Slough's residents and successfully deliver upon our mutually agreed priorities.

From the outset it will be important to set clear principles to operate within so that taxpayers, service users, external partners and staff can see that the Council is taking an approach that is fundamentally different from the past. To do this we will build the right council for Slough around the following key recovery themes:

- Leadership & Culture
- Financial recovery and onward sustainability
- Business planning and performance management
- Governance
- Organisational capability, capacity and resilience
- Technological capability, capacity and resilience
- Customer and resident engagement

The political and managerial leadership teams have together committed to greater transparency and openness in the Council's operation, and this will be an integral theme underpinning all aspects of the Council's business. Measuring and monitoring delivery and actual change will be central to provide assurance on the implementation of the Improvement and Recovery Plan. The Corporate Leadership Team will work with staff and Members to co-create criteria to measure and evidence progress in a meaningful way.

Reaching out to staff, external partners and the wider community and actively seeking their involvement in co-designing and co-delivery of much of the change needed will be another hallmark of the new way of working. A very strong message from the reviews is the need to change the culture. Designing a new operating environment to tackle this culture without the full involvement of staff would be entirely inappropriate and highly likely to fail.

The work to date has identified significant weaknesses in the corporate elements of the organisation with capability hollowed out in such a way that has constrained the Council's ability to respond to the reviews and Government direction swiftly. An important early stage, therefore, will be the creation of that strategic capability, particularly in areas such as human resources, organisational development, policy and communications.

While building capacity will be important this will need to be done within narrow financial constraints, and its ability to attract and retain appropriately skilled staff in the context of Slough's unique challenges. Slough will be employing staff in an already difficult recruitment environment, while the challenge that is started to be set out here is without comparison and will take considerable time to resolve. The strategic HR and organisational development approach will therefore need to value ambitious employees, create a supportive and challenging learning environment, and embed a strong sense of accountability underpinned by the Nolan Principles for standards in public life.

Our recovery framework

In order to create the right council for Slough, one that can deliver the priorities outlined earlier in this plan, our recovery framework will be built around seven themes.

Leadership & Culture

To lay solid foundations for its recovery, the council will embark on a major programme to improve leadership and culture.

We will ensure decisions will be focused on realising clear priorities, based on evidence, and underpinned by effective and transparent governance arrangements. A culture of organisational and individual learning and development will be firmly established, with better communication with our staff and partners. Our leadership teams will be visible, approachable, and open, with the council maximising opportunities for public engagement in our decision making.

Delivering these changes is crucial to demonstrating to residents, taxpayers, service users, staff, partners and Government that the council is capable and committed to addressing the root cause of its previous organisational failure and putting the council on the best footing for delivering for our borough.

The Council will take the following key improvement areas for focus:

- *Properly implement member officer protocol, commencing immediately*
- *Implement actions agreed on leadership and culture in Cabinet paper approved in March 2022*
- *Reinvigorate and reengage with diverse staff representative groups*
- *Refresh and embed values and behaviours (linked to business planning and performance management) by October 2022*
- *Review and refresh current strategic and regional partnership arrangements to ensure alignment with the corporate plan by November 2022*
- *Model open and inclusive employer:*
 - *Staff communications and engagement programme commencing May 2022*
 - *Development programme to encourage diversity at all levels of the organisation commencing September 2022*
 - *Establish organisational design authority to ensure that structures across the council offer best value and equity of approach*
 - *Top tier organisational structure published and agreed July 2022*
 - *Rolling programme of departmental / divisional designs commencing in September 2022*

Financial recovery and onward sustainability

Given the context of this plan, it is unsurprising that financial recovery and onward sustainability form a substantial part of the work that will need to be done, particularly through the stabilisation and operating model stages of recovery.

Under the overarching approach of the financial strategy the Council has a challenging schedule of activities to ensure that it rebuilds its finances, achieves sustainability, and delivers best value. Starting in the summer of 2022, the council will develop zero based budgeting to take initial partial effect from its 2024/25 budget setting processes with full implementation from 2025/26 and beyond.

In order to ensure our approach is robust we will further instil quality assured processes in all staffs' financial ways of working and all financial procedures, while correcting those fundamental errors in the underpinning practices not currently corrected. These improvements allow the Council to move forward by closing accounts for 2018/19 to 2021/22 during the financial year 2022/23 and regularly thereafter. Like much of this plan, progress is underpinned by the development of high-quality staff, a fit for purpose structure and operating standards of the highest quality. It will take up to four years to design, implement and embed all of these elements and there remains much work to be done.

The Council has exhaustively examined many areas of its financial management in the last 12 months and reported on these regularly. This work has culminated in estimated deficits of £307m to 31/3/23, £474m to 31/3/29 and over £.5bn when the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit is brought into account. Levels unique in the UK local government.

There are several specific actions the Council will be taking to resolve this situation:

- *agreement of a capitalisation direction with DLUHC, initially £307m for the period to 31/3/23*
- *sale of up to £600m of assets - this will involve a review of the vast majority of SBC operational and investment assets, including options for a partial or wholesale stock transfer*
- *annual recurrent additional revenue savings up to and including 2027/28*
- *completion of annual accounts up to 31/3/22 by the 31/3/23 and regularly thereafter*
- *a complete restructure of the finance service producing a fit for purpose structure and resources set aside to finance the gaps in the corporate core of the Council*
- *a wide range of financial management improvements in the areas noted above*

Business planning and performance management

The planning and performance cycle will be dynamic, transparent and evidence driven. It will value qualitative and well as quantitative inputs, and it will be a collective process with all directorates included in the discussions and decision-making. The council will achieve its recovery aims through informed and timely planning and robust performance management. Each financial year the council will undertake a business planning process that aligns resources to its recovery aims in the next financial year, with consideration of actual performance, financial position, opportunities and risks. This process will be led by the Corporate Leadership Team, and it will align to the annual budget setting process. All planning decisions will be mindful of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

The council will then track performance against in-year plans, which will also enable it to assess its progress towards achieving its long-term recovery aims. Performance will be tracked using an agile performance reporting process, driven by a recovery performance report that is reviewed monthly by Corporate Leadership Team and Lead Members. This report will include a handful of key performance metrics for each recovery aim, as well as a set of metrics that track corporate health. Each metric will be trackable from the first month of the report, with a baseline, targets, and profiles set for each metric. Each metric will have an accountable member of the Corporate Leadership Team and a responsible owner within the council's senior management.

This recovery performance report will be agile, and as we deliver, observe and learn, we will edit, replace, or introduce metrics. These changes will be made with transparency and decisions only taken by the Corporate Leadership Team, and with input from Lead Members. Annual performance will be reported in the Corporate Annual Report.

Specifically, the Council will take the following actions:

- *The Golden thread of integrated business, service and financial planning with robust performance management to go live April 2023– overseen by Cabinet and CLT:*
 - *Setting targets (financial and service)*
 - *Establishing sign-off processes for business/service plans*
 - *Establishing internal performance monitoring forums and mechanisms*
 - *Establishing formal governance routes for performance*
 - *Setting and agreeing individual performance targets and appraisal mechanisms*

Governance

The Council has a history of poor decision-making practices. In part this is attributable to issues of corporate leadership and organisational culture. In part too, it is attributable to a lack of understanding of what good looks like. Taken together, these factors have resulted in decisions not always being taken by the correct person/part of the organisation; not based on good evidence or high-quality reports; not in a timely manner; and without sufficient openness or accountability.

The work of addressing the issues has begun and includes: officer and member training; beginning the process of recruiting to a new Democratic Services team structure; revised officer scheme of delegations; closer monitoring of the report-clearing cycle (including more rigorous quality assurance); specific support for Scrutiny Chairs; revised terms of reference to enhance the work of the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee (which among other things reinforces the committee's regular reporting processes and its ability to report to Cabinet in a proactive manner as and when needed); strengthened whistleblowing procedures; and an acknowledgement that the work of Cabinet; Scrutiny; Audit & Corporate Governance Committee; and Full Council must be supported by good forward planning.

This work will be continuous, it will evolve to meet the needs of the Council as leadership and cultural changes take hold; and the effectiveness of measures implemented so far will be monitored.

Specifically, the Council will take the following actions:

- *Officer and member training*
 - *Improving corporate practice based upon the Nolan principles for Standards in Public Life - underway*
- *Development plan for scrutiny chairs - underway*
- *Scrutiny realignment to Corporate Plan - underway*
- *Electoral Review (Ward Boundaries) – underway, implemented May 2023*
- *Whole Council elections – Implemented May 2023*

Organisational capability, capacity and resilience

Our most important assets are our people. The right people with the right skills and attitudes will be key to building and delivering our recovery plan for the benefit of our residents. Managers will be accountable for driving and evidencing our organisational successes going forward. As strategic partners, HR will engage and empower managers to achieve their goals, whilst rebuilding our infrastructure and capacity to support the organisation to respond to the challenges.

In building our capability and resilience, key areas will include designing and implementing at pace improvements in:

- *Recruitment and retention*
- *Developing our people*
- *Leadership and management development*
- *Robust policies, procedures and guidance*
- *Workforce and succession planning*
- *Organisational development including change management*

Work is beginning on addressing key areas of our workforce strategy, it will include:

1. **Developmental Capability Review:** The commissioners wish to undertake a capability review of the top two tiers of leaders under CLT. Whilst we plan to seek a partner to conduct the review, the Council will act as client side.
2. **Workforce Strategy:** SBC will need a well-thought-through workforce strategy to help the Council understand and meet its resourcing requirements in the context of recovery and then onward sustainability. *Deliverable March 2023.*
3. **Performance Management:** Design and build a Corporate Performance (appraisal) framework. This should enable staff to understand and be accountable for delivery of their assigned objectives within a context of a corporate planning and performance framework. Ensure there is clarity in place to ensure personal appraisals are in line with corporate/service priorities.
4. **Diversity:** Establish diverse staff groups that ensure representation and inclusion. Build staff development plans that specifically (but not exclusively) provide the opportunity for “the leaders of tomorrow” to come from a diverse background and help the Council to better reflect its diverse resident base at senior leadership level

5. **Staff Communications:** Work directly with the CEO to build a comprehensive staff communication plan so that staff are kept regularly up to date, have the opportunity to engage directly with senior leaders of the Council. Create a tone that reflects culture we seek across the organisation

Technological capability, capacity and resilience

The Council faces several long standing and more recent issues with its ICT service, these include the below:

- old systems & infrastructure which are not robust, resilient and do not provide a foundation to deliver improvements
- old products which are out of vendor support and/or no longer supported
- a service heavily dependent on interim staff and urgently in need of a restructure
- historic under investment in ICT
- a digital function which while making changes to the service offered has a large number of further improvements to bring about
- a series of projects which are dependent on resource which is heavily temporary, and which have not been reported to CLT/Members on a regular basis
- challenges around the timely renewal of key contracts
- the need to protect the Council against potential cyber attacks
- unsuccessful experience of outsourcing
- the changing nature of work i.e. much reduced full time office environment
- peer reviews by both the LGA & the DLUHC have confirmed risks relating to cyber resilience

The Council has agreed a significant three-year work programme to secure and stabilise the current operating environment, to start to mitigate the key risks and to provide a resilient platform for the modernisation and development of an ICT landscape that will then in the future support and deliver the opportunity for business operational improvements through cost savings in ICT and business operations and improved service delivery.

The first step is stabilisation and the need to focus and deliver on this challenge is such that the longer-term modernisation questions will need to be returned to in a subsequent phase.

Key focus areas of improvement:

- *Improvement in incidents and requests responded to and resolved within the agreed service level agreement*
- *Implement planned changes to key services, systems, and infrastructure*
- *Improvement in new work requests responded to with 10 working days*
- *Improvement in service request calls to ICT that are resolved at first point of contact*
- *Volume and impact of unplanned outages reduces*
- *Reduce vacancies in ICT roles*
- *Proportion of improvement projects and initiatives on track*

Customer and Resident Engagement

Customer services has been identified as an area of weakness by the council's office performance data, external reviews, and via councillors. A range of challenges including the implementation of channel shift, rapidly changing patterns of demand, service failure driving additional demand and the underutilisation of technology has left the Council needing to re-evaluate its approach. For example, the current website is rated highly (8th) in the Sitemorse rankings of council websites, but the lack of digital integration with service provision and therefore wider customer experience has not made the progress we expect.

In the short term there has been some recruitment to drive down waiting times for customers and assist in stabilising the service. Other key areas of work as part of this forward strategy will be a comprehensive review and restructure of the team, development of a new customer experience strategy, a review and refresh of the service's performance framework, including the development of meaningful KPIs and an ongoing commitment to identify service efficiencies as part of the organisation's recovery plan.

Given the large nature of change that the council will have to undergo, and the inevitable impact on services and service users it becomes critically important that the Council thinks and acts differently in its relations to residents across communities. The Council's operating model will have to adapt and change to reflect the reality of the issues it faces. The core of the operating model should be how the Council interacts, engages and works with its diverse communities.

The precise approach and impact will be reflected in the council's long-term operating model, but the strategy will include a greater emphasis on working with communities to solve challenges including improved consultation, customer engagement, service co-design and community led delivery. The stabilisation and operating model stages of the recovery will seek to prepare the ground for more significant change on this front.

Key focus areas of improvement:

- *A refreshed Customer Engagement Strategy in place by March 2023, which will align all council engagement with residents and businesses with the aim of substantially improving the experience people have in engaging with the council*
- *Customer call centre targets:*
 - a. *Reduction in average wait time for calls to be answered*
 - i. *Target:*
 1. *Average call answered within 10 minutes by July 2022*
 2. *Average call answered within 7 minutes by December 2022*
 3. *Average call answered within 5 minutes by March 2023*
 - b. *Improvement in percentage of calls to the contact centre answered and resolved*
 - i. *Proportion of calls answered within target timescale (as above)*
 1. *55% by July 2022 (currently 45%)*
 2. *70% by December 2022*
 3. *80% by March 2023*
 - ii. *Target by 2025 of 95% of calls answered, 70% resolved*

- c. *Regular monitoring of percentage of calls to high demand services, including: Council Tax, Schools Admissions, General Enquiries, Housing Benefits, Adult Social Care, and Schools Admissions*
 - i. *Measures:*
 1. *number of calls*
 2. *number and percentage of calls answered*
 3. *call waiting times*
- *Weekly monitoring of number of appointments booked at Customer Access Points – Britwell, Chalvey, Cippenham, Langley*
 - a. *Overall target: 95% of customers attend pre-booked appointments by November 2022.*

Delivery Approach

To successfully deliver the ambition for Slough it is imperative that we rebuild the corporate heart of SBC to ensure focus on the most important tasks. A Delivery Unit, including programme management capacity, will be created to support delivery of the four priorities and the programme to deliver ‘The Right Council for Slough’ recovery framework:

- A council that lives within our means, balances the budget and delivers best value for taxpayers and service users
- An environment that helps residents live more independent, healthier and safer lives
- A borough for children and young people to thrive
- Infrastructure that reflects the uniqueness of Slough’s places and a new vision for the town centre
- Refresh Cabinet portfolios to align with this corporate plan to support delivery and clear political accountability
- The Right Council for Slough recovery framework:
 - Leadership & Culture
 - Financial recovery and onward sustainability
 - Business planning and performance management
 - Governance
 - Organisational capability, capacity and resilience
 - Technological capability, capacity and resilience
 - Customer Service

The Delivery Unit will be supportive but challenging, acting across the whole system to enact the Council’s commitment to recovery and improvement. The programme will be delivered through a formal project management structure including risk management and performance of the programme will be overseen by Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). CLT in turn will report monthly to the Improvement and Recovery Board. There will be a quarterly monitoring report to Cabinet/Full Council.

Scrutiny will have an important role to play in challenging and supporting the delivery of the Corporate Plan, this will be approached on a task and finish basis focusing on specific elements of the plan.

The Council has set aside £5m transformation reserve, over the first 2 years in order to deliver the recovery programme. Any call on this fund will be approved via the Council’s business case process.