

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Audit and Corporate Governance Committee
Date:	10 December 2024
Subject:	Update on Governance Programme (phase 4)
Chief Officer:	Sukdave Ghuman – Monitoring Officer
Contact Officer:	Alexander Polak – Head of Governance and Scrutiny
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	No
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Democratic Governance Improvement Plan Objectives Appendix 2 - Corporate Governance objectives derived from gap-analysis against Best Value Guidance Appendix 3 – Improvement & Assurance Framework outcomes / critical success factors Appendix 4 - The principles of CIPFA’s Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Appendix 5 – Scrutiny improvement outcomes

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the governance improvement programme at Slough Borough Council, the fourth phase of which commenced in September 2024 when the Council’s internal ‘Recovery Board’ and ‘Transformation Board’ approved the ‘Project Initiation Document’. The Audit & Governance Committee is the main way in which councillors monitor progress of this programme, in addition to ongoing member involvement in the commissioner-chaired Improvement & Recovery Board.

Recommendation:

Committee is recommended to review and comment on the phase 4 governance improvement plan update.

Reason:

- 1.2 Good corporate governance is an essential in any organisation, but in particular in public sector bodies. Significant governance failings attract huge attention and inevitably lead to expense being required to correct the failings. Local authorities are complex organisations and vitally important to taxpayers and service users. It is necessary to have in place effective systems, people and culture to meet the highest standards and ensure that governance is sound and seen to be sound.
- 1.3 The governance improvement programme has been in more or less continuous operation since shortly before the beginning of central government intervention in SBC. It is the council’s formal method of keeping track of, and responding to, various requirements (such as government directions, inspections, and internal findings

relating to good governance and scrutiny). More importantly, its primary purpose is to enable the council to provide assurance to residents that its governance arrangements are robust enough to support the council's effective delivery of services.

- 1.4 Instead of reviewing and commenting on this paper, this committee has the option to decline overseeing this work. This is not recommended.

Commissioner Review

Commissioners have reviewed the report and made no comments.

2. Report

2.1 Executive Summary

2.1.1 The purpose of the Democratic Governance, Scrutiny and Assurance Programme (formerly three separate projects) is to 'improve the effectiveness of governance and scrutiny in Slough Borough Council, enabling successful delivery of the wider improvement and recovery programme.'

2.1.2 Good governance is the subject of a complex, overlapping range of statutory frameworks, directions, external recommendations, internal findings and more. The programme encompasses governance improvement actions derived from all of these.

2.1.3 The programme will continue to address these actions and/or monitor and report against them as necessary (such as ensuring that reporting is taking place on the AGS governance improvement actions in next year's AGS, without necessarily owning all those actions).

2.1.4 However, to achieve clarity of focus and to address current strategic priorities, a simple 'mission' has been agreed for phase 4. This mission has been used as a lens to organise, add to, and prioritise the many actions referred to above.

2.1.5 Good governance is not just about systems, rules and processes. It is just as much about power dynamics, relationships and behaviours – the culture of the organisation. This is critical because, while council with poor systems but a strong culture of good governance can still do good decision-making and good governance, a council with good systems yet a poor governance culture is unlikely to lead to have good decision-making or governance. Systems alone are not enough to assure good governance.

2.1.6 The phase 4 mission is therefore to 'build a strong, self-sustaining culture of good governance amongst members and officers.'

2.1.7 There is evidence to suggest that governance change projects broadly need to go like this:

- a. Systems improvement, in support of:
- b. Fostering good relationships and behaviours, in support of:
- c. An emergent culture of good governance

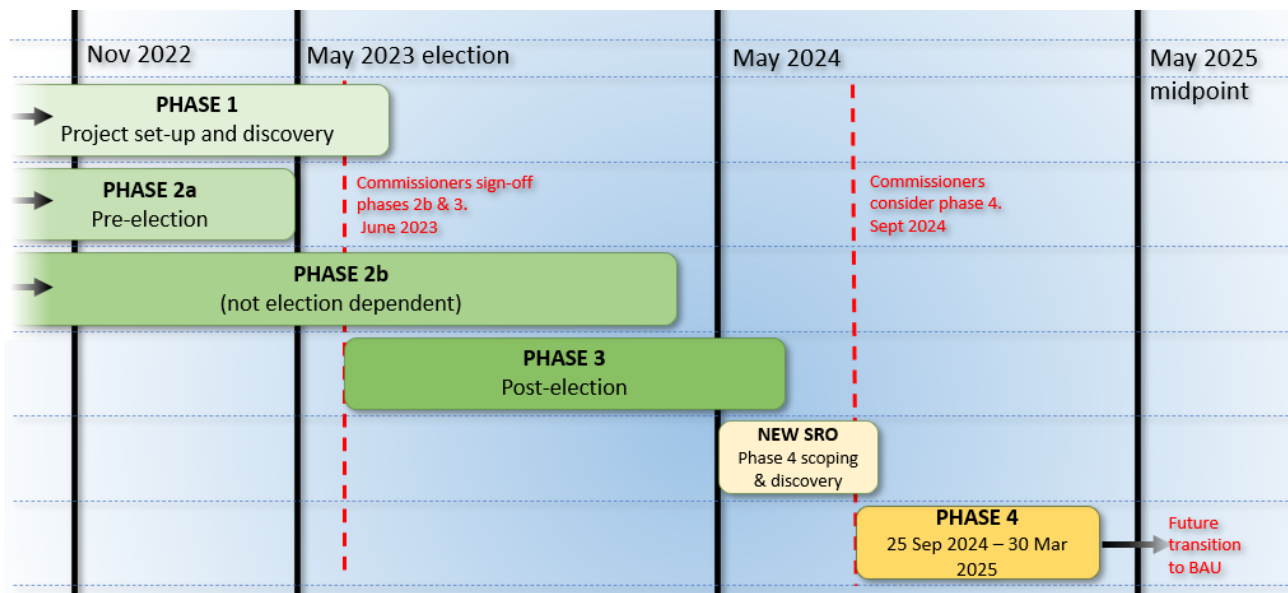
Phase 4 therefore builds on existing successes, particularly with systems and processes, to focus on the following four mission themes:

- a. High-quality councillor leadership, and governance behaviours (across all councillor groups and roles);
- b. High quality officer-member relationships and behaviours; and
- c. High quality officer governance behaviours;
- d. Based on high-quality governance systems and processes

2.2 Background

2.2.1 The Democratic Governance Project (as it was previously called) has delivered three phases of critical work over the past two years, mitigating against governance risks arising from the repeated and ongoing shocks and challenges to the good governance of this authority during that time, while making and enabling progress towards an improved and recovered council.

2.2.2 This update report outlines the recently-agreed fourth phase, following agreement by Transformation Board in July that the programme should continue, and agreement in September that the proposed objectives and priorities were right.



2.2.3 The Democratic Governance project's three previous phases (see diagram, above) were each designed based on the changing circumstances and needs of the organisation at that time, informed by a series of external and internal reviews and a continuous feedback loop with this council's commissioners. Each phase lasted between 6-12 months, sometimes overlapping, and the commissioners' published letters and other council reports have highlighted some of the project's successes and continuing challenges during that time.

2.2.4 A '**Democratic Governance**' element of the programme originally responded to the government direction "...to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of... democratic services" (NB later clarified to mean 'democratic governance' more widely). Recently the government has issued a revised set of directions for the council, in which the language no longer focuses on improving "democratic governance" and "scrutiny" per se, but rather on delivering best value overall (including good governance) and giving attention to various specific aspects of

governance such as internal audit and governance of companies. The government instructed the council to review its ongoing plans for good democratic governance and scrutiny and to keep working on their improvement. This report demonstrates that such a review has been done in a planned and organised fashion, and that the work to maintain and improve the council's governance continues.

2.2.5A **'Scrutiny'** element of the programme originally responded to the government direction: "...to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of...scrutiny".

2.2.6 An **'Evidence-based Decision-Making'** project – then stand-alone but always linked to the other two – was also set up to respond to the direction to 'enable better and evidence-based decision making, including enhancing the data and insight functions to enable better evidence-based decision making'. The revised directions issued in 2024 include: " g) Improving the systems and processes to enable better and evidence-based decision making, including enhancing the data and insight functions, undertaking benchmarking".

2.2.7 Like many aspects of the council's recovery, governance improvement has not been linear. Pace has been variable as the council has encountered new shocks and major changes to leadership and personnel during its recovery journey, however progress on governance issues has consistently been recognised by commissioners in their 6-monthly letters, and by other external bodies such as the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

2.2.8 As long as the council remains on a recovery journey and subject to major financial stress, it is likely to need a 'governance' workstream within its transformation programme.

2.2.9 But the objective is that during phase 4 the organisation's dependency on interim SME capacity to deliver this work will diminish or end so that governance in the second half of this 4-year administration (2025-2027) can be supported by a 'business as usual' governance team.

2.2.10 Phase 4 must:

- **build on previous successes** to continue improvement (such as in scrutiny and member development);
- **re-iterate some actions** to help regain or hold ground (eg where high officer/member turnover has reduced the impact of training programmes); and
- **give emphasis to new areas** where either there is a new imperative, or which could not be prioritized until now.

2.2.11 The Audit and Governance Committee is the SBC body with ultimate oversight of governance improvement activity and is also the body which receives reports on internal control functions, including risk management and internal audit and approves the has oversight of the annual governance statement, statement of accounts and reports from the Council's external auditor.

2.3 Aims & Objectives of the Programme

Programme purpose and high-level outcomes

2.3.1 The purpose of the Democratic Governance, Scrutiny and Assurance Programme remains as follows:

Programme Purpose:

- **To improve the effectiveness of governance and scrutiny in Slough Borough Council, enabling successful delivery of the wider improvement and recovery programme.**

2.3.2 The high-level outcomes of the Democratic Governance, Scrutiny and Assurance Programme remain as follows:

High-level outcomes:

- **A well-run council with clear and robust governance and scrutiny arrangements in place that are fit for purpose, understood by politicians and staff alike and reviewed regularly.**
- **Decision-making processes, within clear schemes of delegation, are transparent, regularly reviewed, clearly followed and understood, enabling decision-makers to be held to account effectively.**
- **Decision-makers behave with integrity and accountability, with members and officers working effectively together to follow good public law decision-making principles (reasonableness, proportionality, fairness, etc).**

Mission and themes for phase 4 of the programme

2.3.3 Section 2.3.9 describes six sources of governance improvement actions (such as the Annual Governance Statement, Best Value framework etc), which are pre-defined and often come with a statutory obligation. While none of these frameworks contradict each other, they make for a complicated picture taken as a whole. Nevertheless, the council is obliged to measure itself by all of them.

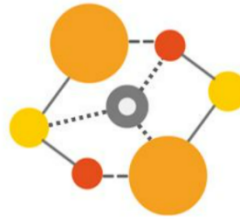
2.3.4 To help ensure clarity, and keep efforts focused on priority areas, the programme has chosen to define its own overarching themes.

2.3.5 This was assisted by turning to models of organizational culture and systems thinking such as those developed by Daniel Denison and Peter Senge, and applying them to how good governance works:

The CfGS Governance Risk and Resilience Framework: CfGS provide a definition of governance which emphasises that good governance is as much about relationships, power dynamics and culture, as it is about 'rules' or systems.



Rules - Obeying the law and complying with the council's constitution and other governing documents



Power – How the inputs and outputs to the decision-making process are legitimised and shared between individuals, and the wider public



People - The relationships between key individuals in leadership positions internally and with key stakeholders



Culture - How attitudes and behaviours influence decision-making and accountability

Daniel Denison's Organizational Culture Model: This model looks at four key aspects of culture that align with systems, relationships, and behaviours, leading to an organisation's culture. He focuses on Mission, Consistency, Involvement, and Adaptability. Denison emphasizes that systems and processes are foundational, but for change to succeed, the focus must shift to involvement and behaviours, which solidify culture.

One could frame this as a process for governance change as follows:

- Step 1: Focus on systems (mission and consistency),
- Step 2: Focus on relationships and behaviour (involvement),
- Step 3: Focus on culture (adaptability).

Peter Senge's Systems Thinking: Senge's work in "The Fifth Discipline" highlights how organizations must first address systems and processes, but real change only happens when people's mental models (thought patterns and behaviours) evolve. Senge advocates a shift from systems to behaviour and learning as the key to achieving change in culture.

At a slight stretch, this could be represented in a similar way as with Daniel Denison's theory, as a process for governance change as follows:

- Step 1: Systems and processes,
- Step 2: Relationships and behaviours (mental models),
- Step 3: Embedding change in culture.

The idea is that a governance change initiative broadly needs to be built in this order:

1. Systems improvement, in support of:
2. Fostering good relationships and behaviours, in support of:
3. An emergent culture of good governance

2.3.6 Phases 1-3 tackled all three of these elements to some degree, but with so much to do and so many practical, operational challenges, there has had to be more focus on step 1 (eg scrutiny structure, all-out elections, constitutional changes, report clearance process and so on) than on relationships, power dynamics or governance culture.

2.3.7 While phase 4 should continue to improve systems and processes where weaknesses persist, it is time to move the focus more towards fostering better relationships and behaviours, and therefore towards culture change.

2.3.8 The mission statement and main themes for phase 4 of the governance programme – the lens through which we have sorted and prioritised all the various frameworks and actions – is therefore as follows:

The Phase 4 mission:

Build a strong, self-sustaining culture of good governance amongst members and officers, by focusing on these four themes:

- 1. High-quality councillor leadership, and governance behaviours (across all councillor groups and roles);**
- 2. High quality officer-member relationships and behaviours; and**
- 3. High quality Officer governance behaviours;**
- 4. Based on high-quality governance systems and processes**

Detailed Aims and Objectives

2.3.9 As mentioned above, six main sources have necessarily informed the contents of this next phase of the programme, because the council is obligated to address them or to assess itself against them:

1. Democratic Governance Improvement Plan – Consists of all the objectives and actions which SBC has put together to address Government directions – in 2022 and 2024 - on governance and data-led decision-making, plus other external reviews such as the Jim Taylor review (MHCLG). This category also picks up any recommendations from Grant Thornton or from internal and external audits, and additional actions identified by the programme to help achieve the programme objectives.

- All open and closed actions from the previous phases of the project have been reviewed to identify open or ongoing actions which should be continued into phase 4, or completed actions which would benefit from being repeated (such as training efforts, where there has been high turnover). Additional items have been added where gaps were identified against the 'phase 4 mission and themes'.
- **Appendix 1** sets out the ongoing objectives of the Democratic Governance, Scrutiny and Assurance Programme which have been carried over from phases 2b and 3 of the programme, brought back for re-iteration, or added in order to achieve the phase 4 mission and themes.

2. Best Value Guidance (MHCLG)

- The Best Value Guidance makes numerous references to governance matters, or issues which fall within the council's code of governance.

- **Appendix 2** summarises a self-assessment of SBC's arrangements against the 'characteristics' set out in the Best Value Guidance, which has provided a number of areas for (further) action.

3. Improvement and Assurance Framework (LGA)

- In July it was agreed to merge the 'improvement and assurance' workstream with this workstream, and to embrace a number of objectives and actions arising from a self-assessment against the LGA's new framework and these have been incorporated in the programme.
- The critical success factors agreed for this element of the programme are listed at **Appendix 3** and have been incorporated into the phase 4 action plan.

4. Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (CIPFA/SOLACE)

- Every year the council assesses its governance arrangements against the framework contained in this statutory guidance and publishes an Annual Governance Statement which includes a list of any significant governance issues and associated remedial actions. Monitoring delivery of the 2023/24 action plan (and/or monitoring the delivery of these actions by other services or parts of the transformation programme) is incorporated within this programme although the programme does not own most of the actions. Furthermore, continued improvement of the council's self-assessment and assurance-gathering process for production of the AGS itself, is included within the programme.
- The CIPFA/SOLACE principles are listed at **Appendix 4**. The actual AGS action plan actions were reported recently to Audit & Governance Committee.

5. 2024 follow-up review of SBC's Scrutiny Arrangements (CfGS) and SBC's Scrutiny Annual Report

- Along with a report of the progress made by SBC's scrutiny function since adopting the structure endorsed by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in May 2023, CfGS' January 2024 review highlighted a number of areas for continued improvement. In the 2023/24 Annual Scrutiny Report endorsed by Full Council, an action plan was agreed which has been incorporated into this programme.
- **Appendix 5** sets out the objectives of the scrutiny improvement action plan. The detailed actions themselves are set out in the programme workbook.

6. External Audit recommendations

- Grant Thornton's recent report to the Audit and Governance Committee included several governance-related actions. This was recently reviewed by the Audit & Governance Committee.

2.4 Scope, Assumptions and Interdependencies

Scope

2.4.1 In Scope:

- Governance improvement activity as set out above, in the appendices and in the programme workbook.

2.4.2 Out of Scope:

- Officer leadership culture and behaviours, except for how they relate to councillors and decision-making.
- Organisational culture more widely.
- Officer induction and management/leadership development, outside of governance-related courses.
- Delivery of the AGS governance improvement actions which fall outside of the Law and Governance Directorate. The programme will monitor and push for delivery of AGS governance improvement actions allocated to other service areas, and they appear in the programme workbook, but this programme is not delivering them.

Assumptions

2.4.3 Assumptions identified so far are primarily around the availability of resources for delivery of the programme:

- That there will be sufficient stability in the staffing of Democratic Services (in particular continuous effective occupation of the Democratic Services Manager role, currently filled by an interim since 17 September following four unsuccessful attempts to recruit permanently) to ensure the programme lead is not drawn away from programme delivery into BAU work as has happened for significant stretches of the last two years.
- That there will be no more snap elections.
- That all bureaucratic reporting burdens associated with running a programme of this type can be resourced by the Project Management Office (such as administering project board meetings, assisting with monthly reporting cycles, maintaining risk log, interdependencies log, action log, producing 'plans on a page' etc) in order to use the programme lead as an SME and delivery resource rather than as a project manager.
- That there will be no impediment to the Monitoring Officer redesigning the leadership structure of the Democratic Services department and advertising to fill permanent roles. That he will there be able to create the necessary BAU capacity before the end of phase 4 of the programme. Impediments could take the form of eg a recruitment freeze or a job evaluation freeze caused by financial pressures or change initiatives.

Interdependencies

2.4.4 An argument could be made that good governance is an interdependency for all council activity and projects. Much like 'culture,' it is a cross-cutting and often intangible factor which pervades and enables or hinders delivery. Like 'culture,' there is even a risk that putting 'governance' in its own programme, instead of making it an element of all transformation programmes, only encourages the mistaken idea that good governance is the sole responsibility of the Monitoring Officer and their team. Of course, the reality is that good governance is the responsibility of every individual councillor and officer.

2.4.5 In addition, there are some specific interdependencies which will require further work or at least regular dialogue:

1. Culture change

- The 'culture change' workstream of the transformation programme does not have councillors in scope. Culture change efforts will need to be completely integrated across members and officers (ie, this programme and that one), especially where action is needed regarding member-officer relationships.
- The 'culture change' programme does not explicitly have things in scope around eg officers' behaviours and attitudes around compliance or commitment to good governance, which this programme will need to foster – again, the programmes will need to work very closely together on this.

2. Learning and Development

- Lots of the 'phase 4' actions relate to induction and development of officers and members. There is a critical dependency on the council having or launching effective induction and development programmes for new starters, senior leaders and newly promoted staff, into which suitable governance content can be inserted rather than running ad-hoc courses as has been done so far, with the exception of a regular slot on the all-staff corporate induction which has worked well for over a year. The Democratic Governance project has had live risks, interdependencies and issues logged on this topic for over 18 months.

3. Community cohesion

- Work underway led by the Director for Strategy, Change and Resident Engagement, will have strong interdependencies with member development and governance culture amongst councillors.

4. Best Value self-assessment

- The Director for Strategy, Change and Resident Engagement is doing work on the Best Value framework and how the council assesses itself against this. There is an interdependency because Appendix 2 of this PID includes a partial self-assessment against governance aspects of the Best Value framework, which has generated a range of programme actions.

5. Companies Governance

- Whether this is 'in scope' is TBC – likely to be some aspects in scope and some out of scope, resulting in an interdependency.

6. Finance Action Plan

- Various aspects of the council's finance improvement plan have significant bearings on the council's governance, and vice versa.

2.5 Governance of the programme

2.5.1 The Corporate Governance Working Group is a stand-alone forum chaired by the Monitoring Officer. It helps to identify governance issues as they arise and to improve and assure the quality of governance improvement work. It also plays the role of 'project board' for the Democratic Governance, Scrutiny and Assurance programme.

2.5.2 Monthly exception highlight reports covering the areas listed in Appendix 7 will be taken to the Corporate Governance Working Group for input, followed by the Recovery Board and the Transformation Board

2.5.3 Reports will be provided to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee at key programme milestones and not less frequently than 6-monthly.

2.6 Next steps

2.6.1 Delivery of prioritised items is ongoing, overseen by the Corporate Governance Working Group, Recovery Board and Transformation Board. The following actions are due to complete before Christmas, for example:

- Launch of 2024 member survey
- Recap training on good governance for councillors (12 Dec)
- Development of joint officer/councillor development session based on the revised 21st Century Cllr work by InLoGov
- Governance training session for wider leadership team 11 Dec
- Business case for ongoing resourcing of programme delivery once the current interim Head of Governance departs (13 Dec), and business case for BAU resourcing of the function beyond that
- Upgrade the process for production of the AGS: design full 'Service Assurance Statement' process to inform production of 2024/25 AGS
- Refresh of officer governance induction materials (first deployment 25 November)
- Reinstatement of Group Leader meetings (complete)
- Re-invigorate role of Corporate Governance Working Group under new Chair (MO) (complete)
- Proposals for improved processes around motions for full council

2.6.2 The Monitoring Officer will have new programme resource in place in January to ensure continuity of delivery. Actions expected in the new year include:

- A focus on the effectiveness of Cabinet support arrangements once the Leader & Cabinet Support Officer vacancy is filled (a candidate has been selected). This will include:
- Reviewing arrangements for Lead Members and Directors meetings and integrated work programming with the Corporate Leadership Team
- Launching standardised 'portfolio management' arrangements to scaffold relationships between cabinet members and their lead officers
- Continued delivery of enhanced member induction and development plan with emphasis on good governance and effective scrutiny, differentiated based on Members' roles, prioritising skills. - incl. leadership development & personal development plans for Cabinet, LGA involvement; NOLAN principles, 'etiquette' for public meetings etc
- Training and development plans for Scrutiny and Audit Committee.
- Workshops to identify opportunities to better leverage councillors' knowledge of their localities and communities for the benefit of service planning and delivery
- Increase visibility of standards processes and outcomes in the council, including performance against timescales
- Gaining new agreement to the member 'role profiles', launch and raise awareness
- Further formalise schedule of all-member briefings and add regular one on transformation
- Create more spaces for informal exchange of ideas between members and officers - via Mayor's office, attendance at wider team events in each portfolio, etc
- Review effectiveness of consultation and engagement in decision-making through eg formal consultation and public participation

- Review the suitability of the current cabinet and committee sign-off processes to ensure they are still optimal
- Upgrade the Mayoral programme, with clear links to corporate objectives and culture change objectives
- Ongoing support re effectiveness of Audit Cttee - actions as per annual plan
- Further reinforce arrangements for clear Member ownership of decisions eg Members presenting their own reports and fielding questions at LM&Ds, IRB, Cabinet, Scrutiny.
- Review effectiveness of arrangements for active monitoring of governance health - eg possibility to improve links to assurance CLT meetings, improve use of data to monitor governance health

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

3.1.1 There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report. However, a failure to respond to actions in the AGS, and the wider governance improvement programme, is likely to result in a failure of financial governance and a risk that the Council makes decisions that are not in its financial interests.

3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 The Council has a best value duty under the Local Government Act 1999 and this includes making arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised. The Council has chosen to set up a transformation programme as the vehicle for its improvement and recovery, with the governance programme as one of its constituent parts.

3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 Several of the matters highlighted in the action plan also appear on the Council's corporate risk register. Members should review this document to establish whether appropriate mitigations are in place.

3.3.2 All risks will be included on a programme risk register with impact, mitigations and a named person who is to be held accountable for that risk. It will be the responsibility for the Programme Support to regularly review and update the register as new risks emerge or current risks change. This will be reviewed periodically by the Corporate Governance Working Group to assist with keeping it up to date.

3.3.3 Reporting of significant risks will be managed through the Transformation team and should be a standing item on each agenda. If a significant risk cannot be dealt with by the delivery group, then it should be escalated to the Transformation Board to manage the risk and provide instruction.

3.3.4 Work is underway led by the Head of Internal Audit to update the corporate approach to risk management, and this has included senior officer workshops which generated draft risks, which are being developed into a refreshed suite of corporate and strategic risk registers for each directorate.

3.3.5 A number of risks identified through that process are in effect governance risks, and work will need to be done to ensure the programme risk register matches and cross-pollinates with corporate risk registers. This work is not yet complete, but Appendix 6 contains the current draft list of governance programme risks, for indicative purposes. This includes risks carried forward from previous phases of the programme.

3.3.6 Next steps will be to review these risks against the new corporate registers, formalise the language and make the format consistent, assess inherent and target risk likelihood and severity, and ensure mitigations are built into the programme plan.

3.4 *Environmental implications*

3.4.1 There are no environmental implications as a result of this report.

3.5 *Equality implications*

3.5.1 Improvement in the council's governance arrangements will ensure that good, evidence-based decisions are made. This should include information on impact on residents and service users with protected characteristics.

4. Background Papers

None

Appendix 1 – Democratic Governance Improvement Plan Objectives

Objectives of the Democratic Governance, Scrutiny and Assurance Programme (which have been added in the development of phase 4 or carried over or repeated from phases 2b and 3 of the programme), are listed below.

The Democratic Governance Improvement Action Plan was originally created to address government directions and findings from various external reviews such as that conducted by Jim Taylor. Over time it has become the place where governance objectives and actions of any source not otherwise listed in the other appendices to this document are listed; crucially, this includes outcomes and actions identified by SBC itself. It also includes eg SBC's response to any governance recommendations from internal or external audits.

The Democratic Governance Improvement Acton Plan objectives have been aligned to the phase 4 'mission themes' as below.

High-quality councillor leadership, and governance behaviours (across all councillor groups and roles);

- b. SBC makes the most of its councillors' civic leadership roles to encourage a sense of civic society in Slough, in which SBC plays an appropriate role.*
- 4. Members, particularly decision-makers, are supported, developed, encouraged and clearly positioned in the governance framework of this authority.*
 - a. Roles of all members, whether executive or non-executive, administration or opposition, are clear and well understood, both by those doing the roles and by others.*
 - b. Members understand the systems, options, and power and relationship dynamics which enable them to get things done.*
- 5. Executive members are given every opportunity to be highly effective, individually and collectively, taking ownership and accountability of their portfolios.*
 - a. More and better opportunities for lead members and officers to be self-reflective about their effectiveness and behaviours individually and collectively.*
 - b. Effective member induction and development*
- 6. A properly resourced cabinet office, supporting cabinet's effectiveness individually and collectively.*
 - a. Improved provision of information to Members*

High quality officer-member relationships and behaviours; and

- CLT and Cabinet work effectively together as a leadership cadre, making the most of understanding each others' roles and the boundaries between them.*
- Effective and respectful member/officer relations across the board.*
- Improved organisational awareness of Slough's particular political dynamics.*
- Leaders (members and officers) understand, and make the most of, the opportunities presented by the strength of Members' understanding of their own localities and communities.*

High quality Officer governance behaviours;

- Improved forward planning of decision-making, including early engagement with members and other stakeholders*
- Improved compliance with formal decision-making processes*

- *Commitment to good governance is in evidence in behaviours and culture across the council's wider leadership team.*
- *Governance training for officers (induction and over time) is impactful.*
- *Efficient and Effective use of Democratic Services Team's limited resources.*
- *Corporate governance officer capacity and structure is sufficient to both sustain governance improvements to date, and to continue to further improve, mindful of where SBC is in its recovery journey.*

Based on high-quality governance systems and processes

- *The council looks to the future to assure its own viability and sets its decision-making priorities.*
- *Strengthened community engagement in the council's recovery and improvement*
- *Improved effectiveness of formal decision-making processes*
- *Commitment to good governance is in evidence in systems in use across the council's wider leadership team.*
- *The Council has systems in place to ensure it will remain self-aware about the effectiveness of its own governance arrangements.*
- *Improved quality of formal reports*
- *A fit-for-purpose constitution evolves in line with the organisation's needs.*

Appendix 2 - Corporate Governance objectives derived from gap-analysis against Best Value Guidance

Below is a further list of objectives for this programme, sourced by reviewing MHCLG's Best Value Standards' themes, 'characteristics of a well-functioning authority,' and 'indicators of potential failure'. Where it was felt there may be a corporate governance gap in SBC which requires addressing, or if this was unknown (this is a subjective judgment made by the programme lead), then the characteristic is expressed here in the form of an objective ie as a positive statement of a success state. The possible indicators of potential failure as set out in the Best Value Guidance have been re-stated as positive objectives too. These are not intended to be true claims about Slough Borough Council (although some of them may indeed be true) these are objectives.

These corporate governance best value objectives were then used to identify additional actions for phase 4, based on what activity would be necessary to either assess or address the degree to which SBC is meeting the necessary standard. Those actions can be found in the programme workbook.

1. Continuous Improvement

- The AGS is used as an improvement document.
 - There is sufficient engagement with our member development offer, and it is of sufficient quality.

2. Leadership

- Positive and effective leadership behaviours are modelled at all levels (including Members).
 - Statutory officers work effectively together, and all have a voice for key decisions.
- Robust systems are in place for identifying, reporting, mitigating and regularly reviewing risk.
 - Members and senior officers maintain constructive relationships.

3. Governance

- Governance arrangements are understood by politicians and staff alike.
- Decision-making processes should be transparent, regularly reviewed, clearly followed and understood.
- The authority's scrutiny function is challenging, robust and contributes to the effective delivery of public services.
- Risk awareness and management informs every decision.
- Full Council alongside the Audit Committee takes an effective overview of the systems of control, audit and governance.
- Appropriate financial, commercial and legal expertise is obtained, including from external sources, and due diligence completed on any key or novel decision.
- Committees and individuals charged with governance have the appropriate experience, skills and expertise to perform their role.
- There is proper member oversight (as shareholders) of companies and partnership bodies, and their existence is regularly independently reviewed.
- Performance management information measures actual outcomes effectively and is frequently interrogated.
- Lessons are learned from complaints.
- There are few significant weaknesses identified in annual audit reports.

- Meaningful risk registers exist at a corporate level and are owned by senior leaders. Risk registers do not downplay risks and have appropriate mitigations in place.
- Performance management information is consistently used, measures outcomes where relevant and underperformance is effectively addressed.
- Member/officer codes of conduct and arrangements for reviewing standards complaints are regularly reviewed.

4. Culture

- Members and officers promote and demonstrate the highest ethical standards and appropriate working behaviours through established shared values and ways of working.
- An accessible whistleblowing policy, of which there is wide awareness and confidence that it will work.
- The respective roles of members and officers, and the interface between them, are accepted and understood, and there is no over-involvement of members in operational decisions or of officers in setting strategic political vision.
- There is no culture of bullying, distrust, or broken relationships.
- The organisation is able to respond effectively to issues because processes and procedures have not become overly bureaucratic and are instead focused on assurance and robust governance.
- There is no under- or non-engagement of the standards regime, and there is confidence in its credibility and legitimacy.
- Disciplinary and complaints systems are properly deployed, leading to a sense that nobody can act improperly with impunity.
- Urgency arrangements, confidential or delegated action reports are not overused, and when they are necessary such reports are reported in a form which allows scrutiny.
- Members and officers have a good understanding of declarations of interest and gift/hospitality registers, which are monitored and regularly updated.

5. Resources

- The Audit Committee has the knowledge, skills and independent expertise to provide robust challenge and ensures effective controls are in place and issues addressed.
- The purposes of companies are carefully considered and regularly reviewed, with effective governance and oversight arrangements in place.
- Effective project management of projects to enhance governance and effective use of resources.

6. Service Delivery

- Data and benchmarking are used to identify whether services are being delivered effectively
- Service plans exist and are clearly linked to the local authority's priorities and strategic plans, and individuals' objectives.
- There are clear and effective mechanisms for scrutinising performance across all service areas.
- There is good tracking of benefits realisation on service improvement.

7. Partnerships and community engagement

- The authority may be beginning to experiment with more participative forms of decision-making (so that partners and residents are involved in developing indicators and targets, and monitoring and managing lack of performance)

Appendix 3 – Improvement & Assurance Framework outcomes / critical success factors

These objectives, derived from the LGA Improvement & Assurance Framework and agreed by the Transformation Board in July, were then used to identify additional actions for phase 4. Those actions can be found in the programme workbook.

- Ensure continuous improvement - Prioritising learning and development, striving to learn from past mistakes, address under-performance and avoid continuing in a direction where failure is evident;
- Openness to challenge and support - ensuring regular benchmarking, participating in external reviews and using appropriate performance metrics to measure performance;
- Effective approach to risk management - effective scrutiny programme focused on improvement, effective internal control mechanisms leading to appropriate understanding of and management of risk.
- Resident focused - appropriate engagement mechanisms to inform decisions, including engagement with harder to reach communities and individuals and service plans being evidence based and aligns to corporate priorities;
- Effective system of governance for decision-making - effective procedures in place and followed to ensure compliance with Nolan Principles, value for money and proper member oversight;
- Culture of cooperation, respect and trust - commitment to transparency, ethical use of data, decision making at the right level and promotion and adherence to the highest ethical standards and effective partnership working;
- Effective use of resources - financial strategy and budgets aligned to strategic priorities, with appropriate use of fixed and workforce resources and robust system of internal control.

Appendix 4 - The principles of CIPFA's Delivering Good Governance in Local Government

These principles have guided the creation of the AGS Action Plan which was published and agreed by Audit Committee in June. All the AGS improvement actions are incorporated into this programme's workbook. Monitoring the delivery of the AGS Improvement Plan is in scope of this programme, although *delivery* against most of the AGS improvement actions is not in scope of this programme, with the exception of a few corporate governance actions owned by the Monitoring Officer.

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

Appendix 5 – Scrutiny improvement outcomes

The following outcomes are listed in the scrutiny improvement action plan, which was most recently agreed by Full Council in May 2024 as part of the Scrutiny Annual Report. It responds directly to the latest CfGS review findings.

Actions designed to deliver each of these outcomes are incorporated into this programme's workbook.

- Residents are better informed about Scrutiny at Slough
- Residents able to propose scrutiny topics.
- Members propose topics for scrutiny that are relevant and deliver impact.
- Better evidence of impact and of good governance re: scrutiny actions and recommendations
- Assurance that scrutiny recognises the value of specific stakeholders.
- Residents recognise and engage with the work of scrutiny.
- Directors and senior managers engage positively with the work of the committee and recognise the positive impact it can have.
- Scrutiny is evidence based.
- Scrutiny is making a difference.
- Agenda items are more likely to be of Member origin or public origin.
- Scrutiny helps residents to feel they can influence decisions made by the council.
- Scrutiny Members feel that they have been able to adequately cover issues important to residents.
- Scrutiny contributes to the wider partnership landscape, not only SBC's internal crisis.
- Decision-makers are held to account publicly.