

## Appendix A – Response to Full Council

### 1. Introduction

1.1 This report sets out the Leader's response to Full Council's objection to Cabinet's recommended budget. It is recommended that this is endorsed by Cabinet.

### 2. Proposed Changes:

2.1 This table sets out proposed changes to the 2026/27 Budget based on the feedback from Full Council. Detail is set out in the sections below. The recommendations to Full Council will incorporate these changes to the original budget.

Proposed Change	Ref	Change	Budget Impact £m	Comments
Council Tax Hardship Fund	3	Increase CT Hardship Fund by £100k.  Met from a £100k ringfence within the Crisis and Resilience Fund Grant.	0.100  (0.100)	Together with the existing budget £175k an £80k grant carry forward from 2025/26 as set out in the 29 <sup>th</sup> January 2026 Council Papers, this would provide £355k, essentially unchanged from £350k in 2025/26
Budget for Scrutiny	4	Increase the available budget for Scrutiny by £50k  Absorb within the existing Democratic and Legal Services Budget.	0.050  (0.050)	The response does not pre-empt the outcome of a planned review of the scrutiny function, but proposes to absorb any increase required within the existing budget.
Drug and Alcohol Treatment Budget	5	Increase the proposed Drug and Alcohol Treatment Budget by £36k to retain the 2025/26 budget level.  Met from drawing down £36k from the Public Health Ring-Fenced Reserve	0.036  (0.036)	The General Fund saving will be retained by this action by using Ring-Fenced Public Health funds to retain the budget at 2025/26 levels.
Total changes showing balanced budget:			0.000	

### **3. Council Tax Support Scheme (CTSS) and Hardship Fund**

- 3.1 The Council Tax Base has been set for 2026/27 including the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme. Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012 Requires the council as the Billing Authority to calculate a Council Tax Base for its area by 31 January for the forthcoming financial year and duly notify precepting authorities (i.e., Thames Valley Police and Royal Berkshire Fire and Police) as well local Parish Councils.
- 3.2 Changing the CTSS at this stage would cause a disconnect between the Tax Base and the approved CTSS which would lead to a deficit on the collection fund to be shared amongst the Council and its Preceptors, and therefore is not recommended.
- 3.3 However, the Hardship Fund can be supplemented by a further £100k ringfenced from the Crisis and Resilience Fund grant. This will provide £355k total funding, consisting of:
- £175k in the original budget proposals
  - £80k carried forward from the 2025/26 grant as set out to Full Council on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2026
  - £100k further amount set out above.
- 3.4 The level required will be kept under review as part of monthly financial monitoring.

### **4. Review of Special Responsibility Allowances and the arrangements for Scrutiny**

- 4.1 The opposition group presentations to Full Council indicated a preference for the establishment of a second Scrutiny Committee, alongside a review of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs).
- 4.2 The Council has commissioned the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to review its scrutiny arrangements. This work is currently underway, with findings and recommendations expected shortly.
- 4.3 Whilst the proposal does not pre-empt the outcome of that review, it allows for the potential provision of up to £50,000 of additional governance capacity, which could include scrutiny. Any special responsibility allowance would need to be part of a review, including recommendations from an independent remuneration panel. This could include provision for a £15,000 Chair and Vice-Chair allowance and the potential for additional officer support if required. Any such investment would need to be met from existing budgets and/or capacity within Legal and Democratic Services.

- 4.4 The current Members' Allowances Scheme for Slough Borough Council was last formally approved by Full Council on 28 March 2023, following recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP), an independent body established under the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 to review and make recommendations on councillors' allowances.
- 4.5 The revised scheme took effect from 1 April 2023 and remains the operative scheme unless amended by a further decision of Full Council. Full Council cannot amend the scheme without convening and considering the advice of an Independent Remuneration Panel.
- 4.6 Under the Regulations, a council may only apply an indexation arrangement to councillor allowances for a maximum period of four years without reconvening the Independent Remuneration Panel. On that basis, Slough Borough Council would normally be required to undertake a further review of the Members' Allowances Scheme by around April 2027 at the latest, but could convene the review earlier.

## **5. Changes to the Budget for Drug and Alcohol Treatment**

- 5.1 Recognising the feedback from Members at Full Council, the administration acknowledges the continued importance of investing in drug and alcohol treatment and wider substance misuse support. These services form a key part of the borough's public health approach to reducing harm, improving recovery outcomes and supporting some of the most vulnerable residents in the community.
- 5.2 Funding for drug and alcohol treatment sits within the Council's Public Health Grant, provided by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), which supports a wider programme of preventative services delivered by Slough Borough Council. This includes work on substance misuse prevention, mental health and wellbeing support, smoking cessation, health improvement programmes and targeted interventions aimed at reducing health inequalities. These services are closely linked, as substance misuse is often associated with wider health challenges such as poor mental health, homelessness, and long-term health conditions.
- 5.3 In this context, retaining the £36k within the Drug and Alcohol Treatment budget recognises the importance of maintaining treatment capacity and ensuring that residents are able to access appropriate support and recovery services, while ensuring that the overall position can be managed within the Public Health ringfenced reserve and without creating an additional pressure on the General Fund.

## **6. Other Feedback**

- 6.1 The proposals set out at Full Council included a number of items that are either already included within the budget proposals (e.g. investing in SEND and recognising savings from integrating Slough Children First) or cannot practically

be implemented at this stage (e.g. savings from reducing the number of Commissioners). Each of these have been reviewed, with the three changes proposed above being those that can be considered.

- 6.2 There are also a number of proposals which fall outside the scope of the budget-setting process. For example, suggestions were made to merge the Audit and Governance Committee with the Standards function. However, Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) guidance on audit committees generally advises that the primary focus of an audit committee should remain on financial governance, risk management, internal control and audit. In addition the Government proposals on member standards are likely to include requirement for a Standards Committee. Therefore the proposal to revert to standards matters being considered by the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee goes against national policy and guidance. Any changes to committee structures would therefore need to be considered separately through the Council's governance arrangements rather than through the budget setting process. Changes to special responsibility allowances can be considered in a wider review.