

Appendix A: Finance Improvement Action Plan

Identified Issue	Actions to be taken	Timescales	Latest update	Responsible Officer/Group	Review(s) that identified issue
Getting the Basics Right					
Review finance procedures to determine if they remain fit for purpose, with external support as required	Review of current financial procedures within the constitution to be undertaken. Annual review is usual best practice so this will be undertaken to ensure ready for financial year 2024/25.	Feb 2024	Annual review not yet due but also awaiting start of permanent new Director and team to lead this process	Dir Corp & Strat finance (team)	CIPFA
Completion of statement of accounts for all outstanding years including Value for Money (VFM) judgements	Financial year 2018/19 is awaiting final sign off with external auditor. 2019/20 complete and with GT. Audit to be completed. 2020/21 accounts to be completed and audited. 2021/22 accounts to be completed and audited. 2022/23 accounts to be completed and audited.	Aug 2023 Oct 2023 Dec 2023 Feb 2024 Sept 2024	Following changes to national statutory deadlines (in draft) then the following deadlines have been provisionally agreed with external auditors The dates provided would ensure statutory deadlines are met. The plan for completion of statement of accounts is well underway and will be discussed with GT once further national framework is confirmed in Oct 23. In completing statement of accounts working papers, supporting evidence and explanatory notes will show year on year improvement where possible, with the Council targeting a non-qualified set of accounts for the earliest	Dir Corp & Strat finance	GT
PLEASE NOTE THESE ARE INDICATIVE DATES UNTIL FORMAL AGREEMENT WITH EXTERNAL AUDITORS AS AWAITING NATIONAL GUIDANCE					

	<p>2023/24 accounts to be completed and audited with council publishing unaudited accounts by 31st May 2024 deadline</p> <p>Value for Money work for 2021/22 and 2022/23 to be completed</p>	<p>Dec 2024</p> <p>Dec 2023</p>	<p>possible opportunity (likely to be 22/23 accounts)</p>		
<p>Ensuring that financial and commercial services has the capacity, skills and capability to support the financial recovery journey at Slough (general council finance skills covered under another theme)</p>	<p>Recruitment to the agreed structure for all service areas within finance including corporate and service finance, procurement and commercial, insurance, risk and internal audit</p> <p>Restructure of transactional services under consideration linked to the revenues and benefits automation programme</p>	<p>Mar 2024</p> <p>Mar 2024</p>	<p>Appointments been made for roles at Exec Dir, Director level.</p> <p>Recruitment underway at SFM and FM level</p> <p>Consultation commenced on new role of Director of Transactions. Recruitment to commence w/c 2 October 2023</p> <p>Work commenced on structural redesign of layers beneath the Director role. Will agree roles required and develop new JDs in advance of Director appointment</p>	<p>Exec Dir Finance and Commercial (S151)</p> <p>Dir Corp & Strategic Finance and Dir Financial Mgt</p> <p>Exec Dir Finance and Commercial (S151)</p> <p>Interim Head of Transactions</p>	<p>DLUHC FIN DIR CIPFA</p>

Financial reporting and budget monitoring (revenue, capital, general fund, HRA, DSG and other financial metrics) needs to be undertaken on a regular basis and to best practice standards	Revenue outturn for 22/23 to be presented at cabinet in September.	Sept 2023	Outturn report to be presented to cabinet in September.	Dir Corp & Strat finance	GT
	Monthly budget monitoring timetable, including meetings with services to sign-off their forecasts to be agreed and aligned to corporate reporting requirements	June 2023 (Month 2 monitor)	Period 2 internal monitoring undertaken with Period 3 (Qtr 1) presented to cabinet in September.	Dir Corp & Strat finance	
	Action plans to be put into place where any significant deviation from balance will need to be identified to ensure that the council lives within its means	As need arises	Deep dive/line by line reviews of all service budgets taken place between Month 3 and Month 4 to identify actions to live within our means. Actions will be followed up on a risk and exemption basis as required and the consequences on the council's financial position included in budget cabinet reports.	Dir Financial Mgt	
	Alignment of reporting with companies to the Council	Sept 2023	Cabinet papers for companies being presented to Sept cabinet meeting	Lead by ED Housing and Property	

Savings had been identified for the year 2023/24 but these need to be monitored, managed and the business cases behind these monitored for delivery	Savings delivery and reporting to be mainstreamed into the regular financial reporting processes	May 2023	Complete – this is now included as a specific monitoring item within regular financial reporting. Any savings that are not achieved in-year or on-going are identified and the service they originated from needs to seek alternative savings to compensate for non-delivery and identify actions within budget management reporting	Dir Financial Mg	GT
Up to date reconciliations of key systems, creditors and debtors balances and regular review of the balance sheet needs to be undertaken and regularly reported on.	Key reconciliations need to be brought up to date with sufficient supporting paperwork and reviewed and signed off. A process needs to be put in place to ensure that backlogs do not arise and performance information included in management information dashboard for senior officers to review.	Feb 2024 (to tie in with SOA) As per SOA schedule Feb 2024	Interim resource secured to bring all reconciliations up to date and setting up a new sustainable business process. Balance sheet reconciliation being undertaken as part of the updating of the statement of accounts work. Appropriate use of balance sheet coding planned within use of Agresso system (referred to under automation theme)	Dir of Corp & Strat Finance Dir of Corp & Strat Finance Dir of Corp & Strat Finance	GT
The raising of debtors invoices needs to be monitored to ensure that there is sufficient audit trail to support the raising of income and to allow proper debt collection to take place.	Deep dive reviews of key risk areas for income to be identified (see deep dive Project 1) that can then be used to improve overall processes	Commenced	3 areas picked (Commercial property, TA as part of wider review and social care income)	Service Exec directors	GT

<p>Original issues were raised specifically in social care but this is an issue that needs to be addressed across the organisation.</p>	<p>From Qtr2 there should be strengthened reporting on key income measures including debt measures</p> <p>Improved Agresso reporting to provide management information on debt for budget managers</p>	<p>Sept 23 for Nov reports</p> <p>Oct 23</p>	<p>Reporting will be developed ahead of Qtr2 monitoring</p> <p>Work has commenced on developing reports</p>	<p>Dir Financial Management</p> <p>Interim Head of Transactional Services and transactions team</p>	
<p>The Fixed Asset register needs to be reviewed and regular monitoring of the asset disposals programme needs to be undertaken.</p>	<p>Full review of the asset register in line with work required for Statement of Accounts</p> <p>Review CIPFA asset register arrangement to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear and that the arrangements are fit for purpose</p> <p>Asset disposal reporting to finance board from May 23 and internal officer Capital Board from Sept 23</p>	<p>Linked with SOA timetable</p> <p>Commence June 23</p> <p>May 23</p>	<p>Specific team has been put together in finance to review available information and linking in with property colleagues to ensure information is fit for purpose</p> <p>Reviewing arrangements on roles and responsibilities has commenced</p> <p>Reports now being provided on a regular basis</p>	<p>SFM Corp fin</p> <p>SFM Capital</p> <p>SFM Capital</p>	<p>GT</p>

<p>Consideration needs to be given to the way in which the Treasury management function works including cash management to ensure that we are providing adequate oversight and reporting on our activities.</p>	<p>Day to day practices reviewed by additional interim resource and processes documented</p>	<p>Aug 23</p>	<p>Complete by end August</p>	<p>SFM Treasury</p>	<p>N/A</p>
	<p>The Treasury Management annual report for 22/23 to Audit and Governance in November 23 and standard performance reporting improved</p>	<p>Nov 23</p>	<p>Will be presented in November 23 and adhere to best practice. Performance monitoring cycles for in-year performance to be considered with the aim that these will be aligned to best practice as soon as possible.</p>	<p>SFM Treasury</p>	
	<p>Ensure Treasury management and cashflow activity reflected in budget monitoring</p>	<p>Nov 23</p>	<p>Although the budget monitoring for Quarter 1 reflects the current activity level, more detailed reporting will be included at Quarter 2</p>	<p>Dir Corp & Strategic Finance</p>	
<p>The time taken to process change of circumstances and new claims in Housing Benefits is excessive and needs to be addressed.</p>	<p>The length of time taken to process new claims and change in circumstances far exceeds acceptable levels and national averages. The service therefore needs to ensure that processes and practices are changed to reduce waiting times</p>	<p>Sept 23</p>	<p>The team are automating processes that will reduce the amount of time taken to process claims and are already seeing reductions in the time taken for these activities.</p> <p>DWP have been working with the council to provide guidance on improving practices and will be on-site during September 2023 to review updated practices to help identify any further actions that could be made</p>	<p>Interim Head of Transactions</p>	<p>N/A</p>

Governance and Decision Making Support					
Company Governance including monitoring and commercial sub committee and reporting needs to be addressed. The number of dormant companies has already been reduced and action now needs to be focussed on resolving issues within current companies	Now lead by ED Housing Need to ensure company accounts are received in timely fashion to be able to complete group accounts	From 23/24 In line with SOA timetable	Cabinet reports in September	Housing	FIN DIR GT
The risk management system of the council and its oversight of risk actions needs to be strengthened and underpin the decisions the council makes in terms of prioritising its resources alongside performance and finance information	The system of reporting risk needs to be embedded across the council through departmental and corporate management teams. Development of risk registers at departmental level and not just corporate level needs to be put in place and regular discussion on risk at management teams	From May 23 June 23	Representatives from the risk and internal audit team now attend DLT's, CLT assurance and finance board, Complete - Departmental risk registers are now in place for each Directorate. The assurance CLT considers the risk register on a monthly basis	Head of Fin Gov, Risk and Internal Audit All Exec Directors	FIN DI R

	<p>Quarterly risk reports need to be considered by the Audit and Governance committee to ensure that there is member oversight on risks</p> <p>All committee reports should show clear consideration on risks, issues and mitigations to allow decision-makers to have full understanding of the implications of decisions they are making</p> <p>Need to consider whether the current tools for monitoring risk are sufficiently efficient and effective</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>March 2024</p>	<p>First risk report was not of sufficient quality but reports for Sept committee have been refreshed and improved sign off process now in place</p> <p>All report authors need to consider risk within their report and report template includes a risk section</p> <p>Business case for support system for risk management to replace use of standard office systems to be considered</p>	<p>Head of Fin Gov, Risk and Internal Audit</p> <p>All report authors</p> <p>Head of Fin Gov, Risk and Internal Audit</p>	
<p>The number of internal audits with actions still outstanding from prior financial years needs to be addressed. (Open actions date back to 2021/22).</p>	<p>The Internal Audit team need to co-ordinate work with internal audit action owners to ensure that outstanding actions from prior years are dealt with</p> <p>A number of open audits remain from 2022/23 where there have been</p>	<p>Dec 2023</p> <p>Aug 2023</p>	<p>Regular reporting at assurance CLT as well as finance board now in place. Actions where movement is not happening quick enough and audits not closed off to be called in to meet with Internal Audit Manager and S151 officer</p> <p>Attendance at DLT's now in place</p>	<p>Internal Audit Manager and Exec Dir Fin & Commercial</p> <p>Internal Audit Manager and</p>	<p>DLUHC FIN DIR</p>

	<p>Independent review was undertaken by Local Partnerships and actions included in specific procurement plan.</p> <p>Next steps are to respond to upcoming Procurement Bill changes, Head of Commercial services is working with colleagues in the London Procurement Network to ensure compliance as well as continue to embed contract management best practice across the council</p>				
<p>There needs to be a process put in place to bring the development of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) back in line with completion of the Statement of Accounts. The AGS will also be monitored for actions undertaken to improve the overall</p>	<p>AGS approved at Audit and Governance committee for 22/23 and arrangements in place to monitor during year</p> <p>Arrangements for AGS for next year to be agreed</p>	<p>July 2023</p> <p>March 2024</p>	<p>AGS approved at Audit committee</p> <p>Agreement on completion for future years to be discussed</p>	<p>Head of Legal</p> <p>Statutory Officers Group</p>	<p>GT</p>

governance framework and culture at the Council.					
Financial Culture and Awareness					
Training programme Developed for officers and members to improve financial awareness	For officers:				
	Review existing induction training for officers	Sept 2023	Induction training being refreshed and updated for finance and non finance officers	Exec Dir Fin & Commercial	CIPFA DLUHC FIN DIR GT
	Revise budget manager training as well as system training	TBC (to be developed alongside Agresso system work)	Included within Agresso work	Dir Corp & Strat fin	
	Berkshire finance collaboration and other networking	Commenced May 2023	Through Berks S151 network, the Slough S151 has developed a collaborate network for training, support and development across Berkshire. (Initiated when she worked at RBWM) Slough officers are included but this will grow as the network develops	Exec Dir Fin & Commercial	
	For members:				
Member induction training on local government finance	May 2023	Induction sessions delivered	Finance team		
Specific training programme for Audit and Corporate Governance committee developed (to	Sept 2023	Initial programme topics discussed with committee and will be agreed at next meeting	Dir Financial Mgt		

	<p>be delivered over financial year with support from external bodies)</p> <p>Bespoke topic training to be identified that can be delivered to all members</p>	TBC	As identified	TBC	
<p>The finance business partnering offer needs to be strengthened to support the council in undertaking its duties and ensuring sound decision-making can take place.</p>	<p>All DLT's to have a relevant representative of the finance team in attendance to provide knowledge sharing, advice and guidance and early input into financial implications of work of services</p> <p>A review of the business partner offer and behaviours to be developed with new permanent team</p>	<p>Commenced April 2023</p> <p>Commence Nov 2023</p>	<p>CLT agreement for finance reps at all DLT meetings</p> <p>New permanent Director of financial management to undertake a review of the finance business partnering offer</p>	<p>CLT</p> <p>Dir of Financial mgt (Perm)</p>	N/A
<p>The general awareness of our financial sustainability and everyone's part in management of our resources needs to be considered.</p>	<p>Finance team will undertake appropriate briefings for staff through staff roadshows, briefing through DLT's and through business partnering approach</p>	<p>Delivered as necessary</p>	<p>Staff roadshow briefings undertaken</p>	<p>Exec Dir Fin & Commercial</p>	N/A

<p>Resident and stakeholder engagement around financial matters needs to be strengthened to ensure that there is better understanding of how the council demonstrates its use of public funds to build trust with our communities.</p>	<p>The team need to focus on the way financial information is presented in reports to ensure that key messages are able to be understood by a wide audience</p> <p>There will be a focus on public engagement as part of budget setting for 2024/25 and then improved year on year (aligned with MTFS actions)</p> <p>The Statement of Accounts narratives will ensure there is a summary of what the more technical information in the accounts mean (focus on 22/23 given the backlog of accounts)</p>	<p>Commenced April 2023 with new team</p>	<p>The team have been reviewing and refreshing available finance information and making best use of charts, tables and pictorial information alongside reducing the use of overly technical language.</p> <p>The team will seek feedback after all reports are produced, from key officers and members</p>	<p>Exec Dir Finance & Commercial</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>We will ensure that we have a strong anti-fraud and corruption culture to demonstrate we are using our public resources wisely</p>	<p>Included in the training and development for officers and members will be anti-fraud and anti-corruption training.</p> <p>Policies will be reviewed on a regular basis and an anti-fraud charter updated</p>	<p>TBC</p> <p>TBC</p>	<p>Included as part of the training actions but specific to this area</p> <p>Timing to be agreed with Audit and Governance committee and align with mandatory officer training</p>	<p>Head of Fin Gov, Risk and Internal Audit</p>	<p>N/A</p>

	to ensure we adhere to best practice				
CIPFA financial management code and other legislative changes need to be considered to ensure technical knowledge is up to date	<p>The team need to ensure that there is a systematic review of codes as issued including awareness of legislative changes and best practice (finance and service)</p> <p>The team will seek to have an external Finance peer review in the second half of 2024/25 to ensure that the actions in this plan are effective</p>	<p>Commenced Sept 2023</p> <p>From Sept 2024</p>	<p>Identified a lead within the corporate team to co-ordinate updates but also build on business partner knowledge with services</p> <p>To be arranged at the appropriate time</p>	<p>Dir Corp & Strat Fin</p> <p>Exec Dir Fin and Commercial</p>	N/A
Medium Term Planning					
Identifying future liabilities to understand the scale of financial risks over the Medium Term (for 24/25 – 26/27)	Review the Capitalisation Directive model (CD) following outturn 22/23	Aug 2023	CD model updated for outturn which will then lead onto revising MTFS model	Dir Corp & Strat Finance	CIPFA FIN DIR
	Identify pressures arising during 23/24 that will continue into 24/25	Aug 2023	Identified pressures as part of Qtr1 budget monitoring	Dir Financial Mgt	
The Council needs to address its medium term planning and ensure that a balanced MTFP is agreed by full council for 2024/25 - 2026/27 when setting the	A detailed timetable needs to be produced to ensure that a fully evidenced MTFP, that is balanced, for agreement by full council	Aug 2023	Timetable for completion presented to finance board in Aug 2024	SFM Financial planning and reporting	FIN DIR

council's budget in March 2024	Build on public and member engagement during the setting of 2024/25 budget but look to further enhance this for future budget setting years	Mar 2024	Meeting with Chair of Scrutiny to agree approach to public and member engagement throughout MTFS development for 2024/25 budget	Exec Dir Finance & Commercial	
The Council had low levels of reserves particularly for the level of financial risk that the council is carrying given the number of financial years of accounts that remain outstanding. This needs to be addressed.	The low level of reserves was addressed in 23/24 setting but need ongoing reserve strategy alongside agreement of the MTFS	Mar 2024	Reserves strategy will be included as part of the overall Medium Term Financial Strategy to be signed off in March 2024	Exec Dir Finance and Commercial	GT
Transformation and Automation					
Revenues and Benefits Transformation work	The service needs to modernise by implementing software applications that automate high volume transactions leaving experienced officers to target recovery for those who can but choose not to pay and intensive support to those who cannot pay and require help.	Mar 2024	For Revenues we are automating: Moves in/out DDs Refunds Arrangements Discount reviews Unpaid DDs Emails SPD Applications EA Returns Historic Credits Student Discounts Write-offs	Interim Head of Transactions	FIN DIR CIPFA

	To improve collection rates the service needs to implement proactive means of contact using text, email, and voice early in the recovery cycle to proactively help and support residents to pay	Mar 2024	<p>For Benefits we are automating: UC – Complete Emails – Complete VEP CTS New Claims Rent Increases Interventions/Suspensions/Terminations Changes in Circumstances</p> <p>Contract awarded to TelSolutions and development work commenced on revenues recovery processes.</p>	Interim Head of Transactions	
Development of Agresso system to be fit for purpose and support the council to make decisions	Programme board established in July 23 and will develop system improvement roadmap	Commenced July 23	Further updates in future updated plan	Dir Corp Fin/SFM systems	N/A
The transactional service (including Revenues & Benefits, Social Care Finance, Sundry Debt and other debt collection) will move to a model where we use data and insight to support a single view of debt	Use data and insight to provide a holistic view of the resident/household to enable proactive joined up collection to drive up collection rates and the early provision of welfare support to those who need it	Mar 2025	Not yet started	Interim Head of Transactions	N/A

and adopt a model where we maximise collection and proactively provide support to those who need it.					
DEEP DIVE PROJECTS					
Deep Dive Projects	<p>First identified projects:</p> <p>Management of Income and Debt Processes within the following areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Commercial Property 2) Housing Benefit Overpayments 3) Temporary Accommodation and wider Housing transactions 4) Adult Social Care Income 	<p>4 separate officer task and finish groups being set up with cross cutting representation from relevant service areas, transactional finance and other relevant depts.</p>	<p>Further actions to be identified following officer task and finish groups findings.</p> <p>These actions will be reviewed for progress through the finance board and recovery boards</p>	<p>Exec Dir Finance and Commercial plus service leads</p>	<p>N/A</p>

Key:

CIPFA = CIPFA governance review actions

DLUHC = DLUHC governance review

FIN DIR = Finance specific directions

GT = actions arising from external auditors Grant Thornton

N/A = either no specific individual action from previous reviews or activity identified since reviews