

REPORT TO COUNCIL

19 NOVEMBER 2025

**REPORT OF HEAD OF PAID SERVICE
AND THE APPOINTMENTS PANEL**

Appointment of Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer)

Summary

Council is asked to make a permanent designation to the statutory office responsible for the proper administration of the authority's financial affairs.

Clare Harper has served as Acting Section 151 Officer since May 2025. Following a Member Appointments Panel on 1 October 2025, the Panel recommends her permanent appointment, with the post styled Chief Finance Officer (CFO).

This appointment strengthens governance, provides stability for budget setting and audit, and ensures ongoing statutory compliance.

Recommendations

Council is asked to:

1. Note that interim arrangements were approved by Council on 21 May 2025, designating Clare Harper as Acting Section 151 Officer.
2. Approve the permanent designation of Clare Harper as the officer responsible for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs in accordance with Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972.
3. Confirm that the post shall be styled Chief Finance Officer and that the role shall continue to report directly to the Chief Executive, with access to the Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance, the Chair of Audit and Governance Committee, and the Monitoring Officer.
4. Authorise the Chief Executive to make any consequential amendments to the Council's officer structure, constitution, and published organisational charts to reflect this appointment.

Statutory Context

1. Every local authority must make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs and designate one officer to have personal responsibility for those arrangements (Local Government Act 1972, s151).

2. The CFO is one of the Council's three statutory officers, alongside:
 - a. Head of Paid Service (Local Government and Housing Act 1989, s4) – overall corporate management and workforce leadership.
 - b. Monitoring Officer (Local Government and Housing Act 1989, s5) – lawfulness, maladministration, and ethical governance.
 - c. Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer – financial administration and stewardship.

These three officers provide a system of checks and balances. Each has direct access to the Head of Paid Service, the Leader, and the Council, and each may issue formal advice or reports which carry significant weight in law.

3. Further CFO-specific duties include:
 - a. Local Government Finance Act 1988 (s114): duty to issue a report if the authority is incurring or is likely to incur unlawful expenditure or if resources are inadequate to set or maintain a lawful budget.
 - b. Local Government Act 2003 (ss25–27): duty to advise on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of reserves.
 - c. Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015: responsibility for accounting records, internal control, and approval and publication of the annual statement of accounts.
 - d. Prudential Framework and CIPFA Codes: responsibility for capital finance, prudential indicators, and Treasury Management.

Role and position in the organisation

4. The CFO is a chief officer reporting directly to the Chief Executive and with unfettered access to the Chief Executive, the Leader, the Cabinet Member for Finance, the Chair of Audit and Governance Committee, the Monitoring Officer, external audit, and the Corporate Management Team.
5. The CFO leads the corporate finance function and provides impartial professional advice to members and officers to support sound decision making, risk management, and value for money.
6. Professional qualification is required under section 113 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The role operates in line with CIPFA's Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government.
7. In practice the CFO
 - a. Gives Council formal advice on the budget and reserves before the Council set the budget.
 - b. Can require spending controls and, in extremis, can issue a s114 report.

- c. Oversees Treasury Management and capital strategy to protect the Council's financial sustainability.
- d. Ensures the annual accounts, audit, and internal control framework meet statutory standards.

Appointment Process

- 8. Following the retirement of the former s151 postholder in May 2025, Council approved interim arrangements designating Clare Harper as Acting Section 151 Officer (21 May 2025).
- 9. The Member Appointments Panel met on 1 October 2025 to consider the permanent appointment. Having assessed professional qualifications, leadership capability, and performance in post, the Panel recommends permanent designation and styling of the post as Chief Finance Officer.

Governance

- 10. The designation of a s151 officer secures:
 - a. Clear statutory accountability for financial administration.
 - b. Direct reporting lines to the Chief Executive and direct member access, including to Audit and Governance Committee.
 - c. Access to all information and systems necessary to discharge the role.
 - d. The ability to commission independent advice and to escalate concerns to Council where required.
- 11. The CFO works alongside the Head of Paid Service and Monitoring Officer to provide collective assurance on lawfulness, financial sustainability, and good governance

Community Impact and Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment

- 12. The appointment has no direct impact on local communities or service users.
- 13. Equality considerations were applied through the Council's recruitment and selection processes, which were conducted in line with corporate policies and the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 14. While the role itself does not directly influence poverty outcomes, effective financial leadership supports the Council's wider objectives to manage resources fairly and sustainably for all residents.

Corporate Parenting Implications

- 15. There are no specific Corporate Parenting implications arising from this appointment.
- 16. The Chief Finance Officer, as a member of the Corporate Management Team, contributes to the effective stewardship of resources across all services, including those that support children in care and care-experienced young people.

Financial, Legal and Risk Implications

17. Designation under section 151 LGA 1972 is a legal requirement and is reserved to Full Council. The postholder must meet section 113 qualification requirements and the Council must ensure the role's seniority, access, and resources are sufficient to fulfil statutory duties.
18. The appointment is contained within existing budgets. The deletion of the vacant Deputy Chief Executive designation will deliver savings within the Medium Term Financial Plan. There are no additional costs arising from this designation.
19. Permanent designation reduces governance risk, supports timely statutory financial advisories, and strengthens resilience through a single accountable CFO.

Wards Affected and Consultation with Ward/Councillors (refer to Concordat for Communication and Consultation with Members)

20. All wards are affected indirectly, as the designation of the Section 151 Officer supports the sound financial management of the whole Council.
21. No ward-specific consultation has been necessary, as the appointment relates to an internal statutory designation rather than a local or service-based proposal.

Background Papers

- Minutes of the Appointments Panel (1 October 2025)
- CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government
- Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015
- Local Government Finance Act 1988; Local Government Act 2003; Local Government Act 1972; Local Government and Housing Act 1989

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