

Council

08 July 2025

Part 1 - Public

Matters for Decision



Cabinet Member

N/A

Responsible Officer

Damian Roberts, Chief Executive

Report Author

Mathew Brooks, Head of HR and Development

Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer - Recruitment

1 Summary and Purpose of Report

1.1 This report proposes the appointment to the newly created Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer post, based on the recommendations of the appointed Panel of Members.

2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

2.1 Efficient services for all our residents, maintaining an effective council.

2.2 As detailed in the report to Council on 13 May 2025.

3 Recommendations

3.1 To note the recruitment and selection process undertaken; and

3.2 To appoint Paul Worden to the newly created post of Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer with effect 28 July 2025.

4 Introduction and Background

4.1 At the meeting of Council on 13 May 2025, Members agreed to recruit into a newly created post of Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer following the retirement of the long-serving Director of Finance and Transformation.

4.2 Members also agreed the formation of a Member Panel, comprising the Leader, Deputy Leader and Leader of the Opposition to oversee and be involved in the recruitment process. (The Deputy Leader of the Opposition substituted)

4.3 Due to the specialist skillset and seniority of the post, it was fundamental that the Council attracted the best candidates available to apply. It was equally important

to ensure that a rigorous selection and testing process of the candidates' skills and abilities was undertaken before the Members Panel interviews.

- 4.4 The recruitment and selection process took place throughout June 2025 led by the specialist recruitment search and selection company Penna. The process was rigorous and contained multiple different interview stages and processes for candidates to undertake.
- 4.5 There was positive interest in the role and a number of applications were received.
- 4.6 Candidates were longlisted and participated in two preliminary interviews prior to the final stage interview with Members.
- 4.7 The first of these was a technical interview conducted by the Chief Executive, supported by an independent Technical Assessor—a very experienced Finance Director and Section 151 Officer from another Council.
- 4.8 The second Stakeholder Panel interview consisted of 3 Chief Officers from the Council's Management Team, the Kent Audit Partnership Manager and the Deputy Chair of the Audit Committee.
- 4.9 Following these stages, candidates were shortlisted for the final stage interview process which included psychometric testing and a Member Panel interview which took place on Friday 04 July 2025.

5 Proposal

- 5.1 The Council's Constitution contains Officer Employment Procedure Rules in relation to the appointment of Chief Officers other than the Chief Executive that provide:
 - 1) The appointment of Chief Officers other than the Chief Executive will be made by a Panel of Members appointed by the Council for that purpose.
 - 2) This panel will include at least one member of the Executive.
 - 3) An offer of employment shall only be made where no well-founded objection from any member of the Executive has been received.
- 5.2 Having excelled at all stages of the rigorous recruitment process, it is proposed to appoint Paul Worden to the Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer role.
- 5.3 Paul is currently the Council's Chief Financial Services Officer. Paul is a highly experienced and respected finance professional with over three decades of local government service, including leadership experience within Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

- 5.4 As a qualified CIPFA accountant and the Council's current Deputy S151 Officer. Paul brings deep institutional knowledge, financial acumen, and a proven ability to lead teams across all aspects of local authority finance.
- 5.5 Paul has successfully overseen budget setting, Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) planning, capital and treasury management, audit and final accounts, and has played a key role in supporting corporate initiatives including risk management and major contract delivery. He also brings relevant experience of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) from another Council.
- 5.6 Paul offers stability, continuity, and credibility as an internal candidate. Paul demonstrated a thoughtful and measured leadership style, with a strong commitment to professional standards, team development, and public service values.
- 5.7 Paul is well-prepared to step into the statutory role of Section 151 Officer and offers a high-trust appointment that would ensure the Council maintains its excellent financial reputation while continuing to adapt to future challenges.

6 Other Options

- 6.1 There are no other options to present.

7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 7.1 As detailed in the report to Council on 13 May 2025.

8 Risk Assessment

- 8.1 As detailed in the report to Council on 13 May 2025.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 As detailed in the report to Council on 13 May 2025.

10 Consultation and Communications

- 10.1 As detailed in the report to Council on 13 May 2025.

11 Implementation

- 11.1 The Director of Finance and Transformation is retiring on 31 August 2025 with the last working day being 25 July 2025.
- 11.2 If approved by Full Council, the new Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer will be appointed with effect 28 July 2025.

12 Cross Cutting Issues

- 12.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity

12.1.1 Climate change advice has not been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.

12.2 Equalities and Diversity

12.2.1 The Council completed a fair and open external recruitment process, assisted by a specialist independent recruitment agency, to ensure that all potential suitably qualified candidates had the opportunity to be considered for this important role.

12.3 Other If Relevant

- Human Resources
- Procurement
- Business Continuity / Resilience

Background Papers	None
Annexes	None