

Staffing Committee

2 July 2025

Appointment of Executive Director of Modernisation & Customer Delivery For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr N Ireland, Leader, Climate, Performance, Communications and Safeguarding

Local Councillor(s):

Senior Leadership Team:

C Howe, Chief Executive

Report Author:

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Statutory Authority: Local Government Act 1972

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

1. Executive summary

1.1 The Executive Director of Modernisation & Customer Delivery is a key leadership role within the council's Senior Leadership Team, with accountability for digital transformation, customer services, data and technology, libraries, revenues and benefits, and the council's wider modernisation programmes. The directorate encompasses around 550 colleagues.

1.2 Following a comprehensive in-house recruitment campaign, a strong field of candidates has been identified and assessed through a rigorous multi-panel selection process. The Staffing Committee is asked to confirm its preferred candidate for appointment.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Staffing Committee is recommended to:

- Confirm the appointment of the preferred candidate as Executive Director of Modernisation & Customer Delivery.
- Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to finalise terms and conditions of employment.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

3.1 The post has been filled through a robust, transparent, and inclusive recruitment process. The multi-panel assessment approach, involving internal stakeholders, council employees, and the Staffing Committee, provides a well-rounded basis for the appointment decision.

4. The report

4.1 The following sections set out the detail of the recruitment campaign and the selection process undertaken to reach this point.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 The option to use an external executive search agency was considered. An in-house campaign was selected on the basis of cost efficiency and the strength of the council's established employer brand.

5.2 Interim arrangements were in place to provide business continuity during the recruitment period.

6. Legal considerations

6.1 The appointment has been conducted in accordance with the Council's Constitution, including the requirements applicable to the appointment of statutory and senior officers.

6.2 As a Chief Officer post, it is subject to the relevant statutory requirements around appointment procedures.

7. Financial implications

7.1 This role is a permanent position and its funding is accounted for within the council's agreed budget. There are no immediate additional costs arising from this appointment.

7.2 A relocation package is available to the appointed candidate, providing financial support of up to £8,000 for HMRC-eligible elements (which are exempt from income tax). The package includes an initial advance of up to £2,500 on commencement, reimbursement of conveyancing fees up to £6,500, and optional financial support towards rent or mortgage costs during the first two years.

7.3 The appointment of an experienced and capable Executive Director is expected to deliver long-term financial benefit through improved leadership of the council's digital and transformation agenda, including more efficient use of technology and the reduction of process-related cost.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

8.1 The Executive Director will play a significant role in driving the digital and operational changes that underpin the council's sustainability commitments. Modernisation of service delivery, including moving more transactions online, reducing physical footprint requirements, and improving data use in planning and infrastructure, directly supports the council's climate action goals. The appointment strengthens the senior capacity to deliver on those commitments.

9. Well-being and health implications

9.1 The Executive Director will contribute to employee well-being through effective leadership of a large, complex directorate. A clear sense of direction, good communication, and a culture that values colleagues are all relevant to staff morale and mental health. The selection process has included values-based assessment to ensure alignment with the council's culture.

10. Other implications

10.1 The appointment will have positive implications for organisational continuity, strategic leadership, and stakeholder confidence. The directorate's portfolio, spanning customer experience, digital infrastructure, and transformation, is central to the council's modernisation ambitions, and stable leadership at this level is critical.

11. Risk implications

11.1 Having considered the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium: Transition periods can create uncertainty for teams and ongoing programmes. Interim management arrangements have been in place to maintain momentum during the recruitment period.

Residual Risk: Low: The appointment of an experienced leader at this level, through a robust process, significantly reduces leadership risk and provides the directorate with the stable direction it needs.

12. Equalities

12.1 The post has been recruited to in accordance with the council's equality and diversity policies. The recruitment process has been designed to be inclusive, and equality considerations have been applied at each stage including sifting, shortlisting, and panel composition. Equality monitoring data from the 172 applications is summarised in the detailed process section below.

12.2 The gender split across applicants was 73% male and 27% female (with 22 applicants not declaring). This is consistent with national market data for senior digital and transformation leadership roles and is not considered unusual for this level.

12.3 Of those declaring an ethnicity, 86% identified as White. 45 applicants preferred not to say or did not answer, so the full picture is uncertain. Underrepresentation of candidates from other ethnic backgrounds is acknowledged.

12.4 14 applicants declared a disability. Disclosed conditions include ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism spectrum conditions, hearing loss, physical impairment,

and long-term health conditions. All candidates were invited to request reasonable adjustments at the point of application.

13. Appendices

13.1 None

14. Background papers

14.1 None

15. Report sign-off

15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director of Assurance & Governance (Monitoring Officer), the Director – Resources (CFO & s151 officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)

16. Appointment Process

Overview of the Recruitment Campaign

A comprehensive in-house recruitment campaign was launched in May 2026, targeting high-calibre candidates through a mix of digital channels, the council's employer brand landing page, targeted social media, and professional networks. The campaign positioned Dorset Council as a place where ambitious digital and transformation leadership can genuinely make a difference.

Key dates in the recruitment timeline were:

Milestone	Date
Applications open	Wednesday 13 May 2026
Applications close	Wednesday 3 June 2026 (closing date)
Longlisting	Thursday 4 - Friday 5 June 2026
Stage 1 technical interviews	18/19 June 2026
Final interview day	Thursday 2 July 2026 – County Hall, Dorchester

Application Volumes and Sifting

The campaign generated strong interest, with 172 applications received in total. All applications were assessed against the essential criteria in the person specification. The sifting outcome was as follows:

Category	Number
Total applications received	172

Ready to progress to shortlisting	29
Borderline - recommended for review	10
Screened and rejected (individualised feedback provided)	80
Incomplete or insufficient for scoring	53
Invited to Stage 1 technical interview	12

Many of the rejected candidates had strong and relevant backgrounds. Given the level of interest in this role, the sifting standard was necessarily high; a number of capable individuals were screened out not because of weakness but because others demonstrated a stronger fit at this stage. All rejected candidates who provided sufficient information to score received personalised, role-specific feedback.

Geographic Reach

Region	Applications	%
Dorset-based (0–25 miles)	57	35%
South / South West England (26–100 miles)	59	36%
Midlands, North, East England (101 miles+)	47	29%

The breadth of geographic reach and the seniority of applicants' current roles reflects well on the campaign. Just over a third of applicants are within commutable distance of Dorchester.

Equality Monitoring

Category	number	%
Male	110	73%
Female	40	27%
Prefer not to say / not declared	22	—

The gender split is heavily male-weighted at 73/27. This is consistent with national market data for senior digital and transformation leadership roles.

Ethnicity: Of those who declared an ethnicity, 86% identified as White. 45 applicants either preferred not to say or did not answer, so the full picture is uncertain. Underrepresentation of candidates from other ethnic backgrounds is worth acknowledging.

Disability: 14 applicants declared a disability. Disclosed conditions include ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism spectrum conditions, hearing loss, physical impairment, and long-term health conditions.

Stage 1: Technical Interviews

12 candidates were invited to Stage 1 technical interviews in the week commencing 15 June. This panel was designed to test digital and transformation credibility in depth, providing an independent expert assessment before the final interview day.

Technical Panel (Stage 1)	
Room	Virtual (Microsoft Teams)
Chair	Jen Lowis, Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement
Panel members	Steve Ford, Assistant Chief Executive Dominic Campbell, Partner, Impossible Ideas (external assessor)
Focus	Assesses depth of digital and transformation expertise, technical credibility, and the candidate's ability to think strategically about digital public service reform. Dominic Campbell brings extensive experience of digital transformation. This stage provides an independent expert view before the final panel day.

Final Interview Day: Interview panels

The selection process involved four panels on the final interview day, each designed to assess different dimensions of the candidate's suitability.

Senior Leadership Team Panel	
Chair	Steve Ford: Assistant Chief Executive
Panel members	Sean Cremer: Director - Resources Julia Ingram: Director of Adult Social Services Paul Dempsey: Executive Director - Children's Services
Focus	Assesses strategic fit and the candidate's ability to function as a genuine peer on the Senior Leadership Team. Panel members are looking for evidence of whole-council thinking, collaborative leadership, and the credibility to work alongside other directors.

Directorate Panel (Internal Stakeholder Panel)	
Panel members	Anthony Palumbo: Head of Customer Experience Katie Hale: Head of Revenues & Benefits James Ailward: Head of ICT Operations Nina Coakley: Head of Transformation and Design
Focus	Assesses credibility with the directorate and the candidate's approach to collaborative leadership. Panel members explore how the candidate handles resistance, brings services with them through change, and earns the confidence of teams without imposing on them. This panel will be facilitated by a

	member of the HR team, who will feedback to the Staffing Committee.
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Employee Panel	
Chair	Rob Dabbs: Head of Business Support
Panel members	Georgina Stephenson: GMB Union Representative Jess Brodrick: Organisational Development Lead Nell Stonham: Delivery Lead - Communities Kim Randall: Apprenticeship & Work Based Learning Consultant James Palfreman: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Officer Paul Bliss: Business Rates and BID's Service Manager
Focus	Panel members score independently before any discussion. The focus is on values alignment, leadership understanding, and whether the candidate can connect with colleagues at all levels. The panel is looking for evidence that the candidate listens, inspires confidence in change, and genuinely reflects the council's values.

Formal Panel (Staffing Committee)	
Chair	Cllr Nick Ireland
Panel members	Cllr Ben Wilson Cllr Hannah Hobbs-Chell Cllr Jill Haynes Cllr Andrew Parry
Advised by	Catherine Howe, Chief Executive Christopher Matthews, Head of HR
Focus	Formal and structured; makes the final appointment recommendation. Assesses political awareness, strategic leadership, accountability, and the candidate's ability to operate effectively at the most senior level within a local authority context.

Outcome of the Process

Following the multi-panel interview and selection process, the Staffing Committee is asked to confirm its preferred candidate for appointment as Executive Director of Modernisation & Customer Delivery and to authorise the Chief Executive to finalise terms.