

Staffing Committee

27 August 2025

Appointment of Corporate Director - Planning For Decision

Cabinet Member:

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

Local Councillor(s): Cllr S Bartlett, Cllr S Flower

Senior Leadership Team:

J Britton - Executive Director, Environment & Economy

Report Author:

Sam McLaren, Recruitment and Marketing Consultant

Email:

sam.mclaren@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority: Local Government Act 1972

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

1. Executive summary

1.1 The Chief Planning Officer (Corporate Director for Planning) is a key leadership role within the Economy and Environment Directorate, with accountability for spatial planning, development management, building control, conservation and heritage services. The Corporate Director is accountable for the management of around 200 employees.

1.2 Following a comprehensive recruitment campaign, a strong field of candidates was identified and assessed through a rigorous multi-stage 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 Corporate Director - Planning
- Delegate authority to the Executive Director, Economy & Environment 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.

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 Chief Planning Officer is expected to deliver long-term value through effective leadership of the council's planning functions, supporting sustainable growth, robust planning decisions, and the efficient delivery of statutory services

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

8.1 The Chief Planning Officer has a significant role in supporting the council's environmental, climate and sustainability ambitions. The role provides strategic leadership for spatial planning, conservation and biodiversity matters, including biodiversity net gain and nutrient neutrality, helping to balance sustainable development with the protection of Dorset's natural and built environment

9. Well-being and health implications

9.1 The Chief Planning Officer will contribute to the well-being of colleagues through effective leadership of a large, complex service. Clear direction, positive organisational culture and strong communication are important factors in supporting employee engagement, well-being and performance. The selection process has included values-based assessment to ensure alignment with the council's culture and leadership expectations.

10. Other implications

10.1 The appointment will have positive implications for organisational stability, strategic leadership and stakeholder confidence. The planning service plays a critical role in shaping Dorset's future growth, housing delivery, economic development and environmental stewardship, making stable leadership at this level essential

11. Risk implications

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

Current Risk: Medium: Vacancy in this post could impact the delivery of key planning priorities, including the Dorset Local Plan, major planning decisions, and wider strategic planning responsibilities. Interim management arrangements have been in place during the recruitment process.

Residual Risk: Low: Appointment of an experienced Chief Planning Officer through a robust recruitment process will provide stable leadership, maintain service performance and support delivery of the council's planning and place-shaping priorities.

12. Equalities

12.1 The post has been recruited to in accordance with the council's equality, diversity and inclusion policies. The recruitment process was designed to be inclusive, with equality considerations applied throughout the selection process, including shortlisting and assessment arrangements. Equality monitoring data was collected separately from the recruitment decision-making process and covers both complete and incomplete applications, it is summarised below.

12.2 The gender split across applicants was 27 male (66%), nine female (22%), with five applicants (12%) not providing this information. Of those who declared their sex, 75% were male and 25% were female. This broadly reflects the gender profile often seen in senior leadership and specialist planning roles.

12.3 Of those who declared their ethnicity, 94% identified as White. One applicant identified as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and one applicant identified as Asian/Asian British. Nine applicants either preferred not to say or did not provide ethnicity information. The limited diversity within the applicant pool is acknowledged.

12.4 One applicant declared a disability. Four applicants preferred not to say and six did not provide a response. All candidates were given the opportunity to request reasonable adjustments as part of the recruitment process, in line with the council's commitments under the Equality Act 2010.

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 July 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	Monday 6 July 2026
Applications close	Sunday 26 July 2026 (closing date)
Shortlisting	Monday 27 July – Tuesday 11 August 2026
Final interview day	Thursday 27 August 2026 – County Hall, Dorchester

Application Volumes and Sifting

The campaign received 29 applications 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	29
Ready to progress to shortlisting	14
Screened and rejected (individualised feedback provided)	15
Invited to in person interview	5

All rejected candidates who provided sufficient information to score received personalised, role-specific feedback.

Geographic Reach

The applicant field attracted interest from across England, with candidates applying from Dorset, the wider South and South West, and locations further afield. The geographic spread demonstrates the ability of the campaign to attract experienced applicants from both local and national talent pools.

Equality Monitoring inc incomplete

Category	number	%
Male	27	66%
Female	9	22%
Prefer not to say / not declared	5	12%

The gender profile of applicants was 66% male, 22% female, with 12% choosing not to disclose this information. Of those applicants who declared their sex, 75% were male and 25% were female.

Ethnicity: Of those declaring their ethnicity, 94% identified as White. One applicant identified as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and one applicant identified as Asian/Asian British. Nine applicants either preferred not to say or did not provide ethnicity information, meaning the overall diversity profile should be interpreted with caution.

Disability: One applicant declared a disability. Four applicants preferred not to say and six did not provide a response. All candidates were given the opportunity to request reasonable adjustments throughout the recruitment process in line with the council's equality and diversity commitments.

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.

Stakeholder Panel	
Chair	Jan Britton: Executive Director, Economy & Environment
Panel members	Kevin Forshaw - Dorset Innovation Park Phillippa Gatehouse - CG Fry Debbie Smith - Bournemouth and Poole College Selina White - Magna Housing Tim Hoskinson - Wyatt Homes Gemma Clinton – Corp Director
Focus	The External Stakeholder Panel will assess candidates' ability to build productive relationships with partners, communities, developers, statutory consultees and other key stakeholders. The panel will focus on collaborative leadership, communication and influencing skills, customer focus, and the candidate's approach to balancing sustainable growth, housing delivery and environmental stewardship. Particular attention will be given to how candidates would represent Dorset Council externally and lead engagement on major planning and place-shaping priorities.

Formal Panel (Staffing Committee)	
Chair	Cllr Nick Ireland
Panel members	Cllr Shane Bartlett Cllr Spencer Flower
Advised by	Catherine Howe, Chief Executive Emma Harris-Cormack, HR Business Partner
Focus	The Staffing Committee Panel will assess candidates' ability to operate effectively at chief officer level within a complex political environment. The panel will focus on strategic leadership, political awareness, governance, values and behaviours, financial accountability, and the ability to work constructively with councillors to deliver the council's priorities. Members will also explore candidates' experience of leading large-scale change, influencing across organisational boundaries, and providing confident, evidence-based advice to elected members.

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 Corporate Director - Planning and to authorise the Executive Director to finalise terms.