

<b>Report title</b>	<b>Financial Services Resourcing</b>
<b>Report author</b>	Paul French – Corporate Head of Finance
<b>Department</b>	Financial Services
<b>Exempt?</b>	No
<b>Exemption type</b>	not applicable
<b>Reasons for exemption</b>	not applicable

**Purpose of report:**

- **To resolve**

**Synopsis of report:**

**To address the need for additional resources in the accountancy team to cover existing and future work streams.**

**Recommendation(s):**

- i) **The creation of a new Chief Accountant post at grade of SMA/SMB to be financed from virements from existing budgets as set out in the report.**

**1. Context and background of report**

- 1.1 The Financial Services Section is managed by the Corporate Head of Finance (the Council's deputy section151 officer) and is split into two distinct teams – Accountancy and Exchequer Services. Its main function is to exercise the Council's statutory duties in relation to its financial administration and stewardship.
- 1.2 As part of the Council's Voluntary Redundancy Scheme (VR) approved in June 2021, two long standing members of Financial Services were granted VR. Subsequent to that, in March 2022 the Corporate Management Committee received a report on a proposed Financial Services Restructure and approved several changes to the Establishment looking to address the loss of 4 key employees in a short space of time, who took with them a wealth of Runnymede knowledge and experience.
- 1.3 Since that date additional pressures and the recruitment of less experienced staff has started to have an impact on service delivery in the Accountancy team which has led to the Corporate Head of Finance (CHF) undertaking more routine work at the expense of managing the team and focusing on strategy. This is something that now needs to be addressed in order to manage additional pressures and workloads that have been identified over the next two years.

## **2. Report**

- 2.1 During late 2021 and early 2022, the CHF lost two direct reports and two further senior managers within a short period of time, one through VR, one due to relocating and two through early retirement. This led to the team losing a wealth of experience that is proving difficult to replace.
- 2.2 In March 2022 the CHF presented a Restructure report to the Corporate Management Committee to address several issues in the Exchequer Services team and to help with the additional workloads taken on in the preceding few years. This was made possible by deleting the hard to recruit to Chief Accountant post from the Establishment. Overall, these changes were ultimately done at no cost to the Council.
- 2.3 In fact, in the last few years the Financial Services division has created savings through redundancies totalling £124,000 (£85,000 VR, £39,000 compulsory – both in the Exchequer services division), by bringing the insurance function back in-house (saving £20,000 a year) and introducing the Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contribution Pension Scheme that generates an annual saving of £13,000. All of these have been achieved through efficiencies. At the same time, the teams have taken on an additional burden via the council's commercial and partnership working arrangements.
- 2.4 One of the assumptions behind the Restructure in 2022 was that the Council's property Service Charges regime would be externalised to an external provider with service charge expertise, thereby releasing additional resources back into the team. Unfortunately due to resourcing issues within both the Assets and Finance teams, this has not been able to occur and there is now a need to reconcile a lot of complex outstanding charges on our commercial and property assets split over several systems. However, this piece of work is now in hand, and it is hoped that with the additional resource now being requested, all service charge reconciliations can be completed over the next year and passed onto an external provider in thereafter.
- 2.5 Recruitment issues meant that for a majority of 2022, the accountancy team was operating with two to three vacancies for most of the year. One year later, whilst the team are now fully staffed, a lack of local government finance experience, and two team members starting their accountancy journey, means the team are finding it hard to catch up and cope with the ever increasing workloads. This has led to the CHF undertaking more routine day to day work at the expense of his wider strategic role.
- 2.6 Losing the Chief Accountant post to fill gaps elsewhere, removed the Senior Management expertise and capacity from the division, this means that there is now a huge gap between the Senior Accountant level (middle management grade) and the Corporate Head leading to a void of knowledge and experience causing problems for career progression and succession planning.
- 2.7 As well as a lack of experience, additional pressures in the last two years can be summarised as:
  - Increased workload of Assistant CEO (s151) having a knock-on effect on the CHF
  - Addressing the DLUHC/CIPFA requirements (which will become meeting the non-statutory Best Value Notice requirements going forward)
  - Ongoing need to make efficiencies and the Service Review Programme
  - Additional regulatory reporting requirements

- Increased requirement for Member and staff financial training

2.8 Looking forward, the Closing of Accounts process reverts back to a 2 month window (from 4 months), and there will be the requirement to catch up on 4 years of missed external audits and that of the current financial year. The implementation of a new Financial Management System over the next two years, despite the need for a project manager, will also be a huge demand on the team's staffing resources.

#### Proposal

2.8 Officers would like to reintroduce a Chief Accountant post to oversee the Accountancy team and provide additional senior management technical expertise for the Council and to the Accountancy team thus enabling the CHF to focus on more strategic and corporate issues (such as dealing with addressing the non-statutory Best Value Notice) and will immediately address the problem of succession planning and career pathways.

2.9 This will provide the additional capacity to allow the team to get over the immediate problem of the Closing of Accounts, dealing with several external audits at once (from two audit companies) and will free up time to kick start and deliver the Financial Management System (FMS), banking and other time consuming and resource hungry procurement exercises.

2.10 If approved, this will allow the team to focus on the implementation the new FMS system, which will hopefully bring with it several processing and reporting efficiencies to the benefit of staff and members alike. By then, we should also know the future consequences for the Council of the Levelling Up Act, the non-statutory Best Value Notice (BVN), and the Council's future funding position. This will help inform us of our future resourcing requirements, which will then enable us to review our structure to meet our future demands.

### **3 Resource implications/Value for Money**

3.1 The former Chief Accountant post was set at grade SMA/SMB which at mid-point with on-costs comes to approximately £81,000. Whilst we had trouble recruiting to this post 2 years ago, it is hoped that the market will have moved on. Having spoken to the Human Resources team and looked at similar jobs in the local area, this would appear to still be the correct range for the role.

3.2 In order to resource the proposal of a Chief Accountant post a combination of the following budgets will be used:

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| • Accountancy Closing Temporary staffing        | £16,000 |
| • Chief Executives Salary Contingency           | £30,000 |
| • Savings in other staffing budgets (see below) | £35,000 |

3.3 The Corporate Head of Customer, Digital and Collection Services (CHCDCS) has identified vacancies within her staffing budgets that will be utilised for this purpose.

3.4 The proposed Job Description and Person Specification are set out in Appendix A and would mean the Financial Service division structure would be as set out in Appendix B.

#### **4. Human Resources**

- 4.1 This report outlines the requirement for additional business critical skills and capacity within the Accountancy Team. The action taken to date to adequately recruit, develop and resource the team has been achieved through a considered approach to succession and workforce planning – identifying the skills we need currently and in the future. This demonstrates that we are delivering the key priorities within the Council's Organisational Development and Talent Management Strategies.
- 4.2 The national pay benchmarking tool Cendex and completion of local pay benchmarking informs an appropriate grade and remuneration package for the newly requested Chief Accountant position.

#### **5. Legal implications**

- 5.1 Under the provisions of section 112 Local Government Act 1972 a local authority shall appoint such officers as they think necessary for the proper discharge by the authority of such of their or another authority's functions as fall to be discharged by them. An officer appointed by a local authority shall hold office on such reasonable terms and conditions, including conditions as to remuneration, as the authority appointing them think fit.

#### **6. Equality implications**

- 6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report

#### **7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

- 7.1 There are no such implications arising from this report

#### **8. Risk Implications**

- 8.1 The risks associated with this report stem more from the consequences of not getting an additional resource. This includes work to satisfy the non-statutory Best Value Notice, the service review and improvement programme, implementation of a new Financial Management System, completion of the closing of accounts for 2023-24 by the shortened completion timetable and dealing with four years of external audits from two different audit companies.

#### **9. Timetable for Implementation**

- 9.1 Recruitment will begin as soon as approval is given for the post

#### **10. Conclusions**

- 10.1 The Finance restructure undertaken in 2022 removed the Chief Accountant post in order to get more bodies into the team to deal with the increased workloads at that time. With further additional workloads since that decision, the loss of a senior manager under the Corporate Head now needs to be addressed to relieve pressure and provide a more balanced stepping stone for future succession plans.

**11. Background papers**

- Financial Services Restructure Report – Corporate Management Committee  
March 2022

**12. Appendices**

- Chief Accountant Job Description
- Proposed Financial Services Team Structure

# Chief Accountant



## Job Description

### 1. POST DETAILS

Business Centre:	Financial Services
Division:	Accountancy
Post Number:	TBC
Working Hours:	37
Grade:	SMA/SMB
Work Base:	Civic Offices, Addlestone
Prepared/Agreed by:	Paul French/Amanda Fahey
Date:	20/01/24

### 2. ORGANISATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Reports to:	Corporate Head of Finance
Deputising	Corporate Head of Finance
Responsibility:	
Directly Supervises:	2 Posts
Indirectly Supervises:	Responsible for the Accountancy Section (9 posts)

### 3. JOB PURPOSE (What is the job trying to do?)

- Provide a full range of costing, budgeting, and accounting services for the Council and its associated companies.
- Ensure that all aspects of the work of the finance team meets relevant statutory requirements and professional Codes of Practice, particularly those in respect of financial accounting, treasury management and taxation activities.
- Provide financial support and advice to all stakeholders to ensure that the best use is made of available financial resources and that decisions are based on appropriate and accurate consideration of the relevant financial issues.

### 4. OBJECTIVES (What is the purpose of the job?)

- To lead and in the preparation of the annual budget and closing of accounts exercises.

- To lead, encourage, manage and inspire the accountancy team in providing a full range of costing, budgeting, and accounting services
- Overall responsibility for the Council's Capital Programme and capital accounting in general
- Assist in shaping strategies, policies and plans for services which support the vision and long-term direction of the Council

## **5. MAIN DUTIES OF THE POST**

### **Financial Support and Advice**

- Provide a full consultancy service on financial matters, to ensure that decisions are based on appropriate and accurate consideration of the relevant financial issues.
- Directing the Accountancy Section so that they provide a comprehensive financial information service to budget managers and heads of services.
- Prepare reports on relevant finance related topics as directed and where appropriate, providing professional input to all other reports to ensure financial consequences are fully explained.
- Provide proactive and responsive advice and support to managers giving verbal and written advice, in order to assist them in applying and understanding the Council's financial rules and procedures
- Attendance at working parties, project teams and committee meetings (including those outside normal office hours), and providing financial evaluations, costings and advice to enable decisions to be made that assist in the achievement of the aims of these groups.
- Complete claims for grants and reimbursements and complex financial and statistical returns for government departments, professional bodies and other relevant organisations.

### **Budget Formulation and Monitoring**

- Establish an effective plan for the preparation of the annual budget by setting out the timetable and the procedures to be followed by all staff ensuring consistency with the Council's financial strategy.
- Prepare annual budgets for Council services by using information supplied by, and in consultation with, Budget Managers and from allocation working papers and analysing information as appropriate.
- Develop the system for budgetary control to ensure that variances are identified and reported effectively and efficiently, and appropriate action taken where necessary.
- Provide regular and up to date financial statements and management information by presenting information in suitable report formats to enable managers to monitor adherence to their budgets effectively.

### **Closing of Accounts**

- Prepare, develop and monitor the annual Closing of Accounts Programme by establishing procedures to be followed by Accountants and managers and monitoring progress against the programme, to ensure that the detailed accounts are prepared in time.
- Lead in the preparation of high quality Statement of Accounts in accordance with statutory requirements and proper accounting practices to meet the requirements of legislation and to the satisfaction of external auditors.

#### Capital Accounting and Capital Programme

- Prepare and develop the Council's Capital Programme ensuring the correct formal approvals are made and that the programme meets the Council's aims and objectives set out in the Capital Strategy
- Maintaining, controlling and monitoring expenditure on capital projects against the approved capital programme and providing advice on capital expenditure and financing issues to relevant stakeholders to ensure compliance with Financial Regulations, and relevant accounting practices.
- Maintain and operate the Capital Accounting system by undertaking the role of Systems Administrator ensuring all records are up to date.
- Prepare reports on Prudential Indicators for Committee by developing systems that enable the information required to be efficiently and effectively generated and monitored in a way that is consistent with both professional guidelines and the Council's aims and objectives.

#### Management of Staff and Resources

- Take a leading role in improving the quality and efficiency of all the services carried out by the Accountancy Section.
- Provide direction, advice and support to all staff within the Financial Services Division, encouraging initiative, innovation and teamwork to inspire and empower the team to working effectively towards agreed objectives.
- Undertake effective staff management, including performance appraisal and the identification of training and development needs.

#### Other

- To assist in and support the response of the Council in relation to a borough emergency.

#### General

*The above is a record of the main duties and responsibilities of this post at a given date. The job may naturally change to meet the requirements of the service. If the changes are more significant your manager will discuss this with you.*



*The post holder will be required to work outside normal office hours, including attendance at evening meetings*

*The post-holder will undertake continuous professional development to ensure that best practice is delivered within all financial management activities to the benefit of both the post holder and the Council*

## **Person Specification**

Please indicate whether the criteria is assessed against the application form or interview by using a ✓ in the columns to the right.

	<b>Method of Assessment</b>	
	<b>App Form</b>	<b>Interview</b>
<b><u>Essential Qualifications</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Qualified member of a CCAB body with full membership</li> </ul>	✓	
<b><u>Desirable Qualifications</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CIPFA membership</li> <li>Management qualification</li> <li>Training specifically linked to local government accounting e.g. IFRS, capital and treasury</li> </ul>	✓ ✓ ✓	✓
<b><u>Essential Working Experience</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive post-qualification experience in local government in a management position</li> <li>Recent experience of preparing the statutory Statement of Accounts for a local authority</li> <li>Prepared and monitored budgets for local government activities in consultation with service managers</li> <li>Excellent first-hand knowledge of local authority treasury and capital accounting</li> <li>Experience of dealing with and managing change and change management issues in the workplace</li> </ul>	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
<b><u>Desirable Working Experience</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leading teams in the completion of the annual budget and Statement of Accounts exercises</li> <li>Experience in acting as systems administrator for a financial IT system</li> <li>Experience in accounting for Council owned companies</li> <li>Experience of working with a local authority HRA</li> </ul>	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
<b><u>Essential Skills/Attributes</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrate a high degree of numeracy and accuracy</li> <li>Confident with using figures and has the ability to collect, understand and interpret information and explain the meaning of figures in a clear way to non-finance staff and other stakeholders</li> <li>Ability to understand, analyse and interpret complex management and financial data and present it in a format suitable for reporting</li> <li>Able to write concise reports on complex issues that are understandable at all levels of the organisation.</li> <li>Able to review and proof-read documentation effectively to check for completeness and accuracy</li> <li>Support managers in meeting their financial responsibilities</li> </ul>		✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to balance own team and service priorities with the wider strategic needs of the Council</li> <li>• Organise and prioritise workload to meet specific deadlines</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>
<b><u>Desirable Skills/Attributes</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to develop the potential of IT packages</li> <li>• Experience of Project Planning and Project Management</li> <li>• Ability to work accurately and methodically to deadlines.</li> <li>• Able to cope with competing demands and multiple deadlines</li> <li>• Able to resolve difficult or complex issues</li> <li>• Able to organise own workload and work independently</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>
<b><u>Essential Personal Qualities</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to communicate effectively, at all levels of an organisation both verbally and in writing</li> <li>• Leads by setting the highest standard in upholding integrity and ethical behaviour and sets an example for the desired behaviour and performance of staff</li> <li>• Honesty and integrity in handling personal financial information.</li> <li>• Ability to work co-operatively and willingly with others, supporting colleagues and sharing workloads.</li> <li>• Calm under pressure</li> <li>• Coach and motivate team members in such a way that it inspires 'buy-in'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>
<b><u>Desirable Personal Qualities</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confident to probe and query written, or verbal information provided by others</li> <li>• Leads and ensures effective implementation of change</li> <li>• Demonstrates political awareness and effectively manages the interface with Elected Members</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>
<b><u>Other Requirements</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The post holder will be required to work outside normal office hours, including attendance at evening meetings</li> <li>• Willingness to undertake continuous professional development in order to maintain essential qualifications and specialist knowledge to the benefit of the Council and the postholder</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>

FINANCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

February 2024 Proposals

