

Candidate Briefing Pack

Chief Accountant

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Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Welcome to Reading



Thank you for your interest in the role of Chief Accountant at Reading Borough Council. My name is Darren Carter and I joined RBC in March this year as the council's new Director of Finance. I thought it would be good to share with you my thoughts about my first few months at Reading; what I'm looking for in my Chief Accountant; and what I can offer you. You can then decide if this is the right role for you.

The first thing I can tell you is that Reading is an incredibly interesting place to work, with lots going on. If you're looking for a quiet life, then it might be best to look elsewhere. We have lots of ambitious plans to build new leisure centres and affordable housing; transport schemes and redeveloping the Minster Quarter part of our town centre. We are also committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. All of this adds up to a £300m capital programme over the next three years.

There is a huge amount going on and I want the finance team to be at the forefront of making it happen. We currently have some excellent interim staff helping us as we transform the service but I'm keen to make permanent appointments wherever possible and to invest in those people as we develop the team. We've recently recruited 2 excellent candidates to fill our Strategic Business Partner posts and we are working with CIPFA to develop a service-wide training programme to roll out next year.

We are now looking to recruit a highly experienced Local Government accountant to lead on our technical accounting. In common with lots of other Council's we are still working on the audit of our 2019/20 accounts, but we are investing in permanent and interim staff and a new financial system as we look to catch up on this work during 2022. As Chief Accountant you will be a key member of the Finance leadership team, using your excellent technical and leadership skills to lead on our accounting arrangements and delivering the Statement of Accounts.

We can offer you a highly competitive salary and lots of flexibility to work from home for the majority of the time. We can also offer you the chance to be part of something truly exciting as we build an outstanding finance team and bring about real financial transformation across Reading Borough Council.

About Reading

Recently named the second-fastest growing city in the UK, and a regional powerhouse, Reading's forward momentum has been remarkable. Road and rail connections are excellent, with access to the motorway network, Heathrow, central London and the City; and this will only improve when Crossrail arrives in Reading.

Quality of life is high in Reading and it also has a high performing economy. We have the 7th highest employment rate in the UK, our working population is the 6th well-educated, and the average weekly salary is 18% above the national average. We have one of the most diverse populations in the South East outside London with a history of strong and cohesive neighbourhoods. Reading has a rich, but sometimes hidden, history and heritage and a thriving arts and cultural offer.

At the same time Reading is the 4th most unequal UK city. This means certain resident groups are being left behind and not benefiting from our successful economy. There is rising demand for services to support and protect older and vulnerable people and children at risk, which has had a big impact on our budgets at a time when funding is reducing. This means balancing the Council's budget has been difficult and has required the Council to produce and implement robust plans to deliver its Medium-Term Financial Strategy

We're proud that the Council, through our **Team Reading** approach, is driving much of this transformation.

- **T** - works **Together** as one team
- **E** - drives **Efficiency**
- **A** - is **Ambitious**
- **M** - **Makes a difference** to Reading

Reading Borough Council is determined to thrive as an organisation, so that it can lead the way in helping to shape Reading's future. The Council has a long track record of being ambitious for Reading's success, even where there are challenges. The Council is adapting and improving to meet these challenges, against a familiar backdrop of growth in demand for services and reduced government funding set out in our [Corporate Plan](#).

The authority is Labour controlled (30 of 46 elected members). Councillor Jason Brock (Labour) is the Leader of the Council. Peter Sloman has been the Chief Executive since July 2017, following nearly a decade as Chief Executive at Oxford City Council during which time it received the LGA Council of the Year award, Investors in People Gold accreditation and cross council Customer Service Excellence accreditation.

Job Description and Person Specification

Job Title:	Chief Accountant		
Grade:	RSMB	Salary:	£72,799 - £85,296
Reports to:	Assistant Director of Finance		
Accountable to:	Assistant Director of Finance Executive Director of Resources (S151 Officer)	Conditions:	JNC for Chief Officers
Direct Reports:	Technical Lead Financial Systems Manager Exchequer Manager VAT and Tax Accountant	Total Staff & Budget:	24 staff

Main Purpose of the Job:

- Leading the Technical Accounting, Financial Systems and Exchequer Teams.
- Influencing the wider Finance Team to drive improvements, set and subsequently maintain internal technical accounting standards, systems and processes to ensure that the Council can swiftly and accurately report its financial performance, both monthly and annually, to support decision-making, scrutiny and good custodianship of public resources.
- Ensure that the Council's financial systems enable Budget Managers at all levels to effectively control and manage their budgets;
- Leading the Council's Financial Accounting function, driving best practice and ensuring all statutory accounting and reporting requirements, are met and delivered within the required timeframes.
- Advising on and implementing changes to the accounts in line with changing accounting standards and guidelines;
- Ensure that the Council's taxation, banking, income and payment arrangements are robust and compliant with the relevant regulations and best practice guidance;
- Ensuring that all control accounts and reconciliations are routinely performed, up to date and signed off;
- All VAT and other tax matters are fully up to date and accurate. Advising on tax matters as required

Key Responsibilities:

- Improving the Council's financial control framework to ensure that there is a sound system of financial control within the Council;
- Delivering financial systems and information to allow service managers to understand and control their budgets;
- Leading a high performing team to deliver the Council's statutory accounts and reporting requirements;
- Leading the Exchequer Team and ensuring appropriate controls are in place.

Key Tasks:

- Lead on setting and maintaining internal standards for technical accounting procedures and processes, putting in place processes and training to ensure that all accountants and appropriate staff in Directorates adhere to the requirements;
- To lead and coordinate the production of the annual Statement of Accounts in accordance with the CIPFA Accounting Code, the statutory timetable and other relevant guidance ensuring that recommendations are minimised;
- Managing the day to day relationship with the Council's External Auditor in his/her scrutiny of the Council's accounts ensuring that the audit process is as efficient as possible;
- Managing the integrity of the finance system and balance sheet (including provisions and reserves) and control accounts throughout the year to ensure that year-end closedown is completed swiftly and accurately with no material errors;
- Acting on Audit recommendations in a timely way and ensuring that the Finance Team is achieving high standards of Financial Control;
- Ensure the regular production and sign off of all required reconciliations in accordance with the prescribed timetable, including the clearing of suspense accounts;
- Produce draft responses to technical accounting consultations from CIPFA and government departments as required;
- Working with the Financial Systems Team, ensure that the General Ledger system and Chart of Accounts are maintained, in conjunction with interface systems, to deliver accurate and timely reporting from the system;
- Manage the review and improvement of the finance system to ensure it's fit for purpose and meets the needs of the finance team and facilitates self-service by Budget Managers;
- Deliver accurate and timely VAT and tax accounting and reporting and secure relevant advice from the Council's tax advisers as required;

- Leading the annual financial closure of the collection fund;
- Leading the Accounts Payable and Accounts receivable teams, ensuring appropriate controls are in place;
- Creditors are paid within agreed time limits;
- Debts are collected in a timely way and reports produced to ensure overall debt levels are kept under control and older debts escalated appropriately;
- Ensure compliance with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI - DSI);
- To ensure that arrangements are in place and maintained for effective joint planning and working with key stakeholders across all service areas;
- Lead on the Council's financial control framework to ensure that there is a sound system of financial control within the Council, including Standing Orders and Financial Regulations;
- To advise the Assistant Director of Finance, Executive Director of Resources, Lead Councillor and the Council of changes in legislation or guidance from Government in respect of the areas of responsibility, and of the implications for the Council and for Reading services;
- To lead and enable excellent working relationships across the Directorate and Council wide and with both Internal and External Auditors, responding quickly and effectively to recommendations;
- To provide leadership to ensure consistent delivery of agreed Council financial strategy.

Information Common to all Reading Borough Council Job Descriptions

1. All work performed and duties undertaken must be carried out in accordance with relevant Council and Departmental policies and procedures, within legislation, and with regard to the needs of our customers and the diverse community we serve.
2. This document sets out the main dimensions of the job it describes. It does not define all individual tasks, which may be expected to change from time to time to meet operational needs.
3. Job holders will be expected to be flexible in their duties and carry out any other duties commensurate with the grade and falling within the general scope of the job, as requested by management.

Health & Safety/Risk Management

4. Ensure that all aspects of the Council's Health & Safety Policies and Procedures are adhered to.
5. Be responsible for identifying and managing all risks associated with the job role through effective application of internal controls and risk assessments to support the achievement of corporate and service objectives.

Contacts and Relationships

At this level the post holder will have significant contact with and senior officers of the Council and other clients along with Elected Members as required. As one of the lead officers for this area, the post holder may have contact with the public through engagement led by the Council as well as planned and unplanned communication with local media.

Other Role Information

This is a politically-restricted post, and the post holder cannot be elected as a councillor in any local authority.

Person Specification

Qualifications

1. Relevant professional CCAB Accountancy qualification
2. Evidence of continuous professional development

Experience

1. Significant experience of leading a Technical Financial Service within local government and advising at Committee/Cabinet level.
2. Proven experience of developing and delivering strategies that support organisational ambitions and priorities.
3. Experience in the formulation of policy, analysis, advice and implementation in a climate of legislative and organisational change, enabling managers to manage within fair, straightforward and efficient processes.
4. Demonstrable experience of engagement with high profile stakeholders in a political environment.
5. A successful track record of working with partners to negotiate, agree and influence outcomes to help further corporate objectives.
6. Significant experience as an efficient and effective people manager, leading, motivating, managing and developing individuals and teams to achieve desired outcomes.
7. Experience of leading and implementing change including managing cultural change
8. Experience of successfully managing budgets of a comparable scope and scale.
9. A successful record of delivering high quality professional and customer oriented services.

Knowledge

1. Excellent understanding of the relevant law and legislation.
2. Up to date and relevant knowledge of Local Government Finance best practice.
3. Knowledge and understanding of large and complex public service organisations.
4. Awareness and understanding of local government operations and how Council services interface with key public service partners e.g. police, health.

Skills and Abilities

1. A strong team player, able to develop shared approaches with colleagues across the Council and enable joined-up planning and shared values and objectives.
2. An enabler, with the ability to manage a wide range of complex issues and agendas at the same time and drive change through influence and diplomacy.
3. Tenacity and resilience, for example challenging existing ways of doing things and raising performance and standards.
4. The ability to lead, develop and motivate staff and teams to effect change and deliver improvement and achieve desired outcomes.
5. Excellent judgement and analysis with the ability to broker solutions to complex problems.
6. Political awareness with an ability to gain the confidence of Members, senior managers, partner organisations, colleagues and employees.
7. Creativity and imagination in seeing new approaches, painting the vision, overcoming obstacles and showing that ambitious goals can be achieved.
8. Ability to provide timely, accurate and correct written and verbal advice for Members, Corporate Management Team and Officers
9. Commercial awareness and approach, recognising the importance of value for money in all Council activity.
10. Ability to work collaboratively with stakeholders, obtaining the trust of a wide range of individuals and organisations.
11. Commitment to and understanding of equalities issues in service delivery and employment, with a commitment to corporate policies including the Equal Opportunities Policy and to ensuring that the service is compliant.
12. Excellent communication and negotiating skills with the ability to present complex issues in a simple and easy to understand way for internal and external audiences.
13. Ability to manage conflicting demands to tight timescales.
14. Ability to work flexibly, including attending evening meetings.

Our offer to you

- Up to 32 days annual leave
- Access to the Local Government Pension Scheme
- Access to our Ofsted Outstanding workplace nursery - Kennet Day Nursery
- A modern working environment and supportive practices
- Relocation and accommodation policies and schemes
- Season ticket loans and discounted travel with Reading Buses
- Salary sacrifice schemes for bicycle purchase, car leasing, child care vouchers, Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVCs) and for Kennet Day Nursery fees.

Pension

You will have access to the Local Government Pension Scheme which will provide you with an income in retirement, payable for life and may give your loved ones financial security in the event of your death or ill health. Our scheme is known as a Defined Benefit pension scheme. The benefits you build up are based on a Career Average Revalued Earnings (CARE) basis. It is a very secure scheme because the benefits are set out in law. This means that your pension earned each year is based on your actual pensionable pay received in each scheme year (1 April to 31 March) and not on the contributions you pay.

You will be admitted to the Scheme automatically from your first day of employment. You pay in a percentage of your salary and we will also pay a percentage depending on your salary level. You can also opt to pay in Additional Voluntary Contributions to improve your pension. You will get death in service benefit to the value of three times your salary and have access to a Credit Union.

Working hours

Your normal working week will incorporate Monday to Friday working and your hours of work are flexible according to the reasonable requirements of the organisation (not fewer than 37 hours per week on average). This will include attendance at evening meetings as required.

However, you will be expected to be in attendance whenever and for as long as may be reasonably required for the successful performance of the job. Accordingly, no regular working arrangements are specified. Overtime is not payable.

Annual leave

We offer a generous holiday entitlement - 30 days a year (plus bank holidays), rising to 32 after 10 years' service with Reading Borough Council. We also offer the opportunity to buy annual leave should you wish to.

We provide a range of family friendly provisions including maternity, paternity, and parental and adoption leave. We also recognise that at times you may have caring responsibilities for other dependants and provide other leave in addition to career breaks.

A modern working environment and supportive practices

Our Civic Offices are in the heart of Reading. Wherever possible we offer a flexible work style. We are committed to providing a wide range of positive working patterns such as 9-day fortnight and part time, flexitime and home working etc. Employees in most areas and at all levels may be considered for flexible work style regardless of personal circumstances, seniority, current working pattern, employment status (permanent/fixed term), although the ability to work flexibly will depend very much on the job you do and the service area.

Pool cars

We have a number of pool cars available for use by staff that need to make regular visits or attend appointments outside of the office.

Trains, buses and bicycles

We are located in the centre of Reading just outside the Oracle shopping centre and within easy reach of the main Reading Train Station (10 mins walk). Buses to Reading town centre are plentiful and there are bicycle racks right outside the front door.

We have a bike scheme where you can buy or hire a new bike via a salary sacrifice scheme and we offer staff season ticket loans and discounted travel with Reading Buses.

Relocation assistance

We have several relocation schemes which offer assistance for those looking to relocate to Reading. Support of up to £8,000 is available to staff relocating from at least 50 miles away and who are moving to within 25 miles of their work base location.

Childcare

Kennet Day Nursery is Reading Borough Council's workplace day nursery situated in the Civic Offices in Reading town centre. The nursery is easily accessible by car, train or bus.

Rated Outstanding by Ofsted, Kennet offers high quality day care for children aged 3 months to 5 years. The nursery is open to children who have a parent or guardian who works for Reading Borough Council and is also open to other public sector workers. However, RBC staff have priority access and discounted rates.

The nursery is open from 8am - 6pm and offers full and part time sessions with a minimum of 3 sessions per week.

For more information please contact Ita McGullion, Nursery Manager on: 0118 9372509 or email kennetdaynursery@reading.gov.uk

Health and wellbeing

Our Employee Assistance Programme offers advice on issues such as consumer and statutory rights, state benefits, landlord and tenant problems, dealing with noisy neighbours or tackling debt. The programme is available to all staff and provides telephone access to a range of advice, information and personal support including counselling and dealing with stress, relationship problems, bereavement or improving your assertiveness skills.

We have a health and wellbeing programme and take an active part in the Healthy Workplace Challenge and we have ample cycle facilities including lockers, showers and drying facilities at the Civic Offices.

When it comes to the social side of things, we have lots going on; our Staff Club runs a range of events like pub quizzes and theatre trips and we have lots of discounts available to staff for local sports, leisure and retail activities.

Probation

Your appointment is subject to a probationary period, during which time you will be expected to meet required objectives and organisational and to demonstrate leadership and a commitment to your role which will set an example to your peers.

Place of work

Reading Borough Council, Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading, RG1 2LU.