



Discussing the leadership challenges for Chairs of public bodies

The “Leadership Challenges for Chairs of Public Bodies” event followed a slightly different format to other PCF events as it was member-led and structured around challenges highlighted by the PCF network of Chairs. Chris Banks CBE, Chair of the Public Chairs’ Forum, opened the session by summarising the feedback from the PCF network into three overarching themes: efficiency and austerity, preparing for the general election and public appointments. Three PCF members shared their experiences, Iain Ferguson CBE (Chair of Wilton Park and lead NED for DEFRA), Jenny Watson (Chair of the Electoral Commission) and Max Caller (Chair of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England).

The subject of continuing efficiency and austerity was covered by Iain Ferguson, following his experience as the lead NED for DEFRA. Ian highlighted the difficulty associated with cuts to a department that is made up of a complex network of almost 40 ALBs. Based on DEFRA’s efficiency reforms to date, they have compiled a more definitive approach to reform by collating a structured overview of inputs, outputs, their associated financial costs and the degree to which each is aligned with DEFRA’s priorities. This approach hopes to improve clarity and allow more effective reform decisions to be made in the future.

Max Caller presented on the subject of public appointments, following his experiences as the Chair of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBC). As Chair of the Commission, Mr Caller expressed his concerns over the extensive time associated with the reappointment process, particularly for short term employees. Mr Caller suggested that effective appointments should always start with a very clear understanding of the requirements of the position to ensure the best candidate is selected.

During the Q and A session that followed, Chairs’ warned against spreading resources too thinly and reducing the quality of the services that they provide to the public. Some ALBs suggested generating their own income to cope with further funding cuts. Chairs’ also highlighted the continuing drive for efficiency and a reinforcement of the digital agenda that is likely to continue into the next parliament.