

Case Study

Creating a succession plan

How the chair of the Port of Tyne (PoT) creates an annual succession plan to support efforts to recruit diversely to the board

The PoT is the statutory harbour authority responsible for ensuring the safe navigation and use of the River Tyne. Despite classifying as a commercial body, appointments to the PoT board are made by the Department for Transport's (DfT's) Secretary of State.

On an annual basis, the PoT chair, Lucy Armstrong, prepares a succession plan to be shared with the department, setting out the strategic direction of the board.

The opportunity

Succession planning enables the chair to support a spread of tenure, skill sets and life experiences on the board to ensure the organisation is able to deliver on its strategic objectives.

Tyne 2050 lays out the PoT's strategic ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030 and a test bed for green innovation by 2050. As such, during the recruitment for a new NED in early 2022, the organisation was keen to appoint a board member with knowledge and experience of the energy sector.

The action

To prepare the annual succession plan, the PoT chair begins with completing a skills audit and creating a skills matrix. Alongside this, the deputy chair circulates a questionnaire to board members, requesting input on their experience on the board and ideas for its future direction.

Working with the company secretary, the PoT chair drafts a long-term succession plan for both executive and non-executive positions. The plan is closely aligned with the organisation's business plan and outlines long-term strategic challenges faced by the port.

This document is then shared with the DfT sponsorship team, informing them of the skills gaps on the board. The 2022 plan outlined the chair's ambition to acquire two non-executive directors (NEDs) with specific knowledge of the energy sectors.

The outcome

Early in 2022, the PoT announced the appointment of two new NEDs: one with significant experience in the energy sector, the other coming from a global tier one manufacturer with both public and private sector expertise.

The PoT board currently hosts a large spread of tenure, with two NEDs serving under a year, two around 18 months, two for four years, and two for nearly six years.



Succession planning has enabled the chair to offer development opportunities to less experienced NEDs and mitigate the risk of losing organisational memory.

Watchpoints

Chairs are advised to be mindful of the time taken to recruit new NEDs and begin succession planning typically around 18 months before a vacancy requires filling.

Chairs can benefit from requesting input from board members on the strategic direction of the board and sharing plans openly with sponsoring departments.

Find out more

Diversity in Public Appointments (DiPA) was a research project conducted during 2022 – 2023, involving contributors from across public service, including members of the House of Lords, senior civil servants, public body chairs, and diversity experts.

The research generated insight, guidance and case studies, for public body chairs to shape an inclusive recruitment process is freely available online PCF | (publicchairsforum.org.uk).

To share your experiences or contribute a case study please contact secretariat@publicchairsforum.org.uk.