

Case Study

Promoting boardroom inclusivity

How a public body supported a diverse non-executive director (NED) facing pressure from external groups

The opportunity

Following the recruitment of a NED from an ethnic minority background to a public body board, members began to observe over the course of a few meetings that the individual was not participating in boardroom discussions as they had done previously.

Members were keen to understand what was prohibiting the NED's ability to communicate their ideas as fully as they had done before.

It became apparent that the NED was facing pressure from external groups to act as their voice and try to influence outcomes on the board.

The action

Members first tried to create a safe environment for the NED to share their challenge, seeking permission from the individual to bring the matter to the attention of the chair and CEO.

The chair demonstrated their support for the NED by listening and providing reassurance of their independence.

The head of governance revised the organisation's on-boarding and reporting processes to take account of the individual's experience.

The outcome

The work undertaken on this matter created an awareness that individuals on boards may at points come under pressure from external groups to be their voice.

The public body established a clear process for individuals to share any pressures with the chair and CEO confidentially. Furthermore, the induction process for new board members was enhanced to highlight the support that was available for individual NEDs.

This provided board members with more confidence to share their lived experiences in boardroom discussions.



Watchpoints

As public body boards become increasingly diverse, greater awareness is needed of the risk that individual board members are viewed as a representative of a diverse community and can be exposed to pressure to deliver a singular view that may not reflect their personal views.

Chairs are encouraged take steps to ensure that members know the steps to report an issue to the CEO or chair confidentially.

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.