

Foreword

The Public Chairs' Forum (PCF) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) are pleased to be working together on this guide, aimed at supporting all chairs and board members of public bodies in England in their roles. Through this guide, we hope to provide you with much of the information that you will need to understand your role as a chair or board member of a public body, in turn helping to make your time with the board as fulfilling and effective as possible.

The wide range of public bodies and the differences in their structures and functions means that it is impossible to provide exhaustive advice and guidance for all public bodies. Rather, this guide offers an extensive overview of what good governance looks like in public bodies, which can be supplemented by specific advice from your public body according to your organisation's remit and structure.

We start this guide with an introduction to good corporate governance, which draws on existing principles and guidance to offer an overview of current requirements. As a chair or board member, good corporate governance will be an integral part of your role and all your responsibilities should be carried out in accordance with this. All chairs and board members must carry out their responsibilities in line with standards of behaviour in public life. Section 1 overviews these standards and applies them specifically to the work of the board.

Much of the information in this guide will apply to both chairs and board members, but it is important to recognise the differences in these roles too. As such, section 2 considers responsibilities and relationships according to the role that you perform.

'How to be a great chair in the public sector' (section 2.2) builds on collective experience and views canvassed at a recent PCF seminar and highlights some of the key attributes necessary to be an effective chair. 'Effective board members – the components for success' (section 2.3) considers the particular skills required to be a successful board member.

The nature of public bodies means that they are often subject to reorganisation and change, with an expectation to maintain effective delivery of public services throughout. 'The role of the chair and the board during transitions' (section 2.11) overviews some of the key findings from the recent PCF/Institute for Government practical guide to managing transitions, drawing on lessons learned from previous transitions to help prevent reinventing the wheel in the future.

The Government has outlined its commitment to improve the transparency and accountability of all public services. Section 3 considers what this means for public bodies, particularly in the context of financial management. The PCF and the Institute for Government have recently developed a guide for best practice transparency in arm's-length bodies. We provide an overview of this guide, with a particular focus on its implications for public body boards.

With increased transparency comes increased accountability. This section also considers the many different decisions and actions that chairs and their boards are accountable for,

together with the multiple accountabilities that they are subject to, before offering advice and guidance for dealing with these responsibilities. This is followed by advice on financial management in public bodies.

We are very aware that many people will not have the time to read this guide cover to cover. In acknowledgement of this, we have produced an executive summary, which pulls out the key points from the guide and offers signposts to further information on specific areas of interest within the guide.

Details on the publications and other sources of information on key areas signposted throughout the guide can be found in annex 1.

Whether you are a new chair or board member, or an experienced non-executive, we hope that you find this guide to be an invaluable resource to use throughout your time on a board. The guide is very much a 'live' document, which we will update over time in line with current requirements for chairs and board members.



Steve Freer
Chief Executive of CIPFA



Chris Banks CBE
Chair of the Public Chairs' Forum