

Making Connections, Shaping Debates: The Unique Role of the Public Chairs' Forum



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Executive Summary

The Public Chairs' Forum (PCF) was established in 2003 as a partnership with Leeds Business School.

The activities of the PCF were reviewed in 2008, and following this a Management Committee was established with Chris Banks CBE as the Chair.

The PCF's activities are seen by members to serve a range of highly useful functions, such as creating a network of chairs, producing publications and holding regular seminars.

The position of the PCF at the intersection of government and public bodies is seen by chairs to be exceedingly valuable as it provides them with insights into the overarching strategy of government.

Since 2010, the work of the PCF has become closely involved with the Coalition Government's major public bodies reform programme, a large scale attempt to reduce the number of public bodies and increase the accountability and efficiency of those that remain.

The PCF has developed a strong working relationship with Government, and in particular the Public Bodies Team of the Cabinet Office.

Opening up dialogue with government means that the PCF can position the voice of chairs as a collaborative group; however, it is not the case that the PCF seeks to represent all chairs under one singular message.

Also key to the PCF's approach is that the dialogue with Government is 'live' – the PCF invites the Cabinet Office, departments and Chief Executives to sit around the table and engage in the discussion.

While the PCF has a close relationship with the Cabinet Office, it is also clear that chairs really value the independence of the PCF.

At the same time, the Cabinet Office values the relationship with the PCF because it enables them to discuss key issues with chairs in a more direct way, and the views of chairs are very important and useful for the Cabinet Office as they implement reform.

The existence of strong individual, inter-personal relationships between senior figures from within Government and at the PCF has proved particularly important for the working relationship between Government and the PCF.

The PCF as an organisation is significantly better placed to react to future reform agendas due to its links with government, and it could be expected that future reform scenarios would be developed with far greater involvement from PCF.

Yet the PCF finds itself at a crossroads in terms of how it balances its new role influencing government with its networking activities that are highly valued by chairs, and with its research activities.

As of April 2014, the PCF has begun a new formalised relationship with the Association of Chief Executives (ACE). This is a potentially very fruitful relationship, adding valuable new voices to the PCF's discussions both internally and with government. However, a key challenge will be balancing this new relationship with activities aimed at the distinct needs and expectations of chairs and chief executives.

The membership of the PCF is growing and this will be positive in terms of the diversity of voices; however, there is under-representation in some areas including health.

The success of the PCF in working with chairs and with Government suggests that the PCF could be a useful model to be used more widely by Government as a way of relating positively to its reformed delivery network.

With the 2015 election on the horizon, the PCF will be looking forwards to how the public bodies agenda may take shape in the future. Members clearly value the positioning of the PCF at the intersection between government and public bodies, and the PCF will be well placed to make use of this positioning to support chairs in planning for the future.



1. Introduction

The Public Chairs' Forum (PCF) was created in 2003, as the first membership organisation solely for chairs of public bodies. In 2010, it developed a more formal footing through the creation of a Management Committee, the appointment of a Manager, and by forming a partnership with the Institute for Government. This formalisation coincided with the Coalition Government's Public Bodies Reform Programme (2010) and since then the PCF's work has primarily focused on the reform agenda.

The purpose of this report is to reflect on the work of the PCF, with a particular focus on the role of the organisation in the Public Bodies Reform Programme. By documenting the evolving role of the PCF, together with the reflections of members and stakeholders on its work, the report provides a comprehensive assessment of the organisation and its future prospects.

1.1 Research Design

The report is informed by a detailed analysis of documents pertaining to the PCF, together with interviews with the Chair and Manager of the PCF, a sample consisting of ten public body chairs who are also members of the PCF and key stakeholders. Participants in the research were asked to reflect on the work of the PCF, its role in the public bodies reform agenda, and its relationships with government and other stakeholders. This data was then contextualised within wider research undertaken into the Coalition Government's public bodies reform programme, drawing on over one hundred interviews with chairs of public bodies and civil servants together with the analysis of salient documents and attendance at numerous meetings including several PCF seminars and the PCF conference in November 2012.

1.2 Overview of the Report

The report begins with an overview of the PCF, including its history, role and aims, structure and relationships, membership, and activities since 2010. Next, it considers the role of the PCF in the public bodies reform agenda, reflecting particularly on how the PCF worked with chairs, Government and other stakeholders. Finally, the report details future challenges and directions for the PCF, based on an analysis of its evolving role, member reflections on its activities, and projections about its potential role in future reform scenarios.

2. The Public Chairs' Forum

This section provides some background detail on the PCF, reflecting on its history, role, aims and structure; as well as detailing its key relationships, membership and activities.

2.1 History of the PCF

The PCF was established in 2003 as a partnership with Leeds Business School. It was initially endorsed by the Government of the time as a valuable network, and held meetings approximately four times a year hosted by various public bodies.

The activities of the PCF were reviewed in 2008 with a view to expanding the organisation, and following this a Management Committee was established with Chris Banks CBE as the Chair. In April 2010, a partnership was formed with the Institute for Government which led to the creation of a PCF office within the Institute for Government premises in London, and the appointment of a full time PCF manager who is responsible for the delivery of PCF objectives (Public Chairs' Forum, 2014a).

2.2 Role and Aims of the PCF

The core mission of the PCF is to 'enable chairs of public bodies to work together to improve the efficiency and effectiveness with which public services are delivered', through 'a network where all chairs of public bodies work together and engage with government through... events, seminars and research projects to effect positive change in their organisations and beyond'. The organisation aims to be member-led, impartial, supportive, independent and trusted (PCF, 2014b).

The clearest expression of the objectives of the PCF can be found in its governing rules. These state that:

The objects of the PCF are to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of public services in the UK, inter alia by:

Providing peer and expert support to the chairs of Public Sector Organisations, via an annual programme of meetings and seminars, on subjects of common interest, often with input from a senior external speakers; and

Drawing on the expertise and varied perspectives of Members (and where appropriate commissioning research and short papers) to provide information, advice and guidance to Government on the role of arm's length bodies in the delivery and reform of public services. (PCF, 2012, 1)

2.3 Structure and Relationships

We weren't sure how the relationship would evolve when PCF moved into our building in 2010. But it has proved a genuinely mutually beneficial relationship since it was established in 2010 – giving us a direct link to chairs' thinking and allowing the PCF to share our understanding of what is going on in government. (Institute for Government Programme Director)

The PCF is led by a Management Committee, which comprises six PCF members. The current membership of the Management Committee is provided in Box 1. 2-4 trustees are also appointed by the Management Committee to deal with the organisation's property and assets. Trustees are appointed for a term of three years – and can be reappointed (PCF, 2012, 1-5).

Box 1: Current Management Committee Membership

Chris Banks CBE (Chair)

Dame Julie Mellor
(Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman)

Rob Douglas CBE
(Space Agency)

Dame Yve Buckland
(Consumer Council for Water)

Richard Foster CBE
(Criminal Cases Review Commission)

Dr Jane Martin
(Local Government Ombudsman)

In April 2010, the PCF formed a partnership with the Institute for Government (IfG), with the aim of working together to 'help improve effectiveness and bring about better value for money from public bodies' (PCF, 2010). The collaboration with IfG aimed to strengthen the strategic capacity of the PCF to make contributions to achieving key policy objectives for public bodies, to engage chairs in IfG work programmes, and to enable the PCF and IfG to contribute to policy debates and provide practical proposals for chairs to improve

¹ There are numerous different types of public bodies in the UK, including non-departmental public bodies (the most prevalent), executive agencies and public corporations. The PCF is open to all chairs of any public body which exists at arm's length to government, and does not distinguish between these types in its membership criteria.

the efficiency and effectiveness of their organisations. Coinciding with the announcement of the Coalition Government's Public Bodies Reform Programme, this collaboration represented an opportunity for the PCF and IfG to contribute to that programme and to align their work to fit with the changing policy environment. Furthermore, through the close relationship with the PCF, IfG is able to use direct insights of chairs to develop recommendations and it very much values the direct access to chairs' views. PCF is also able to use IfG's wider connections into government to spot emerging issues, for example on civil service reform or future trends in public spending.

2.4 Overview of Membership

Membership of the PCF is open to all chairs of public bodies, and includes invitations to attend a variety of seminars and events each year, access to networking opportunities with other chairs and Government actors, support from the PCF Manager, and opportunities to benefit from research projects undertaken by the PCF (see section 2.5 for further details).

Currently, the PCF has 42 members, comprised of 12 women and 30 men. Table 1 provides a summary of the cumulative membership of the PCF since 2009, totalling 55 members. The table shows that PCF members are predominantly chairs of Executive NDPBs, as would be expected based on the ratio of public body types in the UK. The table also shows that there is a good spread of membership across Government departments, with the highest number of members in those departments with the most substantial number of public bodies under their remit.

2.5 Overview of PCF Activities

The PCF has produced nine research reports since 2010 (see Appendix 2 for a full list of

Table 1:
Cumulative Membership of the Public Chairs' Forum, 2009-2014

By public body type		By departmental affiliation	
Executive NDPB	25	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills	6
Executive Agency	5	Department for Culture, Media and Sport	4
Advisory NDPB	4	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	4
Independent Monitoring Board	4	Ministry of Justice	4
Non-Ministerial Department	4	Department for Education	3
Public Corporation	2	Department for Work and Pensions	3
Independent Statutory Body	2	Department for Communities and Local Government	2
Parliamentary Body	1	Department of Health	2
Other	1	Ministry of Defence	2
Unknown	7	Cabinet Office	1
Total	55	Department for International Development	1
		Department for Transport	1
		Department of Energy and Climate Change	1
		Export Credits Guarantee Department	1
		Foreign and Commonwealth Office	1
		Home Office	1
		Department for Children, Schools and Families*	1
		Office of the Third Sector**	1
		No department	8
		Unknown	3
		Total	55

* Was replaced by Department for Education in 2010.

** Was replaced by Office for Civil Society in 2010.

research reports). Research topics have included alternative models of service delivery, managing relationships, board governance and efficiency. The reports represent a clear benefit of the collaboration with IfG, which has meant that PCF has been able to dedicate resources to producing research, in

collaboration with both its members and IfG, to make key contributions into public body policy debates. The most evident contribution is the It Takes Two report (IfG, 2012), a publication which provided both recommendations to Government and an online 'relationship web' tool to enable chairs and departmental

Table 2: Activities of the PCF by Type

	Issue seminar*	Workshop seminar	Government discussion	Research roundtable	Launch event	Total
2010-2014	16	9	7	2	3	37
2005-2010	11	4	0	1	0	16

* 'Issue seminar' refers to those seminars focusing on specific issues affecting public bodies rather than 'workshop' seminars aimed at increasing the skills of chairs (the next column).

sponsors to assess the quality of their relationships.

Between 2005 and 2014, the PCF organised 53 events. 37 of these have been organised in the period from 2010 when the PCF began its collaboration with the IfG, which demonstrates a significant intensification of activity. It also represents a diversification of activities (see Table 2).

In the period 2005-2010, the activities of the PCF were primarily focused on seminars covering key issues of concern to chairs, such as accountability, efficiency and public sector reform; and on seminars focused on skills for public chairs, such as managing political pressure and succession planning. The only other event was a discussion focused on the future role of the PCF.

Since 2010, however, the picture has changed somewhat. The seminars described above have continued, covering issues such as public bodies reform, board diversity, complaints handling and surviving legislative scrutiny. Yet the PCF has also included seven events where the primary aim is to hold discussions with Government. For example, in December 2013 the PCF organised a discussion session on best practice in public bodies reform with the Cabinet Office and the Association of Chief Executives (ACE) and in May 2013 organised a seminar with Nick Hurd MP, Minister for Civil Society to discuss the alternative models of service

delivery agenda, a key part of the Cabinet Office's reform agenda. The PCF has also held roundtables in which chairs were able to contribute their insights to support the production of research reports produced by the PCF, and has held three launch events, signifying the growing number and profile of its publications.

2.6 Member Reflections on the Role of the PCF

I think the PCF first for me provides a really strong network that can share and learn from each other, people in similar roles operating Chatham House style. Secondly it provides access to people who are involved in government change and government policy so we meet key civil servants and Ministers. And thirdly, through its research programme ... it helps position organisations, as well as helping us understand what others are doing (Interview with PCF Member and Chair of NDPB)

The PCF's activities are seen by members to serve a number of highly useful functions. The most commonly mentioned benefit of the PCF is that it provides a network of individuals with common experiences and challenges, thus counteracting the isolation many chairs feel. In addition, it provides a vital sound board on which chairs can test new ideas and check strategies, a function no other forum provides.

The range of reports, publications and newsletters produced by the PCF is regarded as particularly valuable for chairs who cannot always spare the time to attend meetings. Many chairs utilise these reports within their public bodies, helping to spread best practice to other board members and executives in their organisations. However some chairs thought that these reports could be more in-depth and have more seminar sessions devoted to them, for example a series rather than a one-off event.

The position of the PCF at the intersection of government and public bodies is seen by chairs to be exceedingly valuable as it provides them with insight into the overarching strategy of government and as such helps chairs make sense of departmental requests. In addition it helps facilitate bodies' own relationships with government by providing opportunities to meet ministers and officials that can be followed up in private.

Overall the PCF is seen to be highly effective, especially for an organisation of its size and resource. The provision of networks, government access and research were seen to be of real use to chairs from across the public bodies landscape, as was the support of the PCF Manager.

3. The PCF and Public Bodies Reform

Since 2010, the work of the PCF has become more closely involved with the Coalition Government's major public bodies reform programme, a large scale attempt to reduce the number of public bodies and to increase the accountability and efficiency of those that remain. This section examines the work of the PCF in relation to the public bodies reform programme, to gain greater insight into the changes to its role that were detailed in the preceding section.

3.1 Public Bodies Reform Programme

Ahead of the 2010 general election, all of the major political parties had committed to some kind of reform programme. It came as little surprise, therefore, that shortly after the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government formed, a review of over 900 public bodies was announced. The review focused particularly on non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), but also included a small number of public corporations and non-ministerial departments. The results of the review were announced in October 2010, with decisions on whether to retain, retain and reform, abolish or merge each of the bodies. The Public Bodies Act, which received Royal Assent in December 2011, accompanied these plans for reform and provided enabling powers by which the vast majority of reforms to bodies were pursued. Other reforms were enacted through alternative statutory vehicles such as the Education Bill or Localism Bill, whilst some bodies could be reformed without legislation. The Government intends to reduce, through abolition or merger, the number of public bodies by 306 and by the end of December 2013 the programme had resulted in 283 fewer bodies (National Audit Office, 2014).

This focus on reducing numbers was also accompanied by a desire to increase both the efficiency and accountability of public bodies. To this end, the Government implemented a triennial reviews process whereby all NDPBs are required to undergo a review every three years to decide whether the body should still exist and, if so, whether its governance arrangements could be improved (see also Dommett, 2014). There has also been an effort to strengthen the sponsorship relationship between departments and public bodies, with the implementation of a new controls framework whereby public bodies – as well as government departments – must seek Cabinet Office approval for administrative spending over certain limits (Cabinet Office, 2013)².

Research suggests that the public bodies reform programme has had a far greater impact on the public bodies landscape than the efforts of previous governments, both in terms of reducing the number of public bodies and overhauling governance arrangements (Skelcher et al., 2013). In particular, the growth of the Cabinet Office's role in overseeing the implementation of reforms, managing processes such as triennial reviews, and leading on other governance reforms such as sponsorship is seen as at the core of this more substantial impact.

The public bodies reform programme has also been accompanied by other public sector reforms, including the civil service reform agenda which has encouraged civil servants to 'hive off' functions into alternative organisational models such as mutuals (see also Tonkiss and Noonan, 2013). This alternative models agenda overlaps with the

public bodies agenda in ways that are complementary (the idea of considering the adoption of alternative models by public bodies) and yet raise questions about the desirable status of bodies performing public functions, in terms of whether or not functions should be brought closer or pushed further away from central government

It is the public bodies reform agenda and, as a result, the alternative models agenda, which have particularly shaped the work of the PCF since 2010. This is evident in Appendix 1, where the subject matter of the events held reflects this focus. The regular attendance of Cabinet Office civil servants at PCF events also denotes the importance of the Cabinet Office as a key partner of the PCF.

3.2 PCF Working with chairs

I think from the first engagement with the government in opposition, they really had never heard of [PCF]. And no reason that they should have done, at that time we hadn't made an impact outside of our own organisation. Since then I think we've started to. I think maybe at that level it's made an impact because it's provided some way of channelling the enthusiasm of chairs for improving things. (Interview with PCF Chair)

Chairs are positive about the response of the PCF to public bodies reform. They have welcomed the opportunity to express and transmit views about public bodies reform and to have input over assessments of the effectiveness and value of the reform programme. The PCF is regarded by its members to have helped government to understand

² While, as noted, the reform programme affects mainly NDPBs, the controls framework applies to all arm's length bodies including executive agencies.

what has worked well and what has been more challenging, and has influenced implementation in a number of areas including sponsorship, spending control, the digital agenda and alternative models of service delivery.

Members generally felt that the role of the PCF had evolved, meaning that while in its early days it exerted very little influence, now it has grown into a far more influential body with a strong relationship with government. One factor underpinning this developing role has been the PCF's relationship with IfG. IfG is viewed by members as having very significant influence within government, and by aligning itself with this organisation the PCF has been able to enhance its influence. For example, the It Takes Two report produced collaboratively by PCF and IfG, as well as a number of jointly organised seminars, shows the benefits of this relationship.

It was also thought by a number of chairs that another driving force behind this increased influence is that relationships have moved on and both the PCF and government are more willing to engage with one another in a way that produces mutual benefits. Chairs are enthusiastic about driving forward efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector, and the PCF has provided a channel for this enthusiasm – in turn, meaning that chairs are an accessible resource for government.

In responding to public bodies reform, the PCF also provided members with the ability to network with other chairs and to learn from their experiences of implementing reform – for example, in closing down an organisation, moving to an alternative model, or implementing governance reforms. This meant that chairs were able to learn from these experiences and to share

best practice. Furthermore, the PCF enabled members to gain a greater insight into the future agenda for public bodies. This has meant that they have had a greater appreciation of what lies ahead in relation to public bodies reform and public sector issues which will affect public bodies more broadly, that they are able to discuss these future challenges with one another and with key government actors, and that they are better able to plan for the road ahead.

3.3 PCF Working with Government

It's not just 'turkeys voting for Christmas', it's trying to build on the work of the forum around reform and helping government understand what works, what doesn't work, what some of the issues are. (Interview with PCF Member and Chair of NDPB)

That's a very, very close working relationship now (Interview with Cabinet Office civil servant)

The PCF has developed a strong working relationship with Government, and in particular with the Public Bodies Team of the Cabinet Office (herein referred to simply as the Cabinet Office), since the beginning of the Public Bodies Reform Programme in 2010. The PCF has sought to act as a platform for open dialogue with government over the implementation of reform, in order to drive forward better understanding of what works, what doesn't work so well, and what some of the arising issues are. Holding discussions with key actors within Government also provides chairs with key information and a deeper understanding of the issues involved in the debate.

This process of dialogue means that the PCF can position the voice of chairs as a collaborative group; however, it is not the case that the PCF seeks to represent all chairs

under one singular message about public bodies reform. Rather, the PCF seeks to forward, and allow discussion of, the range of views that its members have. For example, in his submission to the Public Administration Select Committee inquiry into public bodies reform (PASC, 2011), Chris Banks emphasised that he was making the submission as an individual but was able to reflect on the range of views held by chairs during previous PCF discussions. Striking this balance appears to be important in making interventions into the key debates while retaining a diversity of voices.

Also key to the PCF's approach is that the dialogue with Government is 'live'. The PCF does not work with chairs to form a view on a specific aspect of reform and then share that with others, but rather invites others such as the Cabinet Office, departments and Chief Executives to sit around the table and engage in the discussion – a cooperative and collaborative approach. The PCF is keen, as an organisation, to be seen to respond positively and productively to reform proposals, and so the emphasis has been on developing this collaborative and constructive approach. This, in turn, has provided chairs with an opportunity to engage with key players within government to discuss key strategic issues related to the reform agenda.

The relationship with government has developed since the formalisation of the PCF and its relocation at IfG in 2010. Initially, many public bodies were on the receiving end of 'quango-bashing' by some ministers and the mainstream press, suggesting that they were wasteful and unaccountable. This created a challenging environment for the PCF in its ambition to establish a collaborative relationship with Government, and much of its work in this period focused on countering these views and trying

to establish that relationship. In doing so, the PCF has been able to build a more productive dialogue. This has also been observed by the Cabinet Office, which really values the relationship which has now been developed.

While the PCF has a close relationship with the Cabinet Office, it is also clear that chairs really value the independence of the PCF. Rather than acting as an organ of government, the PCF is in a unique position to both work productively with Government while still reflecting the interests of its members and acting as a forum for engagement and discussion on key issues. The relationship with the Cabinet Office in itself offers benefits to chairs, because often chairs have strong relationships with their departments but do not have direct contact with the Cabinet Office. The PCF provides a forum for chairs to develop a deeper understanding of the issues involved in public bodies reform, and to offer their own views on these.

At the same time, the Cabinet Office values the relationship with the PCF because it enables them to discuss key issues with chairs in a more direct way. The views of chairs are very important and useful for the Cabinet Office as they implement

reform because chairs offer a more strategic view of the implementation of reform than others more involved in the operational aspects of public bodies are able to give. The Cabinet Office further values the PCF as an intermediary actor between the government and public bodies, to assist communication and dialogue and to share information. Chairs have been able to exert some influence through this mechanism. For example, the PCF fed directly into a new training programme for sponsors which is currently being rolled out, and which will include the PCF's recommendation to reflect on the sponsorship of public bodies that are being closed down.

One aspect of the working relationship between Government and the PCF that is particularly important is the more informal, interpersonal relationship that exists between key members and civil servants. These relationships are valuable in maintaining the close, collaborative and effective links. Regular informal meetings have helped to support this relationship and also offer the PCF a more informal route to engage with the Cabinet Office on issues as they arise, and also to involve the Cabinet Office in the development of their own programme of events.

4. Future Challenges and Directions

The PCF has come a long way, particularly in the last few years. But what challenges and choices does it face? This section considers future directions for the PCF.

4.1 Reflections on the Evolution of the PCF's Role

Since 2009, changes in the organisation of the PCF have led to an evolution of its role and a much higher profile. Whilst previously the PCF placed emphasis on its role as a forum in which chairs could share best practice, network and gain peer-to-peer support, greater emphasis has come to be placed on its role in contributing to, informing and influencing policy development. This shift has resulted not only from the appointment of a permanent PCF Manager and formalised relationship with IfG, but also from a concerted attempt to build strong relationships with civil servants within the Cabinet Office and departments, by publishing reports, guidance, checklists and think pieces on key issues affecting public bodies.

As a result of these changes, the PCF has become a key stakeholder to be consulted on policy development in relation to arm's length governance. This has enabled the PCF to feed chairs' opinions into government policy-making and to highlight areas of difficulty. The increased access to government has also provided access to ministers and officials, several of whom have spoken at PCF events. Francis Maude MP, Nick Hurd MP, Bernard Jenkin MP and Sir Bob Kerslake are just a few of the high profile individuals who have participated in PCF seminars and conferences. PCF members therefore now have the opportunity to engage with government at a senior level in a variety of new ways.

Yet the PCF's new relationship with Government is quite dependent on strong inter-personal relationships. This is a key source of influence for the PCF and an important way in which the PCF is able to stay on top of the emerging agenda, something which is really valued by chairs.

4.2 The Future Roles of the PCF

The PCF as an organisation is significantly better placed to react to future reform agendas, due to the links with government that have been described above. It could be expected that future reform scenarios would be developed with far greater involvement from the PCF, and that chairs' opinions would therefore have greater influence. Yet the PCF also finds itself at a crossroads. We identify five challenges.

Challenge 1: Networking or influencing?

It is evident from our research that chairs regard the primary benefit of the PCF as being a resource for networking and learning from best practice; its influence within government is perceived as important but is a secondary concern. Therefore, the PCF faces a tension between its emerging role in engaging with government and the demand from its members for ongoing networking and learning sessions.

Challenge 2: Working alone or forming alliances?

As of April 2014, the PCF has expanded its activities through the formalisation of a relationship with ACE, a body that has its own connections into the Cabinet Office. Such new alliances could be very valuable for the PCF to contribute to wider debates and discussions about public bodies. However, it is also clear from our interviews that chairs and chief executives have

different roles and demands, and so PCF and ACE provide valuable forums to enable each to meet and share views independently of the other. Therefore striking a balance between this new working relationship and the separate activities of each body, tailored to the different needs and expectations of chairs and chief executives, will be important.

Challenge 3: A focus on chairs or reaching out to non-executives?

The core focus of the PCF is chairs of public bodies. However some interviewees suggested that there may be value in reaching out to non-executives on public body boards. The rationale for this is that non-execs tend to be more isolated from engagement with the wider debates regarding public bodies. Thus, the involvement of non-execs at some PCF events could help enhance their understanding and contribution to improving the governance of public bodies.

Challenge 4: Personal connections or institutional relationships?

The relationship between the PCF and the Cabinet Office is, as described, based on strong inter-personal relationships and this is extremely beneficial to the work of the PCF and its ability to influence government. However, it also brings questions about sustainability. Should personnel on either side change, the relationship may be affected. This is an issue for the PCF to consider in terms of its long-term strategic planning for its relationship with Government.

Challenge 5: Random or targeted recruitment?

The membership of the PCF is growing and this will be positive in terms of the diversity of voices that is put forward by the

organisation. However, some interviewees commented that they had joined PCF because the chair they were replacing had suggested it would be valuable or they had heard about PCF at some point. Thus recruitment of members tends to be random. This may be one explanation for under-representation in some areas, for example health bodies which are affected by their own significant reform programme. Targeting recruitment at areas of underrepresentation may address this and allow the PCF to focus its work on issues affecting a broader range of public bodies than just NDPBs.



Conclusion

The PCF has grown from a small and relatively uninfluential network of chairs, into a formalised organisation managing strong relationships with government and other actors, and has become a key resource for chairs to share experiences and learn from best practice. With regards specifically to public bodies reform, this has been particularly useful to chairs in gaining support in implementing reform, and also in providing an open dialogue between chairs and government actors over key issues arising from the reform programme.

The success of the PCF in working with chairs and with Government, particularly during the course of the public bodies reform programme since 2010, suggests that the PCF could provide a useful model for engagement between Government and other forms of delivery network. For example, there may be scope for a forum of leaders of mutuals and other new organisational models, as the alternative models agenda develops.

The research undertaken for this report suggests that the PCF is in a really strong position to continue its work, building on its existing relationships and potentially adding new ones through, for example, closer working with the Association of Chief Executives. In terms of future directions, the PCF is at a crossroads as regards the division of its resources between influencing government, producing research reports, and acting as a networking resource for chairs. The PCF also faces challenges in terms of its long-term sustainability, and to this end may invest more resources in developing a broader footing for its relationship with the Cabinet Office.

With the 2015 general election on the horizon, the PCF will be looking to how the public bodies agenda may take shape in the future and the issues that its members will be confronted with. Members clearly value the positioning of the PCF at the intersection between government and public bodies, and the PCF will be well placed to make use of this positioning to support chairs in planning for the future.

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Appendix 1

Events organised by the Public Chairs' Forum, November 2005 – February 2014

Date	Event
27 March 2014	'Public body reform strategy – where next?': Cabinet Office discussion
26 February 2014	'The fiscal challenge for public services': Carl Emmerson, Deputy Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies
10 December 2013	'Whistleblowing and the role of the Chair and Board': Cathy James, CEO of Public Concern at Work
3 December 2013	'Best practice in delivering public body reform': a discussion hosted by the Cabinet Office, the Public Chairs' Forum and the Association of Chief Executives
23 October 2013	'Civil service reform and the sponsorship of public bodies: Katherine Kerswell, Director General of Civil Service Reform at the Cabinet Office
10 September 2013	'Leadership challenges for Chairs': Dr Jane Martin, Local Government Ombudsman, Caroline Sheppard, Chief Traffic Adjudicator, Jenny Watson, Chair of the Electoral Commission
25 June 2013	'Best practice efficiency in public bodies': roundtable discussion
13 June 2013	'Priorities and challenges for Government and their implications for public bodies': Peter Riddell, Director of the Institute for Government
21 May 2013	'Public body reform: what next?': Nick Hurd MP, Minister for Civil Society
6 March 2013	'Spending control and public bodies: a roundtable discussion': Professor Matthew Flinders, University of Sheffield, and Dr. Katherine Tonkiss, University of Birmingham
16 January 2013	'Strategic and effective risk management in public bodies': Trevor Llanwarne, Government Actuary
12 December 2012	'Handling complaints in public bodies: the role of the Chair': Dame Julie Mellor, Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman
6 November 2012	'Women on Boards': Chloe Smith MP, Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform, Ruth Medd, Founder of Women on Boards, and Anne Watts CBE, Chair of the Appointments Commission
10 October 2012	'Private sector good, public sector bad?': John Cridland, Director General of the CBI
14 June 2012	Discussion with Margaret Hodge MP, Chair of the Public Accounts Committee
22 March 2012	'Effective public body and departmental relationships': reception to mark report launch
27 February 2012	'Towards better mutual understanding: a workshop for dept NEDs and ALBs' Rt Hon Francis Maude MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office, Chris Banks, Stephen Bundred, Former Audit Commission Chief Executive, Ed Smith, NED at DfT and Chair of the Student Loans Company, David Verey, Lead NED at DCMS
29 February 2012	Seminar with Sir Bob Kerslake, Head of the Civil Service
11 January 2012	Seminar with Rt Hon Peter Riddell, who will become the Director of the Institute for Government
15 December 2011	Seminar with the Rt Hon Francis Maude MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office, and Sir Gus O'Donnell, Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service
22 November 2011	'The impact of digitalisation on governance structures in the future': Martha Lane-Fox, the Government's digital champion
As above	Evening event to mark the launch of publication on good governance in collaboration with CIPFA
24 March 2011	Extended two part discussion with the Government Equalities Office and Cabinet Office
As above	'Using the talents of everyone – diversity on boards and in public appointments': Jonathan Rees, Director General of the Government Equalities Office

Date	Event
As above	'Good corporate governance in ALBs': Rob Wall, Head of Public Bodies and Public Appointments at the Cabinet Office
As above	'A new era for public services': Lord Adonis and Chris Banks
9 February 2011	'Understanding and surviving legislative scrutiny': Matthew Flinders, University of Sheffield
10 January 2011	'How to be a great Chair in the public sector': Hilary Douglas CB, Senior Consultant at Praesta
30 November 2010	'Mutualisation options for arm's length bodies': Barry Stimpson, Senior Partner at Reynolds Porter Chamberlain, Gareth Davies, Managing Director of Audit Practice at the Audit Commission, and Martin Hurst, Director of ALBs at DEFRA
3 November 2010	'Closing down, merging and restructuring ALBs: strategies for managing transitions': Sandra Verkuyten, former CEO of the Hearing Aid Council, Ian Moss, Whitehall Fellow at the Institute for Government
9 September 2010	Discussion about future challenges and opportunities for ALB Chairs: Ian Watmore, Permanent Secretary in the Cabinet Office
9 July 2010	'Alternative models of organisation and delivery': Barry Stimpson, Senior Partner at Reynolds Porter Chamberlain
21 June 2010	Launch event to mark collaboration with IfG, with keynote speeches from Sir Gus O'Donnell, Cabinet Secretary, Lord Bichard and Chris Banks
1 June 2010	Discussion on sponsorship relationships with Sir Ian McGee, Senior Fellow at the Institute for Government; and discussion on the reform of public services and ALBs in the new Parliament with Andrew Hudson, Managing Director of Public Services and Growth at the Treasury
2 March 2010	'Improving the delivery of public services through ALBs': Ben Jupp, Director of Strategy at the Cabinet Office and Simon Gallagher, Director of Productivity and Reform at the Treasury
18 February 2010	Discussion of the recently launched government initiative 'putting the front line first: smarter government and the implications that this will have for Departments and Arm's Length Bodies': Sir Leigh Lewis
17 February 2010	Meeting of Chris Banks, Peter Holland and Nick Hardwick (PCF Members) with Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP (Chair of Conservative Research Department and Conservative Party's Policy Review' to discuss the Opposition's approach to public sector reform
3 November 2009	Discussion of public sector reform, spending cuts, and managing the period up to the general election: Sir David Normington
9 September 2009	'The opposition's view on public sector reform, the role of NDPBs and agencies and ideas for improving the delivery of public services': Rt Hon Francis Maude MP, Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office
15 June 2009	'Improving the delivery of public services: a TUC perspective': Frances O'Grady CBE, Deputy General Secretary of the TUC
24 March 2009	'Shadow boards and succession planning': Mark Sanders and Juliet Taylor, Gatenby Sanderson
19 January 2009	'Role of NDPBs and PMDU current priorities': Ray Shostack CBE, Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit
10 June 2008	'How to handle high profile sensitive issues and manage the media': Mark Wood, Chairman and Chief Executive of ITN
15 April 2008	Event to discuss the re-focusing of the Public Chairs' Forum
10 March 2008	'Balancing Political Pressure': Dame Denise Platt DBE, Chair of the Commission for Social Care Inspection

Date	Event
29 January 2008	'Setting changed priorities in the Audit Commission: Comprehensive Area Assessments and sustainability': Michael O'Higgins, Chair of the Audit Commission
21 November 2007	'Does he who pays the piper call the tune?': Sir Michael Bichard KCB, Chair of the Legal Services Commission
29 October 2007	'The role of political advisors and life in No 10': Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the RSA
11 October 2007	'Delivery and accountability in an age of exception': Sir Gus O'Donnell, Cabinet Secretary
2 February 2006	'The Delivery of Public Services': Sir Michael Barber, Former Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit
15 December 2005	'The Freedom of Information Act, one year on': Richard Thomas, Information Commissioner
16 November 2005	PCF discussion dinner, featuring Susan Block, Head of Thought Leadership at the Change Partnership
2 November 2005	'Managing political pressure': Sir William Wells, Chair of the NHS Appointments Commission

Source: Public Chairs' Forum (2011; 2014c)

Appendix 2

Public Chairs' Forum Publications

14 January 2014	Efficiency By Design: How Public Bodies are Rising to the Funding Challenge http://www.publicchairsforum.org.uk/images/uploads/efficiency_by_design.pdf
29 July 2013	What Public Leaders Can Learn from the Experience of LSIS http://www.publicchairsforum.org.uk/images/uploads/Lessons_for_Leadership_-_the_experience_of_L SIS_-_final_version.pdf
29 January 2013	Relationship Web: Improving ALB/Departmental Relationships http://www.publicchairsforum.org.uk/research
22 March 2012	It Takes Two: How to Create Effective Relations Between ALBs and Departments http://www.publicchairsforum.org.uk/images/uploads/it-takes-two.pdf
14 December 2011	Board Governance Essentials: A Guide for Chairs and Boards of Public Bodies http://www.publicchairsforum.org.uk/research/archives/2011/12
6 September 2011	Transparency in Arm's Length Bodies: A Guide to Best Practice http://www.publicchairsforum.org.uk/images/uploads/pcf-transparency-in-albs.pdf
22 February 2011	Mutualisation: An Alternative Model for Arm's Length Bodies http://www.publicchairsforum.org.uk/images/uploads/pcf-mutualisation.pdf
10 January 2011	Piecing Together the Quango Reforms: A Practical Guide for Managing Relations http://www.publicchairsforum.org.uk/images/uploads/quango-reforms.pdf
26 January 2010	Arm's Length Bodies: Alternative Models of Service Delivery http://www.publicchairsforum.org.uk/images/uploads/PCF_Alternative-Models-for-Service-Delivery-Jul-10.pdf

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