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# chair focus

JUNE 2007

## news and opinion from a chair's perspective

### A chair's perspective

An introduction from Rodney Buse, Chair of Trustees, Charity Trustee Networks

I am now in my second year as Chair of CTN and enjoying the challenge of steering a young, fast-growing and much-needed organisation. Last week, we held a lunch for over 250 trustees of charities from across the country, who came to hear Dame Suzi Leather, Chair of the Charity Commission, deliver the second CTN trusteeship lecture. The theme of the day was, "The questions every trustee should ask..."

Now, this is a theme that is very close to my heart. I believe that, as Chairs, perhaps one of our most important tasks is to identify the right questions to ask. This isn't about putting the management team under pressure, but it is about having the necessary understanding of the organisation to enable us to make the right decisions at our Board meetings.

Then, I think, Chairs need to know where to turn when advice and support are needed. Sometimes this will need to be professional advice from those qualified to advise on the specifics of the issue, but there are also times when it is helpful just to have another Chair to talk to in a confidential setting. It is our belief, at CTN, that Chair networks, either face-to-face or online through [www.trusteenet.org.uk](http://www.trusteenet.org.uk), are a highly effective way to share these latter issues. In the words of one chair, "Knowing there are people I can turn to in confidence when I have difficulties makes a big difference".

I hope you enjoy our first issue of **chair focus** and I invite you to contact us with your feedback and any accounts of your experience of being in the chair – so we can share them with others.

### 'chair to chair'

CTN's new programme exclusively for chairs and vice chairs

Earlier this month, CTN launched a new area of its website [www.trusteenet.org.uk](http://www.trusteenet.org.uk) exclusively for chairs and vice chairs. All you need to do to access this area is sign in to [trusteenet.org.uk](http://trusteenet.org.uk) as a chair and click on the '**chair to chair**' box. This will link you to the following support services focusing specifically on the needs of chairs

- **e-newsletter** Of which this is the first. By signing up as a chair to [trusteenet.org.uk](http://trusteenet.org.uk) you automatically receive a bi-monthly electronic newsletter, containing articles with practical advice and guidance for chairs, the experience of other chairs and signposting resources

### EXPERIENCED CHAIRS NEEDED!

CTN's e-mentoring scheme is looking for chairs who are willing to e-mentor a less experienced chair.

So, if you have 3 years or more experience as a chair, we would love to hear from you.

More information on e-mentoring is available on our website.

and other sources of help and support.

- **e-mentoring** Many chairs report how helpful it is to have a one-to-one relationship with another chair from a separate organisation. Different chairs have different sets of skills and experience that they bring to their role and often a one-to-one relationship brings with it the opportunity to share these and to learn from another's skills.
- **e-network** A private area of the discussion forum pages for chairs. Here you can share your views, ask questions and post useful resources. You will hear about key issues for chairs and will be invited to respond.
- **e-feedback** An opportunity to tell us what you think about the pages for chairs and share with us any ideas you have for resources and services you would like as a chair or vice-chair.

### **In the hot seat**

Questions put to Sarah Morland, who is Chair of Reading Voluntary Action

**What attracted you to becoming a chair?** I am a management development consultant, working primarily with voluntary and community organisations. I thought that I had plenty to offer as a trustee, and that, as a trustee I would keep up to date on the challenges of working within the sector.

**What particularly attracted you to Reading Voluntary Action?** RVA has a high profile within Reading and is held in high regard. As an infrastructure organisation, it works to increase the capability and sustainability of the sector, which has parallels with the paid work that I do. Very complementary.

**Is there anything that would make you an even more effective Chair?** Having more time to get to grips with all the drivers for the involvement of the sector in partnerships, and to attend meetings on behalf of RVA.

**What's the biggest challenge you have faced in your role?** This follows on from the previous question as my challenge is to ensure I give enough time to my business, when I could so easily do more, and interesting work, with RVA. I regularly need to remind myself that I also need to earn a living!

**What do you consider the most satisfying aspect of your role?** Leading a Board of capable Trustees who are not afraid to challenge and offer different perspectives to our discussions at meetings.

**What do you think is the ideal term of office that a Chair should serve?** 2-3 years with succession planning to ensure an easy handover.

**What tip would you give to a new chair?** Make sure that you get a good induction and on-going support so you really understand your role and the difference that your organisation can make within the community.

**If you weren't a trustee, what would you do with that time?** Various other voluntary roles, dog walking, gardening, earning a living.

### **A role description for chairs**

As Chair, you need to know what people in and around the organisation may reasonably expect of you. A role description is a good starting place

to set out the many different aspects of the role you have taken on.

For charities that do not have a chair's role description there are a number of model ones available. On [www.trusteenet.org.uk](http://www.trusteenet.org.uk), there is a table comparing the contents of the models below. You may want to include:

- Chairing and facilitating board meetings (and AGMs)
- Leading on the development of strategy and policy
- Monitoring the role/performance of the board
- Monitoring the implementation of board decisions
- Planning the annual cycle of board meetings and agendas
- Acting as spokesperson
- Ensuring board members fulfil their role
- Liaising with and supporting senior staff member (if applicable)
- Monitoring and appraising senior staff member (if applicable)

Model role descriptions are available at:

**Charity Trustee Networks (CTN) –**

[www.trusteenet.org.uk/resources](http://www.trusteenet.org.uk/resources) 'Model role description – Chair of Charity Trustees'

**NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations) –**

[www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/askncvo/index.asp?id=4484](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/askncvo/index.asp?id=4484) 'Sample board chair job description'

**Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA) -**

[www.icsa.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=461&Itemid=0](http://www.icsa.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=461&Itemid=0) 'Model job description for chair of the board of trustees'

**Islington Voluntary Action Council (IVAC) -**

[www.ivac.org.uk/resources.asp?cat=48&par=0](http://www.ivac.org.uk/resources.asp?cat=48&par=0) 'Trustees – Model trustee job description'

## Resources for chairs

**Charity Trustee Networks (CTN) - [www.trusteenet.org.uk](http://www.trusteenet.org.uk)**

General support for trustees and exclusive area for chairs (outlined above). CTN also has a range of networks around the country to encourage chairs and trustees to meet face-to-face. Several of these networks are exclusively for chairs. If you are interested in joining a network or setting one up in your area, please get in touch.

**Governance Hub - [www.governancehub.org.uk](http://www.governancehub.org.uk)**

Under 'Resources' then 'Chairs' there are sections on induction for chairs, support for chairs and CEO/chair relationships

**NCVO (National Council of Voluntary Organisations) [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/askncvo](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/askncvo)**

Under 'Trustee and Governance' there is a wide range of resources for chairs and trustees. Particular resources to note are:

- A Chair's First 100 Days by Tesse Akpeki (£10 from NCVO)
- Chair appraisal toolkit
- Board staff relationships

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