

Prefer plain text?

Email:
info@trusteenet.org.uk

**16th June – CTN lunch
and lecture**

Can you come?

Why not encourage some of
the trustees on your Board
to come.

More information available
at
[www.trusteenet.org.uk/even-
ts/ctn-annual-lunch-and-
lecture](http://www.trusteenet.org.uk/even-
ts/ctn-annual-lunch-and-
lecture)

news and opinion from a Chair's perspective

This month we have a focus on the role of Vice Chairs. This is a role which can vary from having next to no responsibility to sharing responsibility with the Chair – and everything in between. If you have any thoughts about the role of the Vice Chair do get in touch.

There's more than one way to be a Chair

Martin Farrell and Zoe Reed talk about the advantages of having a Vice Chair at Time Banking UK www.timebanks.co.uk

Until recently Time Banking didn't have a Vice Chair, and now we wonder why we didn't get one before.

When Martin became Chair the Board was small, just seven people. Martin wanted to expand and stabilise the Board before even thinking about having a Vice Chair. However, our Memorandum and Articles limited the maximum number on the Board to nine. So we duly advertised and appointed two people. Some months later the AGM agreed a Board of twelve and so we went through another recruitment process.

Zoe was appointed as Vice Chair by an open internal process in October 2007. The moment her appointment was approved by the Board I (Martin) could feel a weight lifting from my shoulders – I hadn't quite realised how much I'd been carrying as Chair until I could share the load, and this has been re energising. That's one good reason to appoint a Vice Chair.

What has also worked for us is that Zoe has brought her substantial project management skills into play. Yes, they were there before but she found that having an acknowledged role as Vice Chair brought them to the fore.

Martin had been supporting the Chief Executive, which had worked fine but was probably getting a bit too cosy. In her new role Zoe has brought fresh energy, rigour and structure, and has, with the Chief Executive, produced a detailed plan for the year.

On a subtler level, having a gender balance seems like it might be a helpful thing too. We didn't plan it that way, but that's how it worked out.

As well as having practical benefits, appointing a Vice Chair has also given us a greater sense of confidence. The Board knows that it is stronger not just by having someone who can deputise at meetings and in other ways, like being a bank signatory, but who can speak - with authority - with and for the time banking movement.

Appointing a Vice Chair for Time Banking UK last autumn has refreshed the whole Board. So if you don't have a Vice Chair, pause a moment to think about how it might work for your Board. And if you do, pause moment to reflect on how it's working. Maybe it's time for some refreshment?

So what is the role of the Vice Chair?

The Vice (or Deputy) Chair is a trustee and has the same legal responsibilities as other trustees. Beyond this, the additional roles assigned to the Vice Chair will vary from organisation to organisation. The best way to define the role in your organisation is to be clear about why you want to have a Vice Chair on your Board. Asking this question, in the context of what the charity is trying to achieve, will encourage all the trustees to articulate what they want this role and person to do. Their responses should give you the essential elements for building a role description.

There will be varying degrees of formality for this process. However you do it, think through it carefully and make sure you all consider the long term perspective – how this role and process will work over the next three to five years. Below are some questions that your trustees can use to explore the issue.

Explore:

- How will the leadership role of the Board be shared by the Chair and Vice Chair?
- What special skills do we need to have represented by the Vice Chair? Will that change when the current Chair steps down?
- Should the Chair select their own Vice Chair? Should the Board or the wider membership elect the Vice Chair?
- Do we want to elect/select the Vice Chair from existing trustees or have someone from outside come on to the Board?
- Do we want to use the Vice Chair role as part of our succession planning for the post of Chair? (In either case, have we made this clear?)
- Should the Vice Chair step down when the Chair goes?
- How do we expect the Chief Executive/Director to relate to these two lead governance roles?
- Will the supervision of the chief executive be managed by the Chair, Vice Chair or both? How will this work?
- Given all the above, what induction is needed for the Vice Chair?

Areas to think about

Have clarity about areas of responsibility

Make sure the Board has agreed in principle who will lead on what. It is not enough to fall back on 'whoever is available', as this may lead to confusion when other trustees or senior staff need a decision or authorisation.

Take the time to set up a manageable process for your two lead honorary officers to brief each other and share or log decisions taken between Board meetings. In that way you are less likely to be giving contradictory messages.

Create effective communications between Chair & Vice Chair

People who lead boards are sometimes asked to represent the organisation or to speak for it (for example, at a conference, to a funder, or to the media). Consider therefore how your Chair and Vice Chair will keep each other abreast of what they hear, attend and decide. Some people will want to use e-mail, others may find it more effective to speak on the phone or meet regularly. Whatever the medium, the important thing is to commit to keeping in touch and up to date.

Tip:

Refer to your Chair or Vice Chair when you present a view or proposal to trustees or staff. Talking of "we" rather than "I" makes things sound more inclusive, and at least gives the impression that the trustees are working together.

Resources you can buy from NCVO which might be helpful in thinking about the role of Chair and Vice Chair

- Lost in translation: A Complete guide to Chair/CE partnerships
- Good Governance: the Chair's role
- A Chair's First 100 days

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/publications

ANY OTHER BUSINESS?

Do let us have your feedback on this e-newsletter by replying to this email. Let us know if we are getting it right or how we can improve this e-newsletter. Chair focus goes out bi-monthly, and we want as much content as possible to be from you - we would really welcome your ideas and submissions.

This newsletter is sent to you by CTN

3-4 Frensham Suite, Friary Court 13-21 High Street, Guildford GU1 3DG.

If you would prefer not to receive it, please email info@trusteenet.org.uk and you will be removed from our mailing list.

phone: 01483 230280

website:
www.trusteenet.org.uk

Registered Charity
1110979

CTN is a limited company registered in England and Wales with Company No 5499220

Be accountable to the Board

The trustees are all equally responsible for the actions of the organisation and for the governance process, so, although the lead honorary officers may have been elected, they act on behalf of all. It is therefore critically important that the Chair and Vice Chair work out how they will be accountable to the Board, and act with the consent and agreement of the trustee body as a whole. It also helps to discuss and agree how reports will be made to the Board and what can only be decided by a quorate Board (rather than by the two lead honorary officers).

Once you have decided on the above, make sure the decision is recorded in your Board minutes, so that it can be referred to as needed. Also check that the Chief Executive and other key staff (who might need to contact you) are kept up to date as needed.

Prepare for Meetings Together

It inspires confidence if the two Board leaders are seen to be working in tandem and in harmony. So try and ensure that you prepare for Board and committee meetings together – whether or not you are both going to attend.

This section is drawn from the *Vice-Chairs Fact Sheet* (for charities thinking of appointing a Vice-Chair), which is published by the Governance Hub and are available at www.trusteenet.org.uk/resources/Vice-Chair-fact-sheet

In the Hot Seat

Questions put to Jeremy Burnett Rae, Vice Chair of Didcot & District CAB, about his experience of being a Vice Chair.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/bureau_detail.htm?serialnumber=101199

How did you become Vice Chair of Didcot & District CAB? I insisted on incorporating the old CAB, and I think the Chair feared for her office!

What does your role as Vice Chair involve? Governance: the Chair manages the manager, I manage the trustees

Do you have a Vice Chair role description? Officially I could share the Chair's job description, but I have neither seen nor written it

What's the biggest challenge you have faced in your role as Vice Chair? The Board was unprepared for a triennial audit against the Citizens Advice National Membership Scheme. We ended up Highly Commended as a Trustee Board of the Year, although still practically useless

What do you consider the most satisfying aspect of your role as Vice Chair? Power to do some good, without responsibility!

From your experience as a Vice Chair, what do you believe are the key things that a Vice Chair can bring to a charity? A different point of view from the Chair; checks and balances; and resources, cover and succession

What do you think is the ideal term of office that a Vice Chair should serve? 2 or 3 years (I have done too much)

What tip would you give to a new Vice Chair? Start from what you want to achieve, not from what the charity has been doing!

Is there any particular publication, course or resource that you have found helpful and would recommend to other Chair/Vice Chairs? The Charity Commission website is brilliant