



Northern Ireland Public Sector Chairs' Forum

Considering a Public Sector Chairs' Charter Opening our consultation



Why a Chairs' Charter?

Rationale for a Public Sector Chairs' Charter

In the context of increased pressure on public services and the need for a renewed vision for driving change, the Committee of the Northern Ireland Public Sector Chairs' Forum has developed a 'Public Sector Chairs' Charter' for the first time. This Charter aims to highlight the important role played by non-executive directors and provide a mechanism to fully engage the commitment, energy, and diversity of thought of our members, supporting wider mobilisation.

What is a Charter?

A charter is a formal document describing the rights, aims, or principles of an organisation or group of people.

The context

Public services in Northern Ireland, as in other jurisdictions are facing:

- **Severe pressures** due to **changing demographics** and **increasing demand**.
- Growing **complexity** of need and **constrained funding**.
- Increasing citizen **expectations**.

There is a growing recognition within public bodies of the need to rethink how we deliver services, with a much greater emphasis on working in systems, beyond organisational silos.

The NI Executive has recognised that it must act to stabilise and transform services to meet the needs of citizens. Specifically, It has:

- Agreed the new **Programme for Government 2024-2027** and **Wellbeing Framework**.
- Established **new structures** to deliver a Reform and Transformation and created a **£235 million Transformation Fund**.

The Draft Charter

In line with Nolan Principles and existing guidance, members of the NI Public Sector Chairs Forum believe that the non-executive community should respond proactively to current challenges and commit to working collectively with government and partners to:

1. Draw on **international evidence** to develop a stronger vision of **what 'good' would look like** for the future, harnessing the power of data and **technology**, and **future proofing** the solutions we invest in.
2. Remove barriers and create **incentives** to support all parts of the public sector to work together proactively, building further on the **spirit of partnership** agreements and community planning that is already developing.
3. Prioritise **preventative approaches** to public services.
4. Identify and **remove barriers** to supporting transformation at pace, challenging ourselves to be more **innovative and agile**, with a refreshed approach to **risk taking** that takes more account of the risk of inaction.
5. Proactively recognise opportunities to **reduce duplication**, embracing more effective **system working**.
6. **Empower people and communities** at the local level to reduce and address need in a **place-based** approach.
7. Work proactively with the **private sector** and **community and voluntary sector** to develop **solutions**, support the implementation of new ideas, and challenge unnecessary bureaucracy, investing in more innovative ways of working.
8. Ensure that **leaders are visible, solutions-focused**, and grounded in **public service values**, placing people at the heart of our decision-making in these times of pressure.

Working as individual leaders, we also invite our members to:

1. Renew their proactive 'challenge and support' role and focus on solutions:
 - a. Ask at every board meeting: How are we collaborating? How are we reducing duplication? Have we considered outcomes (and shared outcomes)? Have we taken a preventative approach? Have we empowered our leaders and the people we serve?
 - b. Encourage creative work that will support change within existing budgets.
 - c. Ensure innovative projects are well showcased and shared widely.
 - d. Consider adopting Board Charters and appointing a Chairs' Charter Champion.
2. Remain tenacious where progress is not being made despite strong consensus for that change.
3. Contribute to developing an ambitious agenda and fostering a positive environment for change.
4. Build the principles of the Charter into appraisal processes and hold ourselves to account, committing to an agreed action plan of several key actions each year.

Next Steps

We will open a consultation on the Charter at the NI Leadership & Governance Conference (2 April 2025), centred on the following questions:

- Do you feel this a helpful approach?
- Is there anything you would suggest that we add to, remove from, or amend in relation to the Charter?
- Do you have any additional comments on the Charter?

To share your views, please visit <https://forms.office.com/e/2pe20KeyWf>
Or scan the QR code below:



**Consultation: Chairs' Charter
(Northern Ireland)**

Following the consultation, we will launch the Charter at the end of summer and then use it as a lever to support engagement and change on an ongoing basis.

References

- Programme for Government 2024-2027, 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most': <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/articles/programme-government-2024-2027-our-plan-doing-what-matters-most>
- Programme for Government Wellbeing Framework: https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/executiveofficeni/pfg_wellbeing_dashboard.html
- The Seven Nolan Principles of Public Life: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2>
- 'A preventative approach to public services How the government can shift its focus and improve lives', Institute for Government: https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-05/preventative-approach-public-services_0.pdf
- Carnegie UK current programmes - 'Improving our collective wellbeing through public policy': www.carnegieuk.org/programmes/
- Demos Future Public Services Taskforce: <https://demos.co.uk/future-public-services-taskforce/>
- 'Non-executive directors and integrated care systems: What good looks like', NHS Confederation: <https://www.nhsconfed.org/publications/non-executive-directors-and-integrated-care-systems>

Get in Touch

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