PLA PUBLIC LEADERS APPOINTMENTS

CASE STUDY

Building Future Board Talent

How an Associate NED Role Strengthened Governance at Cornwall Housing

At Public Leaders Appointments, we believe that strong boards are not built by experience alone, but through the intentional development of future talent.

In 2025, we were appointed by Cornwall Housing as its Board recruitment, beginning with the recruitment of two Non-Executive Directors. The brief was clear: to strengthen governance across the People & Culture and Audit, Finance & Risk Committees. However, as the search progressed, a broader opportunity emerged - one that would ultimately deliver both immediate impact and long-term value.

Creating Opportunity from Talent

Alongside two successful Non-Executive Director appointments, we identified an exceptional candidate whose experience, insight and energy stood out. Rather than lose that talent, we worked in partnership with Cornwall Housing to create a new Associate Non-Executive Director (ANED) role.

This approach enabled the organisation to enhance its current board capability while also strengthening its future succession pipeline.

Jane White, Chief People & Culture Officer at Delt Shared Services, was appointed as Associate NED to the People & Remuneration Committee in July 2025.

For Jane, this was never about securing ‘any’ board role - it was about finding the right one.

“The biggest thrill I get is helping organisations transform what they do. I wanted to expand that, to contribute to my own community.”

Through our work with Delt, we had built a strong relationship with Jane and developed a clear understanding of her motivations and long-term

ambitions, alongside insight into the high-performing culture she had helped create. When the opportunity at Cornwall Housing arose, the alignment was immediate: a values-led organisation, rooted in community, offering the right level of stretch at exactly the right time.

"I wanted to align myself with an organisation that supports vulnerable and disadvantaged people in a way that promotes dignity. Their values really aligned with mine."

A Deliberate Approach to Board Development

For Cornwall Housing, the decision to create an ANED role was both pragmatic and values driven as Su Spence, Managing Director, explains:

"The board forms such an integral part of the governance of an organisation that getting the membership right is critical to that organisation's success. It requires real judgement to understand that delicate balance of skill, experience and personality to find Board members that challenge the organisation, support it to drive forward and can work together effectively.

Having Public Leaders Appointments support this process for CHL really helps us to find the delicate blend of people that makes things work, from an organisational perspective, for the executive team and for the non-executives who form our Board.

We know that there will be high calibre candidates who share the social value and business objectives of CHL. Recently, we were faced with the positive challenge of more than one strong candidate keen to join the Board. Rather than lose that talent, we chose to live our values — supporting succession planning, being flexible in our approach and finding solutions that work for individuals as well as the organisation.

The creation of the ANED role allowed us to access critical skills while supporting an individual to undertake their first Board role and develop for the future. It has added real value to our People and Culture Committee."

This reflects a growing recognition that board composition is not just about filling roles, it is about curating the right mix of capability, perspective and potential.

A Supported Route into the Boardroom

The Associate NED role has provided Jane with a structured entry into board life. While formally appointed to the People & Remuneration Committee, she also contributes to wider board discussions and strategic thinking.

"They've never made me feel like I'm not a non-executive director. My expertise and input are valued."

For Jane, the role offered a lower-risk environment in which to build confidence, develop her board-level contribution and test long-term fit.

"For someone like me, it's a much safer place to sharpen my teeth than going in cold. It gave me my foot in the door and let me see what the role is really like."

From Executive to Non-Executive: A Shift in Perspective

Transitioning from an executive leadership role to a non-executive position required a fundamental shift in mindset.

"The biggest change is less control. My instinct is to get stuck in - that's my day job. But it's also been very liberating."

Her contribution now centres on insight, challenge and assurance rather than delivery.

"It's about sharing experience, highlighting risk, and then letting go. That doesn't mean you don't challenge, but it's a different way of adding value."

Jane's impact has been particularly evident in strengthening the connection between people, culture and organisational strategy.

"Your people plan shouldn't sit separately from your business plan. Your people are one of your biggest assets - what are you doing about that?"

She has also supported improvements to governance processes, helping ensure that committee discussions translate more clearly into board-level assurance and reduce duplication.

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The Role of Specialist Support

Reflecting on the process, Jane highlights the importance of the trusted, specialist support that Public Leaders Appointments provides in navigating the transition into a board role.

"You're exceptional at what you do. I trusted everything that you said and really took it to heart. Having somebody who is extremely supportive in the recruitment process made the difference for me - without it, I would have been flailing."

Rethinking Board Appointments

This illustrates how a more flexible and intentional approach to board appointments can deliver both immediate impact and long-term value.

Associate NED appointments offer a powerful, low-risk way to bring in fresh expertise, broaden perspectives and strengthen succession planning. By creating space for emerging non-executive talent to contribute alongside experienced board members, organisations can enhance current decision-making while building a diverse, future-ready board.

If you're thinking differently about how to strengthen your board, please get in touch for a confidential conversation.

About

Public Leaders Appointments is an executive search firm delivering executive recruitment, interim management and consultancy solutions across the public and third sectors, and at the public/private interface.

We partner with organisations at moments that matter; leadership transition, growth, transformation or change. Our role is simple but critical - helping clients identify, attract and secure the talent they need to lead effectively today and shape what comes next.

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Our expertise spans board and senior leadership appointments, with a particular strength in Chairs, Non-Executive Directors and senior leaders across all functional disciplines. We understand the nuance of governance, stakeholder accountability and purpose-driven leadership, and we bring deep sector insight alongside a highly personal, hands-on approach.

With an exceptional track record and a trusted national network, we connect ambitious organisations with the leaders who will make a lasting difference.

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