

PFEW Advisory Group

Annual Report

2018-19



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1. Introduction

The PFEW Advisory Group is an independent body of 6 individuals appointed through external recruitment with the aim of adding fresh perspectives and experience to the workings of the Federation. This is our second annual report covering the period May 2018 to April 2019 and details of the group's membership is attached.

As a group we have similarities to that of Non-Executive Directors (NEDs) and, like them, we aim to provide challenge; not just on behalf of 'shareholders' - that's the PFEW's membership - but the wider range of stakeholders such as consumers (that's the public), Federation employees, external suppliers and the like. But the big difference between us and NEDs is that PFEW and its duly elected leaders are wholly responsible and accountable for decision making and what goes on in the Federation, not the Advisory Group.

The first mention of such a group can be found in the Normington report which proposed an independent body that could act as a critical friend. To its credit the Federation has embraced this and set terms of reference which asks us to look at how PFEW activities, strategy and culture line up and with specific reference to:

- Standards
- Health and wellbeing
- Equality and diversity
- Pay and conditions

and

- Matters relating to public confidence.

PFEW national officers have been clear that these terms should guide our work; not limit it. And in our work over the past 18 months we have felt similar encouragement from PFEW Branches.

2. Our Initial work

In our first report in May 2018 we reflected on what we had seen in relation to Trust, Professionalism and Unity - the 3 elements which Normington emphasised and which we, as a group, see very much as the bedrock of how PFEW needs to be if it is going to be the best membership organisation around.

As examples:

- A. In terms of trust we had been working with senior leadership to develop better financial governance. To our eyes it seemed a long way behind many modern organisations and was a priority for us because nothing will corrode trust more than poor financial management.
- B. In terms of professionalism how naturally issues of equality in representation and bargaining are encouraged. It was to PFEW's credit that the 2018 elections committed to thresholds with legal backing; but that was only to be a beginning, it would take hard work for this to really take root.
- C. In terms of unity, and despite the fact that it was nearing its centenary, the way PFEW Branches and the National leadership worked together seemed unsettled. The new electoral system was about to be introduced and that in itself was progress; but structural change is no silver bullet and will have its own growing pains.

3. How we see things – much to be proud of

A year on the elections have all worked their way through - an achievement by any standards. Whilst there may be some changes that could be made to the election cycle we would counsel against this and not pull up the plant to see what the roots look like.

An important element within the election cycle was the new method of selecting the General Secretary. The Advisory Group were closely involved (in an advisory capacity only) in both design and implementation. We were impressed by the serious way in which the Board went about selecting from between the two good candidates who emerged.

Completing the election cycle saw a change in PFEW activities and there is now much more energy devoted to what might be called 'the membership agenda' - in particular around police funding, pay, welfare and on campaigns on issues such as spit-guards, tasers and "Did You Know?"

PFEW enjoys very high levels of membership and with no competitor organisation and years of rich information on policing it can be a 'go to' organisation on the very real problems that officers on the ground face day in day out. No one else can speak as authentically on these issues; issues currently high in the public's consciousness.

As well as high membership PFEW has excellent representatives with bags of experience and receives nothing but praise, as far as we can tell, for the standard of individual representation when a member has a problem.

A year on PFEW now has a coherent range of prime financial policies; guidance on issues such as expenses, the recruitment of internal audit capacity and new budgetary procedures for Branches and HQ departments. The Advisory Group has played a supporting role in shaping these and we have been impressed with the work of the PARC committee which has brought a much-needed focus on financial discipline.

In short PFEW has a lot going for it, but

4. How we see things – still to tackle

With such an understandable commitment around the campaigning agenda there is real risk that the hard yards put in so far on organisational and structural change will dissipate. PFEW cannot ease up and the following are areas where the Advisory Group will focus:

1. To make sure that the financial policies established after hard slog are actually made to work in practise. The Federation cannot allow itself to sit back and believe that because the policies have been written they are working or that the financial challenges it recently faced (on which hung its existence) have been permanently put to bed. An area we also wish to focus on is contract management - how tenders are worked, how suppliers selected and how contracts managed and monitored.
2. In a similar vein the changes made to equality in representative structures is only one step and there is a risk that it is seen to have 'ticked the box' on challenging the uphill struggle for women and those from different ethnic and other minority backgrounds. This too is an area where more will need to be done to ensure change takes root.

3. To be alive to the risks faced by the Federation and that it has strategies in place to tackle these. The Federation does have a risk register, but in our view it needs a sharper focus on the biggies and that there is a 'joined up' way of tackling these. We would put reputational risk high on the register, hence our focus on good governance. This report was written before the cyber-attacks and we will want to help PFEW learn the lessons and embed these.
4. On making sure staffing issues get appropriate attention. We find it hard to understand why there is not a standard method of employment and core conditions whether a staff member works in a Branch or in HQ. There is legal risk here for PFEW, as well as creating a disjointed organisation.
5. On PFEW thinking around succession planning - for representatives and staff - which we believe should be encouraged. A lot of wisdom and knowledge is held by individuals with no apparent way of avoiding the problems that will arise if personal decision or democracy changes the people in those seats.

Over and above these specific areas there is one area that we want to focus on is that of leadership. We have formed 3 impressions of PFEW Leadership which may feel unfair, but we have observed them during the past year too frequently for them not to have some merit.

- Our impression is that PFEW is great at handling crisis and firefighting, but perhaps not as good at setting a strategic direction, mapping the steps to implement the strategy and getting everyone behind the direction.
- Our impression is that blame is often the response when something goes wrong with its bedfellows of gossips and leaks. There seems a lack of corporate leadership with key players burrowing down into their specific area of responsibility and not participating in the collective thinking and responsibility that the role should require.
- Our impression is that steps have been taken to improve how Branches, the Council, the Board and HQ work together, but there remains deep-rooted suspicion between different levels (up/down and lateral). These uncomfortable differences do not seem to be openly discussed but, if not tackled, they will prevent PFEW being the best it can be. An issue we wish to highlight is the sometime awkward relationship between senior staff and elected representatives - not something unique to this membership organisation but one that would benefit from a review of the Head Office structure.

5. Advisory Group – methods of working

As we said at the outset, we are not NEDs in the classic sense, nor do we wish to be. We have no power inside the Federation, nor would we want to have. We are certainly not an appeal body; the Federation has processes in place for dealing with complaints and that is where these should be dealt with.

No power, but we try and have influence by asking questions, bringing in our experiences from other walks of life and holding a mirror up to the Federation and asking, 'is this how you want to be?'. We sense that we are listened to and our views respected. But sometimes we feel the need to press a point.

We meet formally 3 or 4 times a year and in between times we allocate projects to members of the group. In the period covered by this report, we met with the PFEW senior leadership on four occasions, and in addition the AG met by itself for an 'Awayday' to take stock of how further we can assist.

We are contracted to each undertake a maximum of 12 days of work a year and aim to live within that budget by keeping our focus on the areas where we think our input is most important.

We are always looking for effective ways of playing our role. Here are two examples:

1. We have suggested that we undertake a programme of individual discussions with all National Board members to explore their views about the strengths and weaknesses of the Federation and about the next stage of improvement, following the valuable work undertaken after the Independent Review. We are pleased that the Board have agreed, and this work will get underway this summer.
2. Being available to facilitate workshops of PFEW representatives and staff - on the issue of working up a robust and coherent approach to risk for instance.

6. Appreciation

We would like to register our thanks for all those who have given freely of their time. We feel we have a sense of direction, a growing momentum and a respect for the work that Fed members do day in - day out as both police officers and representatives.

From the PFEW Advisory Group, April 2019

