



HM Government

## HM Government Public Appointments



### **Michael Cassidy CBE, Chair of Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, shares his experiences on the responsibilities of a public appointee.**

Michael Cassidy CBE has had parallel careers in law and local government in the City of London - being external lawyer for the UK's largest pension fund for 3 decades and the longest-serving Councillor at Guildhall (for 5 years Leader of the Council).

Latterly he has added a varied portfolio of Non-Executive posts, notably as Chairman of the Barbican Arts Centre, Museum of London, Homerton Hospital in the East End, New London Architecture and now Ebbsfleet Garden City in Kent. He has had Board positions at Crossrail, UBS, the Swiss Bank and British Land.

#### **Spring 2020**

The Government have set out to achieve greater involvement in public appointments from people with disabilities. I am one of those people and you might be too, or know someone who is.

I am going to use this opportunity, and maybe add to it in the future, to share my experiences and give encouragement to other disabled people to think of applying for jobs in the public sector both Central Government and independent bodies linked to Government.

#### **About Michael**

I contracted polio at the age of 2, spent the next 3 years in hospital and have ever since walked with some sort of aid ( now, using a powered wheelchair). So, part of what I can share relates to the simple process of getting about but also about approaching the world of work and the essentials of getting ready for a senior role.

You will see from my biography that I have been fortunate to work in different spheres but always focused on the same motivation, to get things done and to find satisfaction every day. Doing different jobs produces cross-fertilisation of

experience and a problem-solving skill that carries over into the next job – you have probably seen the issue before. In doing this you can forget you are disabled altogether.

My main job now is as Chairman of Ebbsfleet Garden City in North Kent. This Development Corporation exists to build lots of houses and a town centre in old quarry pits next to an International Station on the HS1 route to the Channel. 2000 homes have been built in our first 5 years and all are occupied. The Bluewater Shopping Centre is next door and it is on the A2 trunk road close to Dartford Bridge.

I applied for this job when George Osborne was Chancellor and was interviewed by 3 Ministers and a panel of senior civil servants. This followed a career in the law and local government plus a long spell undertaking a range of non-executive posts in financial firms.

## Responsibilities

What does such a job entail and where might I spark interest in this type of role for you or a friend?

1. You Chair a Board of around 8 and have a staff of 30 or so in a small but modern office on the site itself. Your budget is £300 million. Your key mission is to get a new town of 15,000 built in 15 years.
2. You report to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, specifically the Housing Minister. There are half a dozen or so key civil servants with whom you have regular contact and other Whitehall departments pop-up on individual (usually tricky) matters.
3. Some of your fellow Board members are from the nearby local authorities. Others are drawn from regeneration, engineering, finance and planning backgrounds. You need to lead and cohere this group with a focus on delivery of the Government's priorities.

Although the contract you have may specify a number of days per month, this sort of role needs to be lived and breathed. So you give it what it needs. You are also an ambassador to sell the concept externally and a persuader to get things done. You make sure the basic rules are observed – good behaviour, honesty, fairness, integrity. You try to inspire people to give their best in a common mission.

In return you have the satisfaction of seeing something wonderful happen – a new and splendid entity, in our case a new community in beautiful surroundings and a place where families can grow and thrive.

## Disability

Where does disability come in, you ask? Actually, nowhere because you have been selected to do a job based on your suitability not the fact that you present with a given impediment. The point is, that you do not set out to disqualify yourself because you are disabled. Mental attitude to your job is key to successful delivery because in doing

it you are overcoming whatever outward inhibition might otherwise get in the way.

There are a host of practical ways in which it is possible to give guidance to someone facing this kind of challenge – just getting about, planning visits carefully, avoiding traps, making an impact. For now, be assured that there are answers out there. I want to persuade you that it is worthwhile to make the effort. That satisfaction comes from achievement. That people will thank you for stepping up to the challenge.