

Leading with purpose: Andrew Hulbert on his vision for the IWFM

2 months ago



Following on from our [recent interview](#) with outgoing [IWFM](#) Chair, Mark Whittaker, our editor Claire Middleton recently caught up with his successor, Andrew Hulbert. Here, as the newly appointed Chair of the IWFM, Andrew shares his priorities for the institute, his views on the FM industry's biggest challenges, and what he hopes his tenure legacy will be.

After five years on the board of the Institute of Workplace and Facilities Management, Andrew has stepped into the role of Chair at a pivotal moment for the organisation. With a commercially-driven focus and entrepreneurial background, he brings a fresh perspective to an institute that has recently returned to financial surplus for the first time in seven years.

"I've been on the board for the last five years, so I have some concept of where we are as an institute," Andrew explained. "Those that know me within the board know I have an incredibly driven commercial focus. And that's what I bring to the table."

The institute's improved financial position represents a significant milestone, one that Andrew viewed as essential for future ambitions. "We are back in surplus for the first time in seven years, and that's a really important position for us to be in because our future aspirations for chartership depend on us having positive financials and good cash flows," he stated.

This financial stability has been largely driven by the success of the IWFM Academy and IWFM Direct training programmes. However, Andrew was candid about the work still required. "There is still more work to do on the membership side in terms of retention levels," he said.

A strategic moment

Andrew's appointment coincides with the development of the institute's next five-year strategy. "Our current strategy ends in 2025, so we're now looking at our five-year plan moving forward," he said. "It's very fortuitous timing that I joined at the beginning of that, so I'm able to have some input into what that strategy looks like."

When asked about his number one priority, Andrew was clear: maintaining commercial success whilst revitalising the membership proposition. "We've done an amazing job at getting the training element of it and the IWFM Directs and the Academy. That part is going really well," he said. "We need to just make sure this next strategy focuses on what the value of being an IWFM member is and how we can enhance that as much as possible."

Andrew also praised the diversity and calibre of the executive leadership team. "This is one of the most diverse boards I've ever worked on," he said. "There are some amazing leaders, doing great things."

Addressing the skills shortage

The ever-present challenge of skills shortages in the FM sector remains a concern for all involved. When asked for his thoughts, Andrew said: "I think there are skills available within the sector. It's about how you find the right talent and attract it to yourself."

He pointed to Brexit as a significant setback for the industry. "Brexit really wasn't useful for the FM sector because so many brilliant skills amongst our European friends were lost as they went home," he said.

Andrew's solution focuses on developing talent from within. "For me, it's about growing your own – going back to apprenticeships, back to degree-qualified people and trying and get them in early," he stated. Drawing on his own experience, he added: "I was a graduate who came out of university with no idea about FM. And over the last 15 years, I've just been on this crazy journey that's ended up creating so many opportunities for me."

Andrew's passion for apprenticeships stems from his working-class background. "My dad was a factory worker for 46 years, so that was a real fundamental engineering background," he explained. During his time as CEO at Pareto, the company reached double digits in apprentice numbers despite being a relatively small business.

Andrew highlighted the frustration around unused apprenticeship levy funds. "There are millions, if not billions, of pounds of wasted apprenticeship levy that service providers pay that never gets used. It's such a waste of money because it's just a tax effectively that the government has put on," he said. He noted that some larger FM companies have been lobbying government to allow the levy to be used for salaries rather than just training costs.

Return to office and sustainability concerns

When discussing current industry challenges, Andrew identified two critical areas: the return-to-office dynamic and sustainability targets.

"I see organisations have sort of thrown the dice on the return to the office now," he observed. "They've done all the nice things. The puppy therapy, they've got people coming in to talk, the extra beers on a Thursday, whatever it is. I don't think there's that much tolerance left within organisations to keep

throwing more nice ideas to get people back in."

He suggested the sector has reached a tipping point. "Amongst the people that I talk to, a defined number of days you have to go into the office is starting to increase from what I see," he said. "We're at the top of what organisations are willing to do to get people back in."

On sustainability, Andrew expressed scepticism about net zero commitments. "I am sceptical that all these organisations are going to be net zero by 2050. I just don't think it's going to happen," he stated. "You see slippage on a country level across almost every country, and I think, with Scotland a famous example, many keep moving their targets back."

However, he sees this as an opportunity for FM professionals. "FM could not be better positioned to support organisations in this. Because most likely we're the ones that are confirming the utility bills, we're managing the BMS, we're managing the output. We're just so well positioned, but we keep having to muscle in to make sure that we're the ones that they're talking to about sustainability."

Andrew pointed to Pareto's commitment to achieve net zero by 2027-28 as an example of what's possible. "You need medium-sized businesses and SMEs to be committing to better things than the big businesses are, because that's what innovation looks like from an entrepreneurial perspective," he argued.

Building on strong foundations

Speaking of his predecessor, Mark Whittaker, Andrew described him as "an incredibly competent, calm, strategic individual that can really see the strategy piece."

"What we've achieved under his tenure is brilliant. He will have a positive and lasting legacy for IWFM, least of all for bringing it into a positive position," Andrew said. "He hands the IWFM over in a great state for me to pick up and run with."

A legacy of inclusion

When asked about his own desired legacy, Andrew returned to his core priorities. "I'd love my legacy to be that we make some really impactful strategy choices that last for the next five years or so around what the membership proposition means," he said.

He also emphasised his commitment to inclusive leadership. "I'm known for doing things slightly differently. I have a slightly different voice within the sector. I'm a very social mobility-led and ESG-led leader," he explained. "I want to be known as someone that brought a very inclusive vibe to what we were trying to do, making sure everybody had a voice and that we represented the sector in a very diverse way from the top."

True to his collaborative approach, Andrew is already thinking about succession planning. "I'm already focusing on who we are trying to get ready for the next chapter, when the chairs change again in the future," he said.

In closing, Andrew issued an invitation to IWFM members. "I'm trying to be as immersive as possible. I want to be out there, and I want to chat to people," he said. "I'd love to hear

from people that are delivering it day-to-day around what IWFM means to them. That's important to me."

With financial stability restored, a new five-year strategy on the horizon, and a chair committed to listening and innovation, the IWFM appears poised for an exciting period of growth and development.