CASE STUDY

SUCCESSFUL RECRUITMENT OF 2 SENIOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS MANAGERS FOR SOUTHERN WATER.

- First appointment: closed in six weeks after four months on the market.
- Replacement a year later, following the first appointee's promotion: secured three weeks after the preferred candidate withdrew.

Securing senior public affairs leadership where established suppliers had stalled.

We delivered

Senior Public Affairs Manager x2

Results

6 WEEKS
To secure the first appointment

3 WEEKS
To secure the second appointment, after a late withdrawal

2:1
CV to interview ratio for both roles

A ROLE THAT HAD BEEN ON THE MARKET FOR 4 MONTHS.

Southern Water's Senior Public Affairs Manager position had been on the market for four months before Murray McIntosh was first engaged. The search closed in six weeks, and the appointee spent a year in post before being promoted to Head of Public Affairs and Stakeholder Engagement (a role we did not recruit). Murray McIntosh was then asked again to lead the search for their successor: the preferred candidate withdrew a week before starting, and a second was secured three weeks later. In total, we have recruited two Senior Public Affairs Managers for Southern Water.

A SCARCE TALENT POOL AND A DIFFICULT BRIEF.

Public affairs professionals with a genuine interest in the water sector are scarce, until more insight to candidates can be provided. Its reputation built by public perception puts many strong candidates off before they look closely. Closing that gap takes sector knowledge. Murray McIntosh is a water sector specialist, and our water team places design, delivery and commercial candidates into water companies and the supply chain. Our Water Industry Labour Report was cited in the Cunliffe review, and we are members of British Water, the Institute of Water, Future Water and AquaFed. That depth lets us present the sector positively and show candidates what the role offers. A geographic preference for candidates within 15 miles of Worthing added a further constraint, in a market where the strongest talent was almost entirely London-based.

The post was newly created, and it was not yet clear whether it would become permanent, or a fixed-term. This ambiguity made the opportunity a harder proposition for strong candidates.

Murray McIntosh's recommendation was to broaden the search rather than narrow the brief, opening up the location criteria and drawing in candidates from adjacent, similarly regulated sectors. That approach gave Southern Water access to candidates the wider market had not reached.

A SEARCH THAT LOOKED BEYOND THE OBVIOUS TALENT POOL.

Engaged directly, and retained on an exclusive basis.

Southern Water's Director of Corporate Affairs introduced Murray McIntosh directly and retained the search exclusively, rather than running it alongside multiple suppliers.

- **Location:** accepting London-based candidates commuting to Worthing one day a week, rather than restricting the search geographically.
- **Cross-sector sourcing:** extending the search to candidates with transferable experience in adjacent, similarly regulated industries such as gas.
- **Process:** a two-stage process, an initial online interview followed by an in-person second stage, kept the search moving quickly.
- **Continuity:** when the original appointee was promoted, Murray McIntosh returned to run the search again alongside Southern Water's internal team, and moved quickly to secure a replacement after a late setback.

AN UNCONVENTIONAL PROFILE.

Building trust and responding quickly when circumstances change.

The first search closed in six weeks. The successful candidate presented an unconventional profile, having moved from public affairs into stage management for musical theatre before returning to the profession, a career path unlikely to surface through a conventional water-sector search.

A year later, the appointee's promotion to Head of Public Affairs and Stakeholder Engagement left the role vacant again. The first search had given Southern Water the confidence to return only to Murray McIntosh.

The second appointee was already working in the water sector, giving Southern Water continuity of sector knowledge as it merged public affairs with stakeholder engagement under the newly promoted Head of Public Affairs and Stakeholder Engagement.

Two appointments, a year apart, reflect how Murray McIntosh supports water-sector clients on their hardest appointments: earning direct access through trust rather than volume, and having the ability to respond quickly when circumstances change.

MORE ABOUT MURRAY MCINTOSH.

Founded in 2015, Murray McIntosh was established to offer a research-led, specialist recruitment service. Since then, we've earned a reputation as a trusted partner, working with clients ranging from innovative start-ups to global multinationals to secure the talent needed to deliver.

Our Policy, Public Affairs, Strategic Comms & Economics team deliver highly targeted support, backed by genuine insight and sector knowledge.

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?

If you are planning your next policy, public affairs or communications hire and want to see how this approach could work for you, we would be glad to talk it through.



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