

Sharon White to quit John Lewis after just five years

The £1-million-a-year [boss](#) of [John Lewis](#) surprised the [business](#) world today by saying she intended to stand down at the end of her five-year term in February 2025.

That will make Dame [Sharon White](#), 56, the shortest serving chair in the history of the partnership that also owns [Waitrose](#), a business that has struggled to compete lately with cut price competition from internet players and from supermarket rivals such as [Aldi](#).

The [John Lewis Partnership](#) fell to a [loss](#) of £234 million last year, a plunge into the red that forced it to scrap the annual staff bonus.

That was a serious blow to the 74,000 staff for whom the bonus was both a celebrated annual event and a strong boost to their incomes.

That was only the second time there was no staff bonus since the scheme began in 1953.

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A statement today said: "The chairman of the John Lewis Partnership, Sharon White, has today asked the partnership board to initiate the process to appoint a successor as she enters the latter stages of her five-year term."

That process will be led by Rita Clifton, the deputy chairman and chairman of the nominations committee, and approved by the partnership board.

Although the business describes itself as a democracy, staff do not get a vote on who the new leader will be.

White's appointment was controversial in the first place, given her background as a civil servant and head of the media watchdog Ofcom.

City analysts today were speculating that a more obviously seasoned retailer is a likely replacement.

White said: "Having led the Partnership through the pandemic and the worst of the cost of living crisis, it is important that there is now a smooth and orderly succession process and handover. The Partnership is making progress in its modernisation and transformation with improving results. There is a long road ahead and I am committed to handing on the strongest possible Partnership to my successor."

White survived a vote of confidence among staff earlier this year, but ruffled feathers when she suggested selling off at least part of the business to big investors to raise cash for investment.

JLP appointed Nish Kankiwala as its first ever chief executive in March this year. It is possible that he becomes the new boss, with a part-time chairman atop him like at a more traditional public limited company.

White's relatively short tenure might be taken in the City as a sign that the company is in more trouble than feared. Her

predecessor Charlie Mayfield served two five-year terms.

However, two weeks ago the group reported that half-year losses had narrowed to £59 million and that it expected to return to profit for the full-year.