

Direct Line weighs raid on Aviva's Winslow in hunt for next chief

Direct Line Group, the struggling motor insurer, has approached one of the most senior executives at rival Aviva to become its new boss.

Sky News has learnt that the FTSE-250 group, whose brands include Churchill and Green Flag, has been holding talks with Adam Winslow about taking over as its CEO.

This weekend, insurance industry sources said it was not yet clear whether Mr Winslow would take the role.

It was also unclear whether other candidates remained in talks with Direct Line.

Direct Line has been searching for a new chief since January, when Penny James stepped down in the wake of a string of profit warnings and a decision to axe its dividend.

The company appointed Jon Greenwood, its chief commercial officer, as her interim successor.

Mr Winslow has been with Aviva for less than three years, having joined as CEO of its international operations in January 2021.

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He was then appointed to lead its general insurance business in the UK and Ireland four months later.

His career has also included stints at AIG and Allianz, two big insurance multinationals.

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Mr Winslow now sits on the board of the Association of British Insurers, the main industry trade association.

The search for Ms James's successor began seven months ago when she was effectively forced out as Direct Line's CEO amid growing shareholder unrest.

Danuta Gray, its chair, has been leading the hunt for a permanent replacement.

The UK general insurance market has been hit by inflationary pressures, although Direct Line has performed poorly by comparison with many of its rivals.

In May, the company warned again that the cost of repairing vehicles and of second-hand cars was likely to hit profits this year, with insurance premiums failing to keep pace with those expenses.

The following month, it was ordered by the Financial Conduct Authority to review five years of insurance claims after acknowledging that it had underpaid some policy-holders on written-off vehicles.

More broadly, the City regulator has been scrutinising insurance industry practices more closely in recent months amid concerns about companies' treatment of customers.

Direct Line's shares have fallen by about a quarter over the last 12 months, and the company now has a market capitalisation of just over £2bn.

It has been listed on the London Stock Exchange since 2012, when former owner Royal Bank of Scotland – now NatWest Group – was forced to divest it under the terms of its financial crisis bailout package.

For much of the period since then, it was run by Paul Geddes, a highly regarded businessman who was recently appointed chief executive of the wealth management group Evelyn.

Direct Line is scheduled to report its half-year results on September 7.

On Saturday, Direct Line and Aviva both declined to comment.