

# Guiding performance policy

The councils reserve the right to revise, withdraw or replace the content of this policy at any time and to introduce new policies from time to time to reflect the changing needs of the organisations or new legislation.

## Introduction

1. As an employee of the councils you need direction, feedback and development to succeed in your role. There are various tools in place to ensure that you receive this guidance. Some will depend on the support of your manager, some interventions will require you as an individual to instigate them. Ultimately, your development and your success in your role are not dependent on 'the councils' or your manager. It is up to you as an individual to make the best of your time at work.
2. This policy gives an overview of the support available to all employees, covering ways to help you stretch yourself and also outlining the options if things are not going so well, such as the grievance and disciplinary policy. If you manage a team, you will find it a helpful prompt for what you should be doing as a line manager, although it is designed to assist all employees, regardless of whether you manage people or not.

## This policy gives an overview of the following

- your work and performance
- filling a vacancy
- induction
- probationary periods
- our vision and values
- one to one meetings
- our formal performance review process
- service plans and performance points
- concerns and grievances
- capability and disciplinary
- sickness absence
- Unison
- employee retention and engagement and managers' responsibilities
- work-life balance
- learning and development
- mentoring and coaching
- your future at work and succession planning

- team working
- alternative formats of this policy.

## **Other policies or documents related to or referred to in this policy**

- recruitment and selection policy
- vision and values
- employee conduct policy
- the councils' performance review documentation
- your performance point
- grievance policy
- capability policy
- disciplinary policy
- sickness absence policy
- flexible working policy
- annualised hours policy
- learning and development policy
- volunteering policy
- whistleblowing policy

## **Your work and performance**

3. As an employee of the councils, you are the person who ultimately determines your own performance. You should be customer focused (in relation to both external and internal customers), open to continuous improvement and change, and focussed on the challenge of getting things right first time. Some specific points you should always aim to maintain are:

- delivering the objectives you have agreed with your line manager
- working in line with broader council policies and procedures to deliver your corporate responsibilities (e.g. attending appropriate training, managing budgets effectively, supporting corporate initiatives, responding promptly to questions and queries and taking responsibility for your work).
- discussing your performance with your line manager and accepting constructive feedback (and if you are a line manager, being open to constructive feedback from your team members)
- ensuring equal access to services and information for all
- monitoring your own wellbeing and work-life balance, and asking for support when you need it.

4. If you are a line manager you will need to support your team members with their specific targets but also assist them in a broader sense, helping them to make sure they are clear on how their role fits in what the councils deliver and giving them the right opportunities to develop themselves. Your team members will need the right tools and information to do their jobs and will need you to provide feedback recognising their successes and highlighting the areas they need to develop. With this support in place, your team members will have the right framework to succeed in their roles.

## Filling a vacancy

5. If you are a manager or team leader and you find yourself with a vacancy, either because someone has left their job or because a new role has been created, you need to think about how best to fill this gap. You should not automatically assume that a 'like for like' replacement is the best option. It may be, but equally splitting the responsibilities of the role between existing team members, or replacing the job with a more senior or junior position may be a better alternative.
6. You should ensure that the job description is an accurate reflection of the work required. It may need updating or you may take the opportunity to adapt the responsibilities of the job. When you are thinking about the type of person you will employ, consider what is essential and what is merely desirable in an applicant. You may have a tendency to think that you have to employ someone who has covered all aspects of the role. However, if someone has already got all the experience they may not view the role as a challenge, become bored quite quickly and then leave. A less experienced person with the right attitude may prove a better option in the longer term. As a general rule, the councils value someone's potential and attitude above other factors. If they can grow into the job, they will be more challenged and therefore may potentially keep in the role for longer with their motivation maintained.
7. Depending on the role, an internal appointment or an apprentice may be the best option. Initially an apprentice will need additional support but the right person will relish the opportunity you have given them and will be highly committed to their work.
8. You will also need to recruit the right person to fit into your team. It is not acceptable for someone to be technically competent but a disruptive individual. If you do not think that anyone you have interviewed is the right person, resist the urge to appoint someone. You should not be tempted to recruit the best candidate of a weak group of interviewees. Instead, you should try to re-advertise the role, liaising with your HR representative about whether you should try any other recruitment avenues. When recruiting, keep in mind that the right person may need to have an open-minded approach to change and will need to work to our vision and values (more on these later in this policy).
9. You should work with your HR representative to decide how to advertise a role and what selection process you should follow. The *recruitment and selection policy* will also help you with this.
10. If you are thinking of applying for an internal vacancy you should make sure that it is the right role for you. As you already work at the councils you have an open door to find out more about the position you are interested in. Talk to the recruiting manager or a colleague doing the same or a similar role. Be clear on what your motivation for applying is. Is it a new challenge, a promotion or perhaps a better balance with your commitments outside of work?

## Induction

11. As a manager, you need to ensure that once a new employee starts work they have an in depth induction. They will need this not just to learn the job but also to fit in with their colleagues and know how things work at the councils. If someone leaves within the first few months of joining, this will normally be because of a poor recruitment selection (both on the part of the employer and the individual) or a poor induction.
12. If you are a new starter, our corporate induction will give you an overview of the councils and outline your responsibilities as an employee. The corporate induction is compulsory, consists of the modules below and is completed within your first six months working at the councils.
  - corporate induction (an introduction to the councils)
  - freedom of information and data protection acts
  - safeguarding
  - valuing equality and diversity
  - health and safety awareness
  - fire safety awareness
  - objective setting workshop
  - customer service.

If you are a line manager, you will also need to attend:

- objective setting for line managers
  - managing for customer service excellence
  - health and safety for managers
  - risk assessment for managers
  - our management development programme.
13. The bulk of your learning will be 'on the job' and will take place in your team. You will be given an induction form which lists all the points you should cover in your initial time with the councils. It is up to you to ensure that you have gained all the knowledge you need, although your manager or your colleagues will need to help you with some aspects of your induction. If you do not feel that everything has been covered or wish to focus more on a particular area you should feed this back to your manager or to the HR team.

## Probationary periods

14. If you are new to the council you will normally have a six month probationary period, and this timescale will enable you to learn the role. At the start of your probation your manager will set expectations and targets for your first few months.
15. If you are a manager you should review your new team member's performance during their probationary period. You should ideally have monthly 1-1 meetings with them to review their progress using their job description and / or any objectives set at the start

of their employment. As a minimum you should review their performance after two and four months. Any objectives should be set out clearly so that they are fully aware of what they need to achieve to pass their probation. The meetings will also provide suitable evidence for your team member passing their probationary period.

16. If, as a manager, you have concerns about a team member's performance during their probationary period, you should raise the issues as soon as you become aware of them. You should set clear targets for improvement during probation, agreeing these with the individual, noting them and regularly reviewing them. If there is a possibility that an individual may not pass their probation and therefore that their employment would be terminated, this should be explained to them as soon as you identify this as a possible outcome. You do have the option of extending a probationary period, usually for an additional three months, although this possibility should be raised with your team member before any end of probation review. There may be particular circumstances that support extending probation rather than terminating a contract after six months, for example if your colleague has a disability, is returning to work after time away, is new to work or has not worked in a similar role or environment before.
17. If you do not pass your probationary period and wish to appeal, you should follow the councils' *grievance policy*.

## **Our vision and values**

18. The councils' vision and values provide a clear, concise overview of the approach you are required to take with your customers and your colleagues and are expected to maintain at all times. The councils' vision states that:

'We are seen as being customer focused, approachable and business-like. We are honest and open, and are renowned for providing high-quality, cost effective services'.

19. The values are listed below:

- We act with integrity and show respect
- We are all accountable
- We are passionate about our business
- We strive for simplicity
- We love success.

20. The values also have supporting bullet points that help demonstrate how to achieve them and you will see them on the intranet and posted around the councils' buildings.

21. In line with the councils' vision, trust, openness and consistency are key to your working relationships. If someone feels they can be honest with you and can trust you then any minor issues or differences in approach are likely to be quickly resolved rather than escalating. If you are consistent in your approach with different colleagues you will build this trust and this will form the basis of a positive working environment.

22. Transparency is also critical to the councils on a corporate level. As a public body, we are particularly open to scrutiny from the public and we need to be careful not to inadvertently break the rules. The *employee conduct* policy may prove helpful if you find yourself in a sensitive situation and are not certain how to manage it. For example, the policy covers what you should do if you are offered a gift or if you have some personal involvement with a planning application in the districts. If you are concerned about the integrity of a particular practice or process you may refer to the *whistleblowing policy*.

## **One to one meetings**

23. You should have regular communication with your manager and you should be able to readily approach them if you have any queries or concerns. If you work around the districts, rather than being office based, this may prove more difficult but you should be clear on the best way to communicate with each other – is it by phone, email or in person or probably a combination of all three?

24. Your manager should have regular one to one meetings with you. These are an opportunity to catch up on your current work but also to consider longer term projects and goals. They should be held in private, away from your desk, to give you or your manager the chance to raise any sensitive issues. They should ideally be held once a month, or at a minimum of once every six weeks. Some services or teams have templates for one to one meetings which you should use if applicable to ensure consistency within your area.

## **Our formal performance review process**

25. In addition to regular one to one meetings, we also have a formal annual performance review. This is held in quarter one of the financial year (in April, May or June). Your performance review provides an opportunity for you and your manager to review the work you have completed in the previous financial year and to look forward to your forthcoming objectives in line with your service's and team's targets. It is also a platform for you to discuss your personal development and goals and for you and your manager to agree the support that you need to keep your job interesting and challenging in the next year.

26. Your performance review is essentially a more structured one to one meeting. You should not view it as an opportunity to spring a surprise on your manager (or vice versa)! It is likely that any points discussed will have been referred to previously, although you may cover them in more depth. As long as you have had regular one to one meetings, your performance review discussion should prove straightforward for both you and your manager.

27. In addition to your annual performance review meeting, you will also have an interim review. This will take place in November or December and will enable you and your manager to review your progress on your objectives to date.

## Service plans and performance points

28. Your personal objectives need to be tied into the wider objectives of the councils. There is a corporate plan that has targets for a five year period and you may find that your targets feed directly into this. There are also service plans which you will refer to. These underpin the corporate plan and enable each service to record their objectives each year. You are likely to have specific targets on the service plan. These will be added for the start of the financial year in March, although they may be updated or added to throughout the course of the year. At a minimum, you should review your service plan targets at the end of each quarter.
29. You are also likely to have a team or service performance point. This is a board on which team or service objectives are shown in an easy to read format. Your manager may refer to your performance point in team meetings or run through it with you on an individual basis.
30. It is essential that your objectives and targets are clear and that you are fully aware of them. You also need to know how you are progressing against them. If you do not know, make sure you discuss this with your manager.

## Concerns and grievances

31. If you have a concern about your work, your relationship with a colleague or any other aspect of being at work you should not keep it to yourself but should discuss it with your manager. If you do not feel your manager has addressed it, or your concern is about your manager, you should try getting feedback or advice through one of the avenues listed below:
- a colleague or friend who you feel you trust
  - your manager's manager or your head of service
  - a union representative (if you are a member of the union)
  - a member of the HR team
  - your coach or mentor if you have one
  - our employee assistance programme (available to offer you help on a wide range of issues)
32. If you have an issue with a colleague that you do not feel you are able to deal with through the avenues listed above, the HR team can arrange for an external trained mediator to meet with you both to try and broker a resolution. You also have the option of writing a formal grievance. This is covered in the *grievance policy*. The need to resort to the grievance policy is rare, most issues are resolved informally, but it is important that you have this route open to you to ensure that any concerns can be fully reviewed.

## Capability and disciplinary

33. If you are not performing your role to the required standard, there may be various reasons for this, including a lack of training, illness, a heavy workload or things happening in your personal life that are affecting you. Your performance may temporarily dip due to any of these factors and it is important that you are open with your manager about any reasons for a drop in your usual standards. If they are not aware of the circumstances they cannot help you. If they know what is going on they may be able to offer a solution, such as additional training or a temporary change of working pattern.
34. If your performance is below standard for a longer term period, your manager will need to address this. As well as looking out for your interests, they also need to consider team objectives and the workload of your colleagues and it is not acceptable if you are not performing as expected and disproportionately impact on your colleagues. Initially, your manager will usually aim to address your performance informally. They should make sure that your objectives are clear and monitor your progress against them in your regular one to one meetings.
35. If your performance does not improve, your manager may need to call a formal disciplinary or capability investigation or hearing. The processes for these are covered in the *disciplinary* and *capability policies*. If a lack of performance or a breach of policy or rules is viewed as within your control it would be reviewed under the *disciplinary policy*. If it is accepted that your poor performance is not within your control, for example due to ongoing illness, it would be covered under the *capability policy*. If you are subject to a disciplinary investigation, it is important to keep in mind that an investigation does not automatically lead to a disciplinary process. You should co-operate fully with an investigation as this will help expedite the process and it will be in your interest to conclude matters quickly.
36. If the outcome of a formal disciplinary meeting is that your performance does need to improve, you may be given a formal sanction or warning (in a case of gross misconduct you could potentially be dismissed from your job but if this is a possibility it will be made clear to you before any disciplinary hearing). If you do receive a warning relating to your performance, you are also likely to be given a formal performance improvement plan (sometimes called a PIP). This would cover the areas you need to address and will act as a transparent way of recording what you need to do to rectify your poor performance. The PIP would be used as a basis on how to measure your progress if a further formal disciplinary meeting was arranged.
37. If the outcome of a formal capability meeting is that your performance needs to improve you would be given a review period within which to reach the required standard (normally two months). At the end of the review period you would either be informed that you have now met the required standard or that you will have a second and final hearing. The *capability policy* covers the full process.



## Sickness absence

38. If you are unable to attend work due to illness you should ensure that you contact your manager within one hour of your usual start time (or as soon as it is reasonable to do so) on the first day of your sickness absence, providing the reason for your absence and the likely date of your return. If you are off work for a number of days you should keep your manager informed of your progress.
39. The councils' *sickness absence policy* contains full details of how sickness is treated. If you have an illness or condition that you feel your work is contributing to you should inform your manager as soon as possible. They may be able help by arranging a risk assessment or by amending some of your responsibilities or workload. They may also be able to contact the HR team to arrange for you to see an occupational health specialist who could potentially recommend some adjustments, for example a more supportive chair or specialist VDU equipment.
40. It is your responsibility as an employee to responsibly manage any illness or condition. If you are off sick, consider whether your illness is the genuine reason you are unable to come to work, rather than an excuse that is potentially surmountable. If you are returning to work after illness, a phased return, involving a temporarily lighter workload or shorter hours, could assist you in returning sooner.
41. Conversely, if you are genuinely ill, your manager should not be putting unfair pressure on you to return to work. If you return to work too early, you may not be fully recovered and find your condition deteriorates again. It is also up to you to manage your health on an on-going basis, and to balance your commitments to work with your personal responsibilities. Your work should not be contributing to ill health, but equally your work should not suffer due to you not taking responsibility for your lifestyle.

## Unison

42. All employees have the option of joining Unison, our recognised trade union. Unison can help you with any difficulties you have at work through a number of employees who are trained union representatives and / or by offering external advice. Unison also acts as the formal body that the councils negotiate with about new practices, policies or salary increases. If you join the union you will also be able to influence these negotiations.
43. Union representatives are able to take 'reasonable' time to fulfill their responsibilities. Several named roles on the Unison executive committee are more specifically allotted five hours per week to carry out their work. If you are a union representative, you need to strike a balance between carrying out your day job and fitting in your Unison commitments. You should inform your manager if you become aware that a particular case or requirement means you will be dedicating more time than usual to your Unison work. Your manager should recognise that the union plays an important corporate role and should not obstruct you from carrying out your Unison duties. However, on occasion, they may legitimately ask you to re-arrange your Unison commitments or

pass them to a union colleague if there is an unavoidable short-term clash of priorities with your day job.

## **Employee retention and engagement and managers' responsibilities**

44. It is important that you enjoy your job and work well with your manager and colleagues. If you do, you are likely to stay with the councils. If not, you may be looking for a job elsewhere. If you are not happy with some aspect of your work tell your manager or another colleague who may be able to help resolve your issue. It is preferable that you try to change things rather than walk away from them. If you think that you need a new challenge but cannot see any possibility of this, talk to your head of service – maybe they will know of a potential opportunity that you are unaware of.

45. If you are a manager, keep in mind that the main reason people leave their job is because of their manager! There is a phrase that people leave their bosses, not their jobs. Among the main reasons for this are:

- people feel overloaded with too many responsibilities, too much work or unrealistic deadlines
- they feel micro-managed
- they feel that their manager is never around or does not give them the time they need
- they do not feel their manager is consistent, they think that their manager has favourites or simply does not manage colleagues who are difficult to work with or who are not pulling their weight
- their manager does not take an interest in their career or try to help them with it
- their manager spends more time talking about themselves than about them
- their manager repeatedly changes objectives or targets for them or their team
- they do not feel their manager gives them recognition for the work they do.

46. As a manager you have a responsibility for your team's work getting done. You also have a responsibility to the individuals in your team, to help them develop in their current role and potentially help enable them to be ready for a future role. If someone leaves your team because they are unhappy or unfulfilled that is a failure. If they leave because you have helped them develop to the point where they can take on a new and more challenging role that is a success.

## **Work-life balance**

47. It is important that you feel you have a suitable balance between your work life and external commitments. Subject to the particular demands of your role, you have scope to work flexibly. You may have annualised hours as part of your employment terms and conditions and this structure assists with you delivering work during busy periods and taking time back when it is quieter.

48. The *flexible working* and *annualised hours policies* provide information to help you manage other commitments around your work.

## Learning and development

49. How you learn and develop in your role lies with you. If you feel you would like to gain more knowledge in a particular area then you should talk to your manager about how to do this. Even if you have been in your job for a long time you will still learn, whether this be knowledge that will help you in your current role or a future position. When you gain new learning you should be clear on how best to apply what you have learned to your work. You should also consider whether it will be beneficial to share your new skills or information with your colleagues to help them in their jobs.

50. The council is able to provide a range of learning to help you. Some of this will be in the form of compulsory training courses that you will need to attend to fulfill our health and safety requirements or to pick up knowledge that we consider essential to you. Other ways of learning and developing are listed below:

- professional training requirements. Some of you will have these requirements as part of your role and the councils may be able to help with funding or finding a suitable course.
- corporate training courses. There are a wide range of courses available that you may sign up to (subject to agreement from your manager). Some examples include:
  - effective meetings and chairing skills
  - effective personal impact
  - effective report writing
  - handling angry customers
  - interview skills
  - IT skills
  - plain English workshop
  - presentation skills
  - project management
  - time and workload management
  - achieving work-life balance
- personality profiles. These are psychometric tests that will give a summary of how you see yourself and / or how others see you.
- Self-development courses. We can provide teach yourself and development courses (usually computer based) or books that will help you reflect on and improve your performance at work
- Mentoring or coaching (see below)
- Team related learning (see below)

51. Your learning and development is likely to involve a combination of on the job learning, classroom based courses and computer based help. Different people have different preferred styles of learning and understanding the best way you learn will help you to gain the knowledge you need.

52. The *learning and development policy* contains more details about the assistance that the councils can give you with your ongoing development.

## **Mentoring and coaching**

53. You may find that a mentor or coach would help you with your current work, or potentially prepare you for future changes or your next job. The roles of each are:

### **A mentor**

54. This is someone who will help you with queries about your job or how things work at the councils. You would be able to put specific scenarios to them and they will give advice on how you could deal with the situations. They are normally someone in a more senior position than you who understands the job you do and the organisation you work in. Therefore they are usually, although not always, a more experienced colleague also working at the councils. You can discuss specific current work issues or longer term career goals with them.

### **A coach**

55. A coach tends to work with you to focus on a specific work issue where an improvement is needed. They may not understand your job or organisation and unlike a mentor they will not give you specific answers but will instead ask questions which will help you narrow your options and come to your own conclusions. A coach will usually (although not always) be someone external to the councils.

56. The HR team can arrange mentoring or coaching. Usually this will be with your manager's support.

## **Your future at work and succession planning**

57. We are all different in relation to what we want from work. You may require consistent hours and a role you are familiar with in order to keep your job straightforward and balance it with personal commitments. Conversely, you may be looking to take on new projects or want to have a more challenging role. Whatever your focus, you should share it with your manager and work with them to help you fulfill it. You may discuss your aspirations in your performance review, in one to one meetings or at any other time you feel is appropriate. Be realistic about what you can achieve, what other experience or knowledge you may need and take advice from as many different sources as you can!

58. If you are a manager you should be aware of what else your team members want from their work at the councils (what they genuinely want, not what you think they would like!). If they have a relevant and achievable goal you should work with them on it, ensuring that they have access to appropriate development and the time to follow this through. It may be that they are capable of gaining a promotion or making a beneficial move to a different position at a similar level. If they achieve this, it offers an opportunity for someone else to step into their job. As a manager, you should also think about your own role. If you were to leave, is there someone in your team or elsewhere in the councils who could potentially fill it? In other words, do you have what is known

as a succession plan? If there is someone who could step into your role, what extra development can you provide that would help them fulfill this potential?

## **Team working**

59. Feeling part of a team is another important aspect to enjoying your job. If you are working towards a shared goal you are likely to feel more supported than if you are working independently. Team meetings are central to knowledge sharing within your team and should take place monthly. In addition you may also have meetings about your performance point or a specific project that the team is working on.
60. A key part of everyone's role is to contribute to your team and to team meetings. You should take a positive and constructive approach, supporting colleagues within your immediate team and across the councils. You are also expected to contribute ideas to team discussions about objectives and continuous improvement. You are able to help influence how things are done, so make the most of this opportunity.
61. As a manager you need to keep in mind how your team is working together and balance this with your focus on objectives and on individuals. If your team is not gelling or if cliques form this may leave some members feeling isolated and less committed to their jobs. It could potentially lead to your team members shifting their focus from their work to their poor relationship with a colleague or colleagues, resulting in energy being wasted on issues not related to the actual work that needs to be completed. Therefore it is crucial that you deal with any dissent immediately, do not let negative sentiments fester. Not everyone will agree with everyone else all the time but if you have an open dialogue in your team then any disagreements can be resolved constructively. The key point is that your team members respect each other and each other's views.

## **Team building**

62. The councils have run various corporate programmes to enable teams to improve as a group. Some of these have been around teams delivering their work in the most efficient way. Some have focused more on individuals' different working styles and how team members can relate to each other and recognise others' preferred ways of working.
63. You also have scope to arrange team building exercises or a team building day. These may take place at work, potentially looking at the distribution of objectives or progress on specific projects. HR can also support your team in terms of further analysing the working styles of team members and how individuals in your team can best work together. The use of psychometric tests and other tools will help with this.
64. The councils also provide a small budget to facilitate a team building off-site or away day each year. This does not have to be directly work related but should be aimed at a whole team, with the principle that members will get to know each other better and this will assist with co-operation at work. Your head of service will be able to give you more details. The councils also offer employees up to two volunteering days each year, to

support voluntary community work in the districts, and you may choose to volunteer as a team. The *volunteering policy* provides more details about this.

### **Alternative formats of this policy**

65. Alternative formats of this publication can be made available on request. These include large print, braille, audio, email, easy read and other languages. Please contact the HR team on 01491 823424.

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