

Resources Department
Human Resources
Newington Barrow Way

Report of: Executive Member for Finance, Planning and Performance

Meeting of: Executive

Date: 23 March 2023

Subject: Response to the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee – new approach to Performance Development

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. In March 2022, the Policy and Performance Scrutiny committee received a report from HR (Human Resources) and the Policy and Performance working group about Islington staff performance development. The report provided feedback from the Research and Discovery phases and set out next steps for developing a new approach to performance development.
- 1.2. Two recommendations from the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee were received and this document reports back on the activity that has taken place in relation to the recommendations. Please see section four of this report.
- 1.3. This report also provides a summary of the Council's new approach to performance development.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. To note the responses to recommendations made by the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee set out in section four of this report

3. Background

- 3.1. In 2019, the council made the decision to remove the annual appraisal and move to a different model of performance development for staff called 'Quality Conversations' (QC).

All formal meetings and requirements for any ratings or structured documentation were removed although example templates and guidance for conversations was provided.

- 3.2. In December 2021, a joint working group between members of the Policy & Performance Scrutiny Committee and officers was initiated as part of the work plan to:
 - 3.2.1 Review the existing approach to staff performance development, including areas of good internal practice
 - 3.2.2 Benchmark and explore good performance and career practice
 - 3.2.3 Make recommendations for improving the performance development framework and approach to career development
- 3.3. The discovery and research phase in early 2022 included surveys and detailed focus groups with a broad and diverse range of staff as well as a deep dive of staff survey results on performance. Insights from the research showed that the current approach to performance development (QC) had not achieved what it set out to do; staff reported that performance was not being managed well and high performers were not being recognised or valued for the work that they were doing.
- 3.4. The following were identified as suggestions of what could be done differently from the focus groups:
 - 3.4.1 Islington's values need to be embedded
 - 3.4.2 Need a more holistic approach – including talent management and career development
 - 3.4.3 Needs to be more strategic – objectives to tie up with Islington's organisational priorities and wider aspirations, e.g., reducing inequalities, net zero carbon
 - 3.4.4 Input into performance development from people apart from manager, i.e., 360
 - 3.4.5 Performance conversations need to hold people accountable – QC take place and often nothing happens
 - 3.4.6 Could frequency be flexible: QC every 4-6 weeks are too 'time-consuming', particularly for managers with lots of staff, especially non-office-based
 - 3.4.7 Needs to be a stronger, clearer, more consistent framework
 - 3.4.8 New approach needs to be embedded with training for managers and staff
 - 3.4.9 A platform to record conversations would ensure a more consistent approach
 - 3.4.10 Needs to be a quality check process – nobody checks QC completion or effectiveness
- 3.5. Findings were shared back with staff, trade unions and the Corporate Management Board as well as the Policy & Performance Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.6. Trade union colleagues had previously shared concerns about the impact of a failure to tackle poor performance on the workload of their members. When presented with the initial research, their view was that a uniformed approach is important as some management identify quick chats as QC. In addition, they emphasised the importance of the fact that not all staff have IT access.
- 3.7. They are also concerned in some areas about the quality of management and would welcome more focus on managers being 'appraised' for their management skills,

including the introduction of 360 feedback. They also support better training for managers in 'crucial conversations' feeling that early honest conversations about performance concerns prevent issues from escalating.

- 3.8. They have expressed support for the focus being on performance development, supporting staff to achieve their potential to deliver better services for residents. They recognise that it is a small percentage of staff whose performance needs to be more actively managed for which the council has a performance improvement procedure.
- 3.9. Committee Members commended the report and resolved that the recommendations be adopted and referred to the Executive for consideration.
- 3.10. They recognised that data was not captured on QC but welcomed the fact that in future, performance would be reportable via dashboards.
- 3.11. They noted that QC timescales varied between staff and managers and there were issues with whether conversations were conducted less formally in some jobs. Members expressed the view that this should be looked at as ideally conversations needed to take place every 4/6 week.
- 3.12. It was agreed that officers would go away to design a scheme taking account of the discovery phase and review of modern schemes of performance development within and beyond the sector to accompany the Scrutiny recommendations. A summary of the new approach is outlined in section 4.6 of this report.

4. Responses to Recommendations

- 4.1. The Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee set out two recommendations. Responses to each are set out below.
- 4.2. **Recommendation one:** Council officers to make sure that the current approach to performance development is being utilised by managers with recent improvements fully embedded. A communications campaign from April 2022 onwards will reinforce messages linking Quality Conversations to objectives and development planning for 2022/23, referring managers to a curated selection of supporting development resources and tools, linked to our CARE values.
- 4.3. **Response:** Throughout 2022 we used our internal communications channels to remind people about QC and the updated supporting documents (objective setting and development plans). We agreed with CMB (Corporate Management Board) that a deadline would be set (end of June 2022) for all staff to have objectives and development plans completed as part of a QC, confirmation that the objectives/development were agreed on time was managed locally in each Directorate. We updated our QC training offer to include all the updated resources and messages. All the new resources are linked to our CARE values and our izzi and staff web page content houses all the information in once place.
- 4.4. **Recommendation two:** Staff performance and development continue to be reviewed, with the aim being to design, deliver and evaluate a new approach which is fit for

purpose for a diverse population of roles and work styles through trialling approaches with different work groups.

- 4.5. **Response:** Our new approach to performance development is called Islington Check Ins. A summary of the model is listed below. The approach provides a consistent level of management practice across the Council. It sets clear expectations for what managers need to do for their team members. We are also being flexible with Check Ins, as long as the basic requirements are met. Working with CMB, their DMTs (Departmental Management Team) and our HR colleagues, we will ensure the development required for managers and staff are as tailored and targeted as possible. Check Ins need to be meaningful and effective, and we can only achieve that by making them a useful resource for managers and staff.

New approach to performance development

- 4.6. The proposed new approach to performance development focuses on driving and sustaining high individual performance across the council whilst working towards our Islington Together 2030 strategy and delivering excellence for our residents and staff.
- 4.7. The CARE values were introduced in 2020 and are at the heart of the way we behave to deliver the best services for our residents. The CARE framework describes desired behaviour and therefore underpins the proposed approach.
- 4.8. The new scheme, to be known as Islington Check Ins, will have a focus on the staff member's performance and development, creating a bespoke approach that ties into organisational priorities and the CARE values. This approach ensures that expectations of performance are clear and that there is a robust framework for managers to use to have effective performance related conversations.
- 4.9. Check Ins will be held monthly using a 'you, goals, grow' model to ensure discussions about personal wellbeing, delivery of priorities, goals/objectives and personal development are covered.
- 4.10. Check Ins Reviews will take place at four-month intervals in July, November, and March to ensure the continuity of the conversation throughout the year and to allocate staff a performance status that is always current, rather than an annual rating:
- Red - not performing well
 - Amber - some strengths, with areas for improvement
 - Green - performing well
- 4.11. Statuses will take a 'whole job' approach: general performance in the role, demonstration of CARE values and delivery of specified objectives where appropriate.

4.12. Implementation and Timelines

- 4.13. We have communicated about our new approach to performance development since the start of January 2023.

- 4.14. Below is an overview of the timeline for the next steps:
- 4.14.1 January 2023: Launch new approach via comms, team meetings, DMTs and staff events
 - 4.14.2 February - April 2023: Rollout of mandatory workshop for anyone who manages people (ongoing for new managers) and workshops available for staff on how to get the best out of Check Ins (April 2023) along with ongoing and targeted communications.
 - 4.14.3 Pilot workshops have been delivered (or are booked in) for CMB, Unions, HR and offered to staff forums. We have also agreed to work with CMB members on tailoring workshops for certain parts of their services, most often our managers of resident facing teams.
 - 4.14.4 April 1st, 2023, Islington Check Ins officially go live.
 - 4.14.5 July 2023 will be the first official Check In review. We will run a campaign in the lead up to July with any additional support resources and messages required. Especially if any pay, reward, and recognition schemes have been agreed, then these will need to be communicated effectively.
 - 4.14.6 As discussed with Union colleagues, we will be communicating that we are reverting to pre-2019 when we did not automatically process increments for those staff still eligible (approx. 950). Increments are awarded based on performance discussed in Check Ins and Check Ins review and the individuals' current status.
- 4.15. Once we have launched the new approach to performance development, we will continue to deliver training workshops for new starters and managers and staff that require extra support. As soon as someone attends the workshop, they can start using Check Ins and Check Ins Reviews. This will be supplemented by our existing package of development around coaching skills, giving, and receiving feedback and having difficult conversations.
- 4.16. To successfully embed this approach to performance development, the process will be iterative, and feedback will be continuously sought to make improvements as we launch in 2023 including close work with front-line services to ensure the scheme works well for all different types of workers, especially our front-line staff.
- 4.17. Once the overall framework is in place, we will be looking to build on it with a new approach to talent management, career progression and succession planning as well as improving data capture and reporting.

5. Implications

5.1. Financial Implications

5.2.1 Further work is underway to explore the possibility of introducing a reward and recognition component to Check Ins Reviews.

5.2.2 There will be some cost savings from not awarding increments to staff who are rated as 'red – not performing well' which can be used to off-set costs of any other reward and recognition schemes.

5.2. Legal Implications

5.2. The Council's contracts of employment provides that subject to satisfactory performance, employees will receive annual increments within the grade of their post. The manner in which satisfactory performance is assessed is not prescribed within the contract. This assessment will need to follow a fair process and with a consistent application.

5.3. Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030

5.3. There are no environmental implications to consider.

5.4. Equalities Impact Assessment

5.4. Gathering equalities data in relation to the current status of our staff is essential. Now we have agreed a model we are currently exploring the best way to capture this data, hopefully on our existing MyHR system. For our launch we are providing a range of applications/formats (Word/Excel/Forms) for managers to capture notes from Check Ins and the status from Check Ins reviews. It is a core ambition to capture and analysis meaningful data to help our staff reach their full potential and deliver excellent services for residents.

Final report clearance:

Authorised by: Executive Member for Finance, Planning and Performance

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