

29th March 2022

PROPOSED NEW WLGA PERFORMANCE REVIEW FRAMEWORK

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to request Member support for the introduction of a new performance review framework for all WLGA staff with effect from April 2022 onwards.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Association's business planning and performance management processes are currently being reviewed and incremental improvements made to coincide with the wider preparations being put in place to support Member organisations following the May 2022 local government elections.
2. For example, some of the key responsibilities for the newly appointed Head of Workforce & Executive Business Manager include -
 - Establishing an SMT / WLGA Forward Work Programme with external and internal business matters being progressed in a systematic and timely way
 - Establishing organisation-wide business planning and performance management systems to ensure that WLGA strategies, policies and plans are developed and implemented in a co-ordinated and effective way
 - Integrated organisational performance arrangements - at individual, service and organisational levels - to be based on clear agreed outcomes
 - Governance arrangements to be improved and sustained, particularly in terms of business efficiency, risk management and reputation
3. As has recently been reported to the WLGA's Audit Committee, an external review of the WLGA's Risk Register is currently being facilitated by a senior officer from Cardiff Council, leading to improved risk management arrangements being established.
4. A comprehensive package of agile working arrangements was introduced in September 2021; these have been designed to complement the move to new office accommodation at One Canal Parade. Agile working necessarily requires regular discussions at individual and team levels about how best the Association's business needs and priorities can be delivered, and from where, with a particular focus on forward planning; safeguarding personal wellbeing is also important.
5. A review of corporate support staff activity has recently been undertaken with the aim of better deploying and unifying the work of some of the staff currently engaged

on corporate support activities. One product of this review is the re-allocation of some staffing resources to corporate business management activities.

6. Within this context, it is appropriate that a framework for performance review at the level of each individual employee is designed and put in place at the earliest opportunity to further integrate individuals' work activities with organisational priorities and to support personal wellbeing.
7. This report provides details of the performance review framework which it is proposed be rolled out to all WLGA employees in two phases over the next six months.

CURRENT POSITION

8. A majority of the Association's employees are currently engaged in regular discussions with their respective managers regarding their activities at work, alongside regular team meetings. However, some of the arrangements which have been identified are not sufficiently comprehensive, robust and/or timely to ensure that all necessary work-related and personal wellbeing issues are addressed systematically across the whole of the Association.

PROPOSALS

9. In addition to an extensive research exercise, feedback has been sought from managers within the Association about current and proposed new performance review arrangements, focussing on -
 - (a) ensuring that all employees participate in regular and effective discussions with their manager about work-related and personal wellbeing matters, and
 - (b) broadly scoping the range of topics which might best be considered during these discussions
10. There are many options available in respect of performance review / appraisal systems. What is most important, though, is that the features of the performance review process selected for the WLGA complement, and are compatible with, the organisation's culture and business processes.
11. Lengthy in-depth annual appraisals have fallen into disrepute at most organisations; today's fast-moving workplace environment requires a focus on the future, on the support required by individuals to carry out their work activities and on maintaining a suitable balance between business needs and employees' wellbeing. The proposed new WLGA performance review framework has been designed with these features in mind.
12. Senior WLGA colleagues have been consulted about -
 - 12.1 **Process** - "one size fits all" vs. flexible approach vs. minimum standards
A "light touch" and flexible approach is favoured by all consultees, underpinned by some minimum standards. It is agreed that regular meaningful conversations

between staff and managers are much more important than a focus on completing paperwork.

12.2 Frequency of discussions - weekly vs. intermediate vs. annual frequencies

An approach based on continuous timely regular conversations about work-related and personal wellbeing matters is favoured, rather than a performance assessment based on single annual appraisal interview.

Formal performance review discussions will take place on a quarterly basis, ie on four occasions each year.

The quarterly performance review discussions will supplement other regular discussions - which take place during the intervening period/s - regarding work-related and personal wellbeing matters. It is important that all such matters are progressed in a timely manner - when they need to be discussed - and should not be unnecessarily delayed.

Managers will be mandated to ensure that all quarterly performance review discussions are suitably prioritised and diarised. The timing of the discussions, though, will be a matter for managers and individual employees to agree.

12.3 Focus - looking back vs. looking forward

There is a clear consensus that the predominant focus during performance reviews should be on looking forward at what needs to be achieved and on removing any barriers to success.

The balance between looking back and looking forward will change from time to time. This will be jointly decided by individual employees with their manager.

12.4 Review topics - personal vs. team vs. organisational

Each quarterly performance review discussion will take place on the basis set out below; the amount of time spent discussing each topic will be for individual employees and managers to decide on a discussion by discussion basis -

A. Reflection on the last 3 months

- What work has gone well during the last 3 months?
- Has there been any key learning about how to do, or not do, things in future?

B. A look forward to the next 3 months

- What are the key work objectives for the next 3 months?
- What challenges / difficulties may need to be addressed?
- What support is needed from (your) manager, or others?

C. Personal wellbeing

- Are home, remote and/or office working arrangements going well? Are any changes needed?

- Are working hours and annual leave being managed well? Are any actions needed?
- Are catch up conversations outside formal performance review discussions sufficient?
- Is any assistance needed to support (your) wellbeing?

D. Personal Development

- What skills and/or experience should be developed over the coming months?

E. Additional discussion topics

- Discuss, and agree any actions arising from, any service / organisational topics discussed over and above the matters referred to above; for grant funded employees, this will, eg, be an opportunity to keep future funding plans under continuous review

F. Any Agreed Actions

- review previously agreed actions and confirm new actions agreed

It has been suggested by UNISON during the consultation period that some employees might welcome the opportunity - at the end of each year - to look back at achievements over the last 12 months to identify and recognise success and to discuss career development / planning. This is an option which has been adopted and incorporated into the planned new process.

12.5 Annual performance assessments - based on business objectives and/or formal competency rankings

It is **not** considered necessary for the Association to establish a formal employee assessment mechanism which ranks individuals according to pre-determined categories, eg excellent, good, satisfactory, some improvement required etc.

Likewise, it is **not** planned that any links be established between performance and pay.

12.6 Performance concerns - in a small number of instances, concerns may exist about an employee's performance. Experience indicates that many such performance issues can be addressed informally if they are addressed sufficiently early. This approach is strongly supported. Details of concerns and consequential actions will need to be recorded and followed up at suitably regular intervals during the subsequent review period.

Ultimately, if a manager's concerns about an individual's performance are not addressed, the formal stage/s of the Association's *Managing Unsatisfactory Performance Policy and Procedure* will need to be initiated -

"A decision to initiate the formal stages of this policy and procedure should not constitute a surprise to the employee who should already have been made aware by his/her manager about any issues of unsatisfactory performance".

12.7 Documentation - minimal vs. comprehensive

Traditional appraisal interviews have understandably been criticised for creating too much paperwork. The planned quarterly performance review discussions will assist employees and managers alike to focus on conversations rather than the paperwork.

A pro-forma (see **Appendix A of Policy**) has been developed for use as a framework for quarterly performance review discussions based on the contents of paragraph 12.4 above. This pro-forma can be adapted, as necessary, to accommodate any existing good practice or any additional requirements.

The facility exists for notes of quarterly performance review discussions to be filed on an employee's personal record on the BreatheHR. The minimum requirement is for this to happen in relation to each quarterly performance review discussion; it will be for managers and employees to decide what notes are made and retained in relation to intervening weekly / monthly etc. discussions.

It will be for managers and employees to agree who records the outcome of quarterly performance reviews. Both parties should agree the notes as a correct record. Any disputed matter should be noted accordingly.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

13. The JNC Chief Executives' Handbook of Conditions of Service makes provision for a performance appraisal process for Chief Executives with the following key features -

“... a focus on clarifying what the chief executive is expected to achieve and on identifying any continuing development needs ... to maintain a high level of performance. The process of setting objectives should be by agreement and the result should be to identify objectives which are relevant and challenging but achievable”.

“The process should not become complex. At all times it needs to focus clearly on a few basic issues: what the chief executive's job is; what has been done well; what could have been done better; the major issues over the next year; and what developmental needs the process clearly identifies”.

“It will be for local decision in the light of local circumstances whether the appraisal should be carried out by a small committee representing all political groups or by a senior representative or representatives of the controlling group. Whichever approach is adopted, those conducting the appraisal need to bear in mind at all times that the chief executive is employed by the council as a whole, not by the controlling group, and is therefore required to serve all of the council”.

“Appraisal should take place on a predetermined date, at least annually, backed up by regular monitoring meetings at which targets can be continuously reviewed”

14. It is appropriate that the WLGA's Chief Executive participates in a performance review / appraisal process which is broadly similar to that which applies to local

authority Chief Executives, whilst also being aligned to the Association's performance review process for all other employees.

15. It is planned that the Chief Executive's performance review discussion - on two occasions each year - will be led by one or more Elected Members, as designated for this purpose from time to time.
16. Performance review discussion topics for the Chief Executive will typically include the key strategic objectives to be achieved during the coming year, eg the Local Govt Financial Settlement and other WLGA support for member organisations, along with a review of the leadership, management and governance of the WLGA (and Data Cymru).
17. The Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring that all WLGA member organisations and their Member representatives, all political groups and all officer networks are suitable supported. The Chief Executive's review shall take these factors into account.
18. As is the case with all other WLGA employees, there is an expectation that the Chief Executive and designated Elected Member/s will jointly take responsibility for ensuring that a continuous meaningful two-way dialogue takes place regarding work-related and personal wellbeing matters.

TRADE UNION CONSULTATION

19. GMB and UNISON, the Association's recognised trade unions, have been consulted about the proposed new performance review framework. Both trade unions have welcomed the supportive approach which is being proposed by the Association.

IMPLEMENTATION

20. A proposed new *WLGA Performance Review Policy and Procedure* is included with this report.
21. A phased roll out of the proposed new arrangements is favoured so that any lessons learned can be incorporated into the ongoing implementation programme.
22. It is proposed that around half of the Association's workforce participates in a phase 1 roll out programme during April, May and June 2022.
 - Chief Executive >> to review >> All SMT Members
 - SMT members >> to review >> All Team Managers
 - A selection of Team Managers >> to review >> A selection of team members
23. All remaining employees to be included in a phase 2 roll out programme during July, August and September 2022.
24. Any personal development / training needs arising from the performance review implementation programme will be identified and addressed over the coming period.

RECOMMENDATION

25. It is **RECOMMENDED** that:

(a) A new Performance Review framework is approved and introduced for all WLGA staff on the basis set out in this report, including the new policy and procedure which accompanies this report.

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