



# Scrutiny Review

## Staff Appraisals



## 1. Introduction

This report sets out the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee task group following the scrutiny review into staff appraisals.

The task group wishes to thank all those who gave their time in contributing to the review, in particular the random sample of 25 Ryedale District Council staff who responded to a survey seeking their views on the staff appraisal process.

## 2. Scope of the review

In the scoping report noted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30 September 2021, the following key question was set out as:

- How is the appraisal process contributing to effective performance across the organisation and can it be refined?

The key points that the review would like to cover:

- What is the strategic impact of appraisals, in terms of supporting the delivery of the Council's priorities and performance management?
- What appraisal system is in operation?
- Is it appropriate and proportionate to the organisation and its current context?
- What evidence is there that appraisals are having a positive impact on performance?
- What developments may be required to ensure that staff have clear guidance on priorities and that performance is measured and addressed if necessary?
- What other forms of staff liaison with team leaders and managers is taking place across the council outside of the formal appraisal process e.g. team meetings, 1-2-1s, wellbeing groups?

## 3. Membership of the Committee

The Task Group formed to undertake the review consisted of Councillors Bailey, King, Oxley, Riby and Raine.

Officers involved:

Emma Lawer (Senior HR Business Partner)

Marie Lomax (HR/OD Project Officer)

Simon Copley (Head of Corporate Governance)

Task Group supporting officers:

Will Baines (Senior Corporate Governance Officer)

## 4. Methodology

The Task Group held the following meetings in conducting the scrutiny review:

19 October 2021 - Task Group first meeting

9 December 2021 - Final Task Group meeting



In order to gather the information required to formulate recommendations from the scrutiny review, the task group devised a survey on the staff appraisal process for a random sample of 25 Ryedale District Council staff to complete. The survey was provided to the sample and available to complete from 3 to 19 November 2021. The form was available to complete either digitally and manually. The full results of the staff sample survey were presented to the task group at the meeting held on 9 December 2021.

## 5. Findings

Members of the Scrutiny Review Task Group were clear at the start of the review that they were seeking reassurance that an appraisal process is in place for all Ryedale District Council staff to engage with and feel a part of, that they are taking place across the organisation and that the outcomes of the appraisals are followed up and addressed as required. The wellbeing of staff is a key concern for Elected Members over the next period with the Local Government Reorganisation process ongoing in North Yorkshire to form a unitary authority, and that is why the topic was put forward for consideration by the task group.

Staff performance management at Ryedale District Council is monitored through a formal annual appraisal. This is a chance for both the manager and staff member concerned to reflect on the successes and achievements of the previous year and to look ahead to future challenges and potential support and assistance that may be required. This annual appraisal is part of the ongoing conversations between staff members and managers that also includes regular team and directorate meetings, 1-2-1s and ongoing conversations to reflect and discuss issues further.

Annual staff appraisals took place across all Ryedale District Council service areas in August and September 2021, with progress on the percentage of completed appraisals monitored during this period on a weekly basis by Strategic Management Board. The percentage of completed annual appraisals for staff members for 2021/22 is 100%, a big improvement on previous years. To assist managers, the process for undertaking staff appraisals was refreshed and streamlined to support them in completing these within the time period set with their direct reports and a 'Skills Booster' online video training on appraisals was promoted to all managers in August 2021. Given the continued challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic this year, appraisals took place either in person or via video conferencing software as agreed between the manager and staff member concerned.

In exploring this topic, members of the task group noted the various mechanisms currently in place across the organisation for staff and managers to discuss performance issues on an informal and formal basis. The fact that the majority of the random staff sample of 25 (82.61%) found the formal appraisal process a positive one was encouraging. The task group were also pleased to see that nearly three quarters of the staff sampled (73.91%) felt that the appraisal took place as part of regular 1-2-1s, but were keen that the staff members responding where this did not take place were still given the opportunity to feed back regularly to managers on a consistent basis.

The structure to the formal appraisal process was felt to be fit for purpose and appropriate for the size of the organisation, with the forms and guidance on the staff intranet website on objective setting and training needs providing a clear and helpful format for encouraging a two-way conversation. This was shown in the 100% agreement from the staff sample surveyed that the appraisal process was a two-way conversation between managers and their direct reports and is reflected through the signing of the completed appraisal form by both parties. The task group also felt the renewed push to promote the process this year was a positive step forward and the regular reminders to managers helped to develop a consistent approach. A small number of comments from the staff sample were received asking for a longer time period to complete appraisals and this should be considered in future years.



The survey results from the staff sample indicated that in the vast majority of cases (86.96%) the objectives set with managers were felt to be at an appropriate level. Members of the task group commented on the clear link between the objectives set to a number of key Council documents, such as the strategic priorities in the Council Plan 2020-2024, the relevant team/service objectives and a personal objective that can be linked to the job role, personal development or values and behaviours. The setting of objectives in a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based) way was seen as a well-established method to help give a structure to this part of the appraisal meeting.

The task group were reassured that the appraisal feedback was collected electronically on a written proforma so that it could be referred back to at a later date as part of the monthly 1-2-1s or other conversations between managers and their direct reports. It was important that any training needs identified during the appraisal process were fed up to senior managers to help nurture and develop the strengths and talents of all employees and to revisit these at future personal development conversations.

The task group also noted the wider staff engagement undertaken to seek the views from staff, such as the staff surveys and wellbeing activities taking place, with evidence of good levels of engagement across these. The introduction of a Manager's Forum was also seen as a positive step forward for line managers to discuss corporate issues and feed back ideas and comments on future initiatives to senior management.

Overall, the task group were impressed with the very high percentage of completed appraisals this year, particularly with the Local Government Reorganisation process underway and the need to support staff as much as possible during this period. The importance of having an appraisal process cannot be underestimated within an organisation, as a key tool for all staff to have open conversations to support performance improvement, identify any areas for further training and to raise any issues or concerns. The process and procedures that have been put in place for staff appraisals at Ryedale District Council provide a great platform for the organisation to improve this further and to ensure all employees get the maximum possible benefit from their staff development discussions.

## **6. Recommendations:**

As a result of the scrutiny review, the task group put forward the following recommendations:

- Reaffirm the importance of staff appraisals as a key tool for Ryedale District Council to ensure all employees get the maximum possible benefit from their staff development discussions, particularly during the Local Government Reorganisation process.
- That the set period in the year to undertake appraisals should be continued in future years to make it part of the routine for staff and managers to complete these as part of a corporate calendar.
- Officers should consider giving a longer period for the annual appraisals to occur, to give enough time for both managers and staff to effectively plan, undertake and write up the notes from the appraisal meeting.
- Mid-year reviews and catch ups should be encouraged for managers to undertake with staff in March and April to continue the cycle of performance and objective evaluation and to help ensure that service priorities continue to be met with Local Government Reorganisation.



- The escalation process for any issues raised through appraisals should be promoted as part of next set of mid-year/annual appraisals through the staff intranet website and employee communications, to ensure greater awareness and understanding of the options available.
- An overall percentage of staff appraisal completions be included as a key performance indicator (KPI) in the Ryedale District Council Annual Report to Elected Members to allow continued tracking.
- Appraisals for Elected Members on a similar basis to the staff process should be considered by officers as part of the implementation of the member development arrangements for the new unitary authority.

**Terms of Reference - Scrutiny Task Group: Staff Appraisals**

<b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee Scoping Report</b>	
The question that the scrutiny review is trying to answer	How is the appraisal process contributing to effective performance across the organisation and can it be refined?
Key points that the review would like to cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the strategic impact of appraisals, in terms of supporting the delivery of the Council's priorities and performance management?</li> <li>• What appraisal system is in operation?</li> <li>• Is it appropriate and proportionate to the organisation and its current context?</li> <li>• What evidence is there that appraisals are having a positive impact on performance?</li> <li>• What developments may be required to ensure that staff have clear guidance on priorities and that performance is measured and addressed if necessary?</li> <li>• What other forms of staff liaison with team leaders and managers is taking place across the council outside of the formal appraisal process e.g. team meetings, 1-2-1s, wellbeing groups?</li> </ul>
Indicators & Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of appraisal activity across all functions.</li> <li>• Evidence of appraisal impacting performance.</li> <li>• Evidence of staff engagement with wellbeing activities and support groups.</li> </ul>
Improvements	To be determined from the review.
Other information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officer workload awareness.</li> <li>• This topic is linked to the ongoing review of the Council's Performance Framework</li> </ul>