



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

On Track Talks Guide

Human Resources, Operations Group

ON TRACK TALK GUIDANCE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the On Track Talk Guidelines, these are provided as recommendations in setting direction and having check ins with individuals and groups to ensure they're feeling OK, their performance is on track, and they are living our values of Respect, Collaboration, Innovation and Deliver.

Outputs of these meetings will also provide evidence to support your individual 'My Journey' discussions.

We know that there are many areas of good practice already within our council, so if you (the manager) already have an embedded practice that keeps you informed of your teams welfare, performance and progress, that's ok and we only suggest you consider the guidance to compare and see if this could improve your practice.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the 'Meeting and Developing People Our Way' document.

WHY?

It's important that managers stay connected to check in on key aspects of employee's wellbeing, performance and support or recognition where needed. These catch ups should also help to give clarity on direction by assigning targets (or goals) and SMART tasks and objectives.

WHAT?

Unlike 'My Journey' which focuses on the employee's personal career aspirations, succession planning and development need, On Track Talks should concentrate on employee's targets, objectives, the ways they work and their wellbeing.

The quality of the conversation will be directly proportionate to the effort that you put in and it goes without saying that the conversation will involve:

- ✓ reviewing the employee's wellbeing,
- ✓ performance/behaviours and
- ✓ agreed objectives (changing or adding to these when needed).

Depending on role, purpose and reporting structure, there are many ways this could be carried out including:

- Individual meetings, often referred to as One to Ones.
- Team/group meetings
- Project meetings
- Day to day interactions

These meetings will offer clarity and support by covering the following:

- Purpose of the meeting
- Setting targets
- Setting and reviewing SMART tasks and objectives to deliver the targets
- Monitor progress against targets and objectives
- Acknowledge efforts and achievements

- Discuss concerns relating to the individual or their performance with a view to support improvement and get things back on track.

What is the difference between targets and objectives? A target (or goal) refers to the desired outcome. An objective is a measurable milestone that refers to specific actions to achieve the target (or goal).

What is the difference between Tasks and Objectives? Objectives describe what you will ultimately achieve. Tasks are the key actions that show how you will achieve it.

What are Targets?

Target setting is more commonly referred to as key performance indicators (KPIs) or outputs and are usually clear at an organisational level, but it is often less clear what good performance constitutes for individuals or teams. Performance measures in some jobs are straightforward, as the outcomes are obvious and objective. But for many roles– it is more complicated to measure performance.

The Council cascades departmental targets or goals through our Service Plans and the On Track process will inform and guide the expectations for employees and teams. It may be helpful to think of three main types of performance when setting and monitoring targets:

- **Task performance:** how well someone carries out the core activities included in their job. This could include the number of customer satisfaction ratings, specific cases resolved, time it takes to complete an activity i.e. employee recruitment stages, service quality or (for people managers) their impact on the people in their team.
- **Demonstrating our Valued behaviours:** for example, helping other teams reach their targets, or contributing to ad hoc initiatives and showing respect.
- **Adaptive performance:** how well employees respond to changing job demands or support innovation. This includes both how agile employees are to changing objectives and how they help the organisation become more agile in response to demands..

All three types can all be understood as results (the outcomes of activity) or as behaviour (how that activity was carried out).

What are Objectives?

This is where the employee receives clarity on what they need to do to deliver their targets.

Depending on role, purpose and reporting structure, there are many ways this could be carried out including:

- Individual meetings, often referred to as One to Ones.
- Team/group meetings
- Project meetings

These meetings will inform clarity by communicating the following:

- Purpose of the meeting
- Setting targets
- Setting and reviewing SMART tasks and objectives to deliver the targets
- Monitor progress against targets and objectives
- Acknowledge efforts and achievements

- Discuss concerns relating to the individual or their performance with a view to support improvement and get things back on track.

What do we mean by Wellbeing?

Promoting and supporting employee wellbeing is at the heart of our purpose to champion better work and working lives because a healthy and effective workplace can deliver mutual benefit to employees, organisations, economies and communities. Healthy workplaces help employees to flourish and reach their potential and can lead to increased resilience, better employee engagement, reduced sickness absence and higher performance and productivity. However, wellbeing initiatives often fall short of their potential because they stand alone, isolated from the everyday business. To gain real benefit, employee wellbeing priorities must be integrated in everything we do day to day and during the On Track process.

What do we mean by the Way We Work?

Our Valued Behaviours describe the attitude and approach we should all take towards our work and how we represent the Council even when we're not working.

WHEN?

For the above reasons it's important to keep in touch, however the frequency and approach will depend on many things. We share accountability for making sure that we have at least 6 on track conversations every year. That's about one every 8 weeks – but that doesn't mean you can't have more! It's not solely the managers responsibility to make this happen. Every employee has the right to have quality time with their manager.

More regular conversations would be expected where support was identified, and performance was a concern.

WHO?

We have a diverse workforce, and we recognise that there are many ways to meet, however as mentioned above, primarily this will be carried out with a manager and their direct reports or teams.

HOW?

These catch ups should be relaxed but focussed between the line manager and their employee or teams, depending on the nature of the meeting, to discuss their progress and how they can be the best they can possibly be at work.

When meeting managers and employees should discuss goals and agree objectives. These objectives should naturally flow from Service Plans and functional operational plans reflecting on how the employee can contribute in line with their job role. At the end of the catch up everyone should be clear about what needs to be delivered and when – with the right balance between realistic and challenging objectives. Ideally, not more than six objectives.

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Objectives should always be SMART:

S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPECIFIC • Include the details of what the individual or group wants to achieve with the target/task/objective.
M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MEASURABLE • You should be able to measure your progress and accurately determine whether the target/task/objective has been achieved.
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACHIEVEABLE • the target/task/objective should be challenging not too easy and not too hard, they should motivate the individual or group. Clear ownership and due dates should be given.
R	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REALISTIC • Include the details of what the individual or group want to achieve the target/task/objective should be reachable with effort and resources available. Ensure they reflect the overall DBC objectives.
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TIMELY • The target/task/objective should have defined start and end dates or if they are long term projects set out incremental tasks and dates to meet specific

Agreeing personal objectives is a two-way process, but managers must ensure that an appropriate number and range of objectives are set, which contribute to departmental and Council goals.

Both the employee and the manager should bring proposals for discussion to the conversation, this is dedicated time to talk, where you have each other's undivided attention so make the best use of the time, preparation is the key.

Some guidance would be:

- No colleague should have more than six personal objectives at any one time.
- These should be listed in order of priority.
- Some roles will have less than six objectives.
- Objectives should also focus on the 'way' in which work is completed; namely the quality of the outcome and the behaviour and attitudes of the individual in carrying it out.
- Objectives may also include personal development goals and the attainment of competencies or skills.
- Training is not an objective! If training is agreed as required, it should be recorded as a learning and development need and picked up in 'My Journey' process.

So, make it a great conversation, asking the right questions to make sure this happens. Remember, don't just talk about the '**what**', reflect on the '**how**' too using our Valued Behaviours Framework, which you'll find [here](#) [web page].

Where it's believed that the employee isn't demonstrating the council values, refer to the managers tool kit on using the behaviour framework for suggested guidance on ways to improve the individual's performance.

Outside of setting and reflecting on the group or individual performance it is important to remember this time is also about the individual, so make sure to check in on the person too.

The wellbeing of the individual or the group is an important part of the catch up conversations, whether in a group setting or an individual meeting wellbeing should be discussed, a simple 'How are you?' or 'How has/have your week/few weeks/month been?' to start the discussion.

Other wellbeing questions will depend on whether you are noticing differences in the employee and probing to see if you can support or are aware of the background and monitoring how they are doing, e.g.:

- I've noticed you haven't been yourself recently, is there anything you would like to talk about?
- On a scale 1-10 (being fantastic) how do you feel? How could we increase this rating?
- Is there anything I could do to support you? (Consider referrals to Occupational Health, Counselling or Physiotherapy)
- Do you have anything else you would like to share?

The manager should have knowledge of the support services available within the Council to discuss with the employee, where applicable.

It is just as important to discuss what is not going so well, any performance or behavioural concerns should be talked through, focusing on the performance and facts not personalities and most importantly discussing support asking 'Is there any more support you need? Are you getting what you need from me? Can we put a plan together to move forward?'

Refer to the 'Managers Guide in Having Quality Conversation' for tips to setting the tone and having those quality conversations.

Where?

Although in-person meetings will provide the best way for everyone to engage, and communicate effectively by understanding body language, we appreciate that this is not always essential and for some purposes, meeting remotely will be better than not meeting at all.

Follow up

Ensure that there is a record of any plans and actions agreed in the meeting and schedule the next on track talk.