



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Managers Guide to Having Quality Conversations

Human Resources, Operations Group

Quality Conversations Guidance *'In everything we do'*

Purpose

This guidance will show you as the manager how we can have quality conversations at the Council in accordance with our **Valued Behaviours [framework](#)**. [web page] It should be read in conjunction with completing *On Track Talks* and *My Journey* discussions, but it's much wider including how we interact every day, also during discrete wellbeing discussions and welcoming employees back from periods of leave whether for sickness or any other reason such as maternity/adoption etc. Through this we aim to enable everyone to be their best every day and feel able to express themselves so that we can all achieve things together and deliver what is needed.

This guidance and the information in our toolkits is intended to be flexible to meet individual needs. We are all individuals with our own unique talents, skills and priorities – as such there is no one size fits all when it comes to having conversations, so it's up to us to ensure that we work collaboratively and focus on delivering great outcomes for our customers.

Individual employees deserve to be given feedback on how they are doing, good and bad, be given a chance to talk about any support or development they may need, as well as being able to give feedback on the way they are managed and feel like a valued employee.

Above all, we focus on having regular quality conversations to catch up, connect, check in on how they are feeling, setting, and reviewing progress of objectives and personal development goals. Although these practices can be applied in group discussions too, the main focus is in a one-to-one discussion.

So, what do we mean by Quality Conversations?

It may be best to describe the fundamentals of quality conversations as ABC:

A is for *Ability* – ensuring everyone can have effective conversations.

B is for *Behaviours* – demonstrating our Council Values.

C is for *Constructive* – giving feedback that is aimed at a positive outcome by providing someone with comments, advice or suggestions that are useful for their work or future.

The most common way that you will engage with your team members should be through daily interactions such as check-ins, team meetings and project meetings. It is important that you keep in touch with your team members frequently and build up strong relationships. Building this relationship will ultimately help ensure that all conversations are more natural and effective.

Golden Rules:

Irrespective of the purpose of the conversation making it effective is the key, here are some tips to setting the tone and having those quality conversations:

1. **Prepare** – Make sure you prepare. It's not just about the obvious things like agreeing the date, time, and location, consider the environment, remove outside distractions – give each other respect to focus on the conversation. Discuss ideas of what and where would make you both comfortable, that

could even allow you to think differently to how you would usually hold a meeting, think about a walking conversation in a green space or an alternative Council location.

Once you have identified where and when it is just as important to consider the purpose of the conversation. This might include refreshing your memory of their targets, tasks and/or objectives and gather performance information. It could also include any welfare considerations, think about the person and how you would approach asking about them, who and how they are?. Consider what you want to prioritise and what you'd like to achieve, focusing on tailoring the conversation to the person/group.

2. **Commit** – It's all too easy sometimes when we have competing priorities to put catching up at the bottom of them, but this is how we keep track of wellbeing, performance, and objectives, and if we don't commit to this, we are less likely to deliver what our customers need. Make a commitment and stick to it.
3. **Connect** – Invest some time in talking and listening to connect. Understand your and their energy, moods and filters together and approach with curiosity, not judgement. Actively listen to each other to see the subtle signs given as well as the words said.

The Do's and Don'ts of Actively listening:

Do's

- ✓ Use supportive and encouraging gestures, such as nods of the head and smiles
- ✓ Make eye contact: look at the speaker directly without staring
- ✓ Take notes: jot down key words and use these for later questions
- ✓ Look interested by facing the speaker, altering your facial expression and staying relaxed and calm
- ✓ Ask questions – but try to avoid interrupting.

Don'ts

- ✗ Modify the message you hear to suit your own view
- ✗ Be pre-occupied with your own thoughts
- ✗ Make up your mind too quickly without hearing each other
- ✗ Become anxious about what you are hearing and over-react
- ✗ Be prejudicial and listen with a closed mind.

Demonstrating care for each other in all meetings is important, good wellbeing means we are able to our best at home and at work so good conversations will have wellbeing at the heart, alongside performance. A simple 'how are you' is a good start and you can also talk about what has been enjoyable and what's been challenging since your last meeting.

Useful Information – Continuing to be developed

- Meeting and Developing People Our Way
- On Track Talk Guide
- On Track Talk template individual and Group Template
- Bank of On Track Talk/Group example questions
- My Journey Managers guide

My Journey Employee's guide

Talent Bite size guide

Talent Tool Kit

FAQ

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