



Government  
People Group

# Senior Civil Service Performance Management Framework

(April 2024)



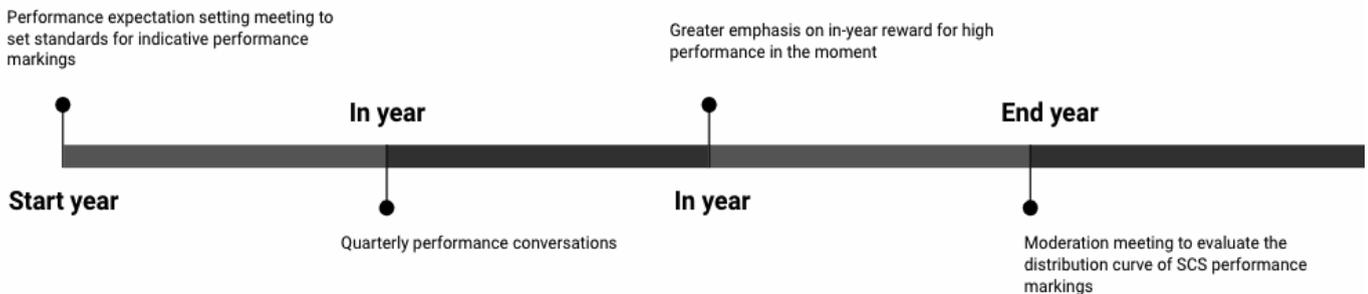
## Table of contents

<i>Summary</i>	3
<i>How to use this Guidance</i>	5
<i>Setting performance expectations</i>	8
<i>Agreeing stretching objectives</i>	13
<i>Regular performance conversations</i>	18
<i>Underperformance</i>	20
<i>Performance assessment</i>	22
<i>Performance differentiation and moderation</i>	24
<i>SCS Performance Management Reporting Requirements</i>	26
<i>SCS Performance Management Frequently Asked Questions</i>	27
<i>Annex A: SCS Objective Setting</i>	29
<i>Annex B - SCS Performance Agreement Form</i>	34
<i>Annex C - Good Practice Guides:</i>	35
<i>Annex D – Guidance for conducting a localised moderation panel</i>	38



## Summary

1. The Senior Civil Service (“SCS”) performance management framework provides the parameters within which departments should formulate their performance management arrangements. If there is an area of the policy that the framework is not prescriptive on, departments should use their discretion to tailor their arrangements to suit their workforce context.
2. Departments must ensure that their performance management process includes and allows for:
  - a. a start-year **performance expectation setting meeting**
  - b. **quarterly performance conversations**
  - c. the ability to recognise high performance in the moment through **in-year reward**
  - d. **end-year moderation meetings** (both at the localised level by business unit and an overall moderation meeting)



3. The performance management process is made up of a number of stages which are explored in more detail throughout this guidance. The main features include:
  - a. **setting performance expectations:** a performance expectation setting meeting should take place at the beginning of the annual performance year to make clear performance expectations for members of the SCS.
  - b. **agreeing stretching objectives:** these should be agreed between members of the SCS and their line managers and **must focus on both the what and the how.**
  - c. **regular performance conversations:** these should be conducted on at least a quarterly basis between line managers and members of the SCS to ensure objectives remain relevant and that performance progress can be informally assessed on a continuous basis. Indicative box ratings should be agreed on a quarterly basis to demonstrate progress of objectives.
  - d. **consistency check:** a mid-year consistency check is recommended to evaluate the distribution of indicative ratings across protected characteristics.
  - e. **in-year recognition:** line managers are encouraged to use in-year awards to reward members of the SCS for real-time performance.
  - f. **performance assessment:** a formal box rating recommendation should be agreed between the individual and their line manager in the final quarterly conversation.



- g. **moderation:** following end-year performance conversations, departments will need to conduct both localised moderation panels by business unit and an overall moderation meeting to moderate SCS performance ratings as a whole.



## How to use this Guidance

4. Departments must ensure that this framework forms the basis of their performance management policy and process for the Senior Civil Service (SCS). Within the limits set by this guidance, departments are expected to then tailor their own policies to suit their workforce context. Should a department wish to deviate from any of the content included in this document, they must first seek Cabinet Office permission to do so by contacting the [Civil Service Employment Framework Mailbox](#).
5. This document provides:
  - a. a **common framework** for the SCS to facilitate the cascade of organisational priorities into individual objectives;
  - b. a **minimum expected process and timeline** for the management of performance in the SCS
  - c. guidance on a number of matters that stem from this framework including **dealing with dips in performance and appropriate interventions to gain improvements for those who have only 'Partially Met' their objectives**.
6. This framework applies to all departments, agencies and non-departmental public bodies that employ members of the SCS who are subject to the SCS pay rules. Separate performance management guidance applies for Permanent Secretaries.
7. This guidance does not cover the formal process for managing poor performance. This is set out in a separate guide, '[Managing Poor Performance Policy Procedures for the Senior Civil Service](#)'.

## Principles

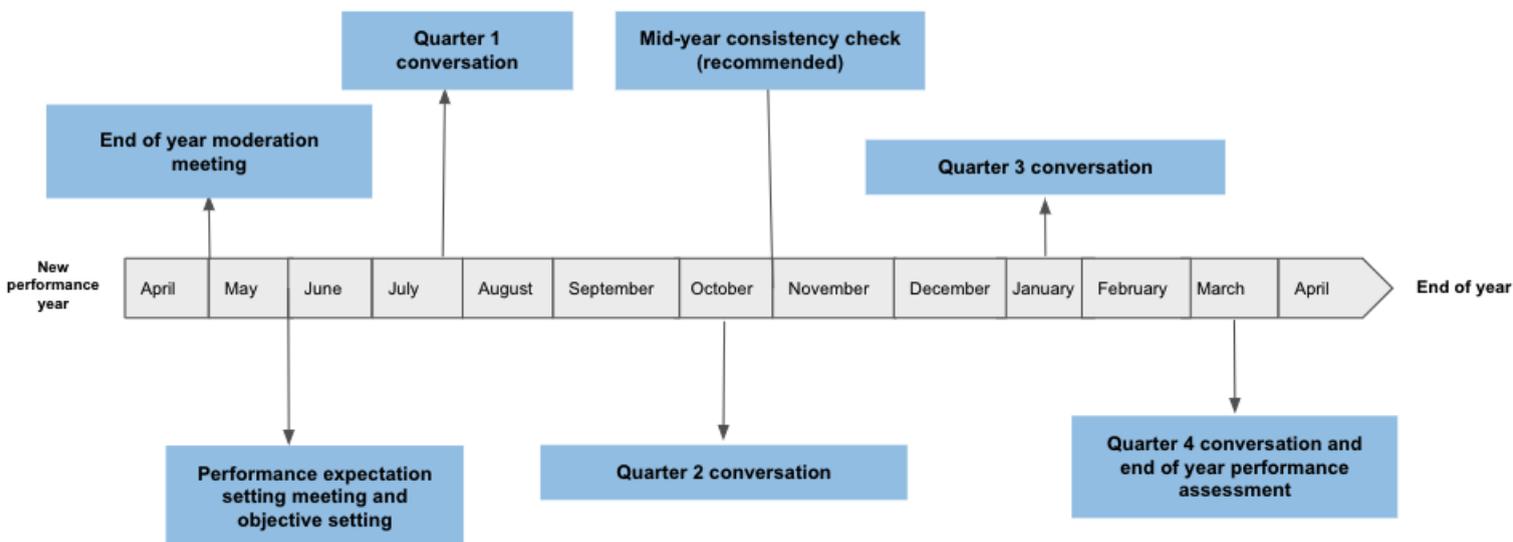
8. There are a number of general principles that underpin this framework, and to which all departments should adhere to when tailoring their SCS performance management arrangements to suit their workforce context. They are as follows:
  - a. greater flexibility to allow for **closer alignment** between performance arrangements **for the SCS and delegated grades**;
  - b. a clearer link between **individual objectives and organisational priorities** ensuring measurable lines of accountability to members of the SCS when it comes to the performance of the department as a whole;
  - c. simplicity in the objective setting process to allow for a **balanced focus on 'what' and 'how'**, with performance standards and expectations clearly articulated at the beginning of the performance year;
  - d. an **all year-round focus** on performance;
  - e. improved emphasis **on monitoring and tackling detrimental Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) outcomes**;
  - f. greater emphasis on reward for **high performance in the moment**, and;
  - g. prompt identification, monitoring and **tackling of underperformance**.



9. The performance management framework is not intended to be wholly prescriptive. It encourages departments to tailor their performance approaches to ensure greater alignment with their processes for delegated grades and improve line manager capability. As such, departments have discretion to modify elements of the performance management process where the framework is not specific to fit their workplace context. However, to maintain a level of coherence across the SCS cadre, this framework outlines key elements of the performance management lifecycle and process that departments should adhere to.

## Timelines

10. The timeline below outlines key elements of the annual performance management lifecycle. These dates are indicative but departments must ensure, where possible, that the end-year moderation meeting takes place **before** the start-year performance expectation setting meeting.



11. Departments should ensure that their performance management process includes and allows for:
- a start-year **performance expectation setting meeting**
  - quarterly performance conversations**
  - end-year performance moderation meetings** (both localised moderation panels and an overall moderation meeting)

## Process

12. The performance management process is made up of a number of stages which are explored in more detail throughout this guidance. The main features include:
- setting performance expectations:** this takes place at the beginning of the annual performance year and is designed to make clear performance expectations and directorate priorities for members of the SCS.
  - agreeing stretching objectives:** these should be agreed between members of the SCS and their line managers once they understand the performance expectations for their directorate. **These must focus on both the what and the how.**



- c. **regular performance conversations:** these should be conducted quarterly between line managers and members of the SCS to ensure objectives remain relevant and stretching and that performance progress can be informally assessed on a continuous basis. Indicative box ratings should be agreed and recorded to demonstrate progress of objectives.
- d. **consistency check:** a mid-year consistency check is recommended to evaluate the distribution of indicative ratings across protected characteristics.
- e. **in-year recognition:** line managers are encouraged to use in-year awards to recognise and reward members of the SCS for real-time performance.
- f. **performance assessment:** a formal box rating recommendation should be agreed between the individual and their line manager in the final quarterly conversation.
- g. **Moderation:** following end-year performance conversations, departments will meet to moderate SCS performance ratings as a whole in both localised panels by business unit and an overall moderation meeting by evaluating the distribution curve.

13. Each element of the performance management process is discussed in greater detail below.



## Setting performance expectations

14. Each performance year should begin with a performance expectation setting meeting. Performance expectation setting meetings are intended to both ensure:
- consistency across the department in how they approach the upcoming performance year by agreeing expected standards for delivery and behaviour for each grade of the SCS, and;
  - that members of the SCS at all grades understand what the box ratings they will be assessed against at the conclusion of the performance year mean in practice.
15. A key component of this expectation setting meeting will be to agree and develop business unit objectives that align with the Priority Outcomes and/or Strategic Enablers as set out in the organisation's Outcome Delivery Plan. At least one of the organisation's Priority outcomes and/or Strategic Enablers must be reflected in each business unit's objectives for the year. These Priority Outcomes can include any cross-cutting outcomes that the department is contributing towards. Members of the SCS should then look to cascade this down further into individual objectives. As Outcomes are often broad and can only be progressed in the longer term, it must be possible for business units to achieve positive impacts, without necessarily succeeding (alone) in progressing a Priority Outcome. These meetings should also look to agree expectations for how members of the SCS should focus their leadership or diversity and inclusion objectives.
16. Departments should use these planning meetings to ensure that all members of the SCS understand what the four box ratings they will be assessed against mean and the expected standards of delivery and behaviour of each rating. It is important for effective performance management that those being assessed fully understand what is expected of them from the beginning of the performance year and that these expectations are not shifted throughout the period they are being assessed on.
17. Below we have provided a table summary of what the four box ratings mean, but departments must build on these and apply the context they are operating within to the guidance they issue for their SCS.

Performance Rating	Descriptors	Additional Guidance
<b>Exceeding</b>	Exceeding outcomes, exceeding expected competency and behavioural standards	<p>This is likely to be appropriate where the members of the SCS consistently performed above and beyond all of their agreed stretching objectives, throughout the performance year. It is absolutely vital for those who receive this box rating to have also embodied the expected behaviours of their role throughout the performance year in all aspects of their work.</p> <p><i>Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A member of the SCS who delivered exactly what was agreed in their objectives <b>should not be placed in this box.</b></li> <li>A member of the SCS who went above what was expected of them in the delivery of their objectives, but who did so while not demonstrating reasonable behaviours such as delivering at the expense of others or without showing the level of leadership required of their grade, <b>should not be placed in this box.</b></li> <li>A member of the SCS who went above what was</li> </ul>



		<p>expected of them in the delivery of all of their objectives, but who also did so while demonstrating and even surpassing the relevant behavioural and leadership expectations for their role <b>should be placed in this box</b>. In particular, to be placed in 'Exceeding' requires a significant corporate contribution which extends beyond the business unit itself.</p>
<b>High performing</b>	<p>Meeting requirement expected in role and exceeding in <b>some</b> deliverables and/or behaviours</p>	<p>This is likely to be appropriate where the member of the SCS consistently performed above and beyond <b>some</b> of their agreed stretching objectives throughout the performance year, or where the individual exceeded the expected delivery of some objectives, but who only achieved in others.</p> <p>To be given this rating, you would expect the individual to have consistently demonstrated most of the expected behaviours of their role throughout the performance year in all aspects of their work. This is more of a subjective test however as the complete absence of certain behaviours or demonstration of other more extreme negative behaviours could also mean that it is not appropriate for the individual to be given this box rating.</p> <p><i>Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A member of the SCS who delivered exactly what was agreed in their objectives <b>should not be placed in this box</b>.</li> <li>• A member of the SCS who went above what was expected of them in the delivery of their objectives, but who was not consistent in the behaviours demonstrated in the way they went about delivering these objectives <b>may be placed in this box</b>, but thought will need to be given to the severity of the behaviour failings and the impact on others as part of the end of year conversation.</li> <li>• A member of the SCS who went above what was expected of them in most of their objectives and did so while demonstrating the relevant behavioural and leadership expectations for their role <b>should be placed in this box</b>.</li> </ul>
<b>Achieving</b>	<p>Meeting requirements expected in role in terms of both deliverables and behaviours</p>	<p>This is likely to be appropriate where the member of the SCS has delivered exactly what they agreed to deliver in their performance objectives.</p> <p>To be given this rating, you would expect the individual to have demonstrated the behaviours they agreed were relevant for the successful delivery of their objectives.</p> <p><i>Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A member of the SCS who delivered exactly what was agreed in their objectives <b>should be placed in this box</b>.</li> <li>• A member of the SCS who went above what was expected of them in a few of their objectives while meeting the behaviours they agreed they would demonstrate to help them meet their objectives <b>may be placed in this box</b>. This is a subjective test that may</li> </ul>



		result in the individual being placed in the achieving box or the high performing box. Weight will need to be given to what objectives went beyond what was expected and which did not as well as how the behaviours were demonstrated and whether this was throughout the year.
<b>Partially met</b>	Meeting <b>some but not all</b> of the requirements expected in role, in terms of deliverables and behaviours	<p>This is likely to be appropriate where the member of the SCS has delivered some but not all of what they agreed to deliver in their performance objectives, as a result of factors either within or outside of their control.</p> <p>To be given this rating, you would expect the member of the SCS to not have demonstrated all the behaviours required for the successful delivery of their objectives.</p> <p><i>Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A member of the SCS who did not deliver exactly what was agreed in their objectives, and these objectives remained reflective, or were updated to be reflective, of the expectations of them for the performance year, <b>should be placed in this box.</b></li> <li>• A member of the SCS who did not demonstrate the behaviours required of them to fulfil their objectives should be placed in this box. Members of the SCS who delivered against their objectives but consistently failed to demonstrate the required behaviours must be placed within this box.</li> </ul>

18. As with any normal large organisation, performance differentiation is expected to take the shape of a curve, with the highest proportion of SCS falling in the Achieving box and roughly 5% of the SCS cadre within each department falling in the Partially Met box. Where departments find at the end of the performance year that they have not met these distribution expectations they should ensure they consider why and make necessary changes to their performance process for the following performance year to help bring them up to the expected distribution levels.

**19. An individual failing to meet any of the requirements expected in the role, both in their deliverables and behaviours, over a sustained period of time, should be moved onto formal poor performance measures as set out in the [poor performance guidance](#).**

## Setting performance expectations - departmental guidance

20. Departments may want to use the following guidance to help them tailor the requirement **to conduct a performance expectation setting meeting before the start of the performance year** to their specific departmental needs. The below is not mandatory, but is intended to help departments implement the framework effectively.

21. Departments are free to handle these meetings as they see fit, but we believe these meetings would be best handled by Directors General (DGs), Heads of Professions and Permanent Secretaries. This will help members of the SCS understand what they are working towards at the outset of the performance year. It will also enable departments to cascade organisational priorities as outlined in Outcome Delivery Plans (ODPs) and organisational business plans down to individual objectives.



22. The following resources are available and recommended to departments to agree expected standards of delivery and behaviour for each box rating.
- a. **Success Profiles** - Business objectives identified at the beginning of the year will set out “what” an individual needs to achieve over the year. It is also important to understand “how” the individual will need to work to achieve those objectives. Equal weight should be given to both the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ when assessing individual performance and the delivery of objectives. Departments will be required to use the Civil Service Behaviours element of Success Profiles in order to understand “how” we want people in the Civil Service to work. The full scope of Civil Service Behaviours is available in the [Success Profiles](#). Civil Service Behaviours have been designed to complement professional competency frameworks that have been developed by the Civil Service professions/functions, so should be used in conjunction with these.
  - b. **Leadership in action** - [Leadership in Action](#), published in March 2020, is rooted in leadership practice. It sets out eight attributes of leadership seen in action every day across the Civil Service when leaders are at their very best. It is complemented by Leaders in Action, a repository of stories that help bring the leadership attributes to life. The aim is to help individuals to actively consider their own leadership behaviours and experiences and purposefully identify the experiences that they might need to take on to further their leadership.
  - c. **Functional standards** - Functions such as Human Resources, Commercial and Finance form a framework for collaboration across organisational boundaries. Those doing functional work should meet the [Functional Standards](#) detailed on GOV.UK, which set expectations for what needs to be done, and why. The functional standards have been [mandated for use across government](#) and define the most important functional roles and accountabilities, most of which are likely to be done by members of the SCS, and which should be reflected in personal objectives. Performance in meeting the relevant functional standards should be reviewed with line managers as part of in-year and end of year discussions (including, where relevant, the application of Cabinet Office spending controls). As well as helping individuals ensure they are covering the right work, use of the standards across different organisations should help drive more consistency and coherence in functional ways of working, including how personal performance is assessed.
  - d. **Diversity and Inclusion** - With the merit principle front and centre, the [Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-25](#) sets out a series of practical ways in which members of the SCS can deliver against the commitments made in the [Declaration on Government Reform](#). All SCS are required to make a commitment to delivering an element of the Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy set out by their department, profession or function, as part of their mandatory People and Capability objective. They should lead on embedding the consideration of D&I in business-as-usual decision making and through actions including: outreach, recruitment, talent, learning and development, tackling BHD, creating an inclusive culture and developing management capabilities. Showing leadership in creating an inclusive workplace also includes being cognisant of causes for, and ensuring measures are in place to deliver performance management outcomes which are based on performance and merit.



## Agreeing stretching objectives

23. Once expectations for the performance year have been agreed, each member of the SCS must set stretching objectives in agreement with their line manager under **each** of the following headings:
- Business delivery, which must relate directly to the delivery of their organisation's ODP;
  - Finance/efficiency, in line with the principles of the [Managing Public Money guidance](#);
  - People/capability, including a Diversity and Inclusion objective; and
  - Corporate contribution, based on contributing to the overall leadership (or delivery outside own area) of the Department and Civil Service.
24. Members of the SCS should be encouraged to set additional objectives if necessary, to better capture the range of activities that make up their role. An example of this would be an **SCS Development objective**, which focuses on professional capability. Where the member of the SCS member is a clear member of a Function or Profession, this should be clearly recorded and any developmental objectives connected to this recorded.
25. Objectives must focus not only on **what** the individual is aiming to achieve over the performance year, but **how** they will go about meeting those commitments. Both elements of the objective should be seen to have equal weighting when it comes to assessing which box rating the individual falls into.
26. All objectives, including those linked to the ODPs, will then be monitored throughout the performance year. At the end of the year, the individual receives a rating based on how they have done against agreed objectives. This would also include an assessment of how their business unit / directorate as a whole met their goals, as aligned with their department's ODP.

### **Business delivery objective:**

27. This objective must directly relate to the delivery of their business unit goals which in turn, support delivery of the ODP or respective organisational business plan. This can include being the Senior Responsible Owner ("SRO") for a project/programme in the organisational ODP or wider contributions to the Priority Outcomes and/or Strategic Enablers.
28. This objective should cascade from the respective ODP or organisational business plan itself through SCS 3 to SCS 1 and responsibility for delivery should be distinguished between each grade and the impact of each individual's work in achieving them clearly articulated. For example, we envisage that DG outcomes will be mainly focused on Outcomes and Strategic Enablers, whilst DD objectives will focus predominantly on specific deliverables that support these outcomes.
29. In defining and reporting business unit objectives, each business unit must also:
- Extract the relevant metrics/trajectories that they will use to assess delivery against the outcome or enabler (as outlined within the ODP);
  - Identify which key projects and programmes critical to the delivery of each Outcome and/or Enabler the business unit is responsible for, allocating these to an SRO;
  - Identify any additional metrics/trajectories that can be used to gauge delivery of the Priority Outcome and/or Strategic Enabler.



30. When agreeing business unit objectives, it will be important to test:
- How do the business unit objectives align to any of the priorities identified in the ODP?
  - Do the objectives make it more likely that the department will successfully deliver its ODP?
  - How can the business unit manage the risks associated with successful delivery of Priority Outcomes and/or Strategic Enabler in the ODP?
  - Are there any activities missing that the business units should be working on to enable delivery of the ODP?
31. For Senior Sponsors of Priority Outcomes and Strategic Enablers, the production of a strategy, plan and the delivery of that plan must be one of their objectives.
32. Example:
- Priority Outcome:** Modernise and integrate defence capabilities by taking a whole force approach to our people and increasing the use of technology and innovation
  - Relevant metrics:** Percentage of Defence projects in the Government Major Projects Portfolio that are on course for delivery, based on Infrastructure and Projects Authority assessment criteria: 70% in FY 21/22.
  - Business Unit / Directorate Objective:** Deliver the MOD Digital program to meet 90% of the milestone commitments.
  - Individual objective:** Set and maintain the MOD GMPP Digital programme on course to meet its objectives, deliver the projected outcomes and realise the required benefits (directly supports PO above).
33. To create alignment between business units and departmental priorities and to ensure transparency, business unit objectives should be shared and available to all employees.
34. **Finance/efficiency objective:** All SCS must ensure public money and other resources are used properly and efficiently, in accordance with the principles in [Managing Public Money guidance](#). Where, exceptionally, an SCS job holder has no individual budgetary responsibilities, this should be set at a wider corporate level. This should capture what they, as a leader of the department or agency, will do in this area to help others save money or maximise efficiency. It is imperative that any responsibility for compliance with HM Treasury or Cabinet Office finance controls are captured by this objective.

***People and capability, objective:***

35. This objective should ensure that members of the SCS are considering the leadership and management of their teams. As part of this, they may wish to consider workplace culture, increasing the capability of their teams, and improving ways of working, to support better outputs. They should also consider how this maps across to the Leadership in Action Attributes.
36. SCS should also consider how they set their Diversity and Inclusion objective in line with the objectives of their department and profession, to deliver better outcomes for all. As part of this, members of the SCS should be cognizant of the Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and the need to: take a data-drive, evidence-led and delivery-focused approach; set success measures upfront; reflect a wider understanding of diversity; and embed mainstream D&I activity in so that this is not seen as something separate to delivery of the organisations objectives.



### **Corporate contribution:**

37. This objective expects all members of the SCS to make a contribution to the running, performance and reputation of the Civil Service, over and above their day job. It encourages members of the SCS to work in a joined-up way outside their teams, improves knowledge sharing across teams and enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of the Civil Service as a whole. To be eligible for an Exceeding box rating, members of the SCS should demonstrate that they have made a significant contribution to the Department and Civil Service, which extends beyond the business unit itself. This could include work at a cross-government functional level such as championing and contributing to initiatives such as Civil Service Reform, Smarter Working, One Big Thing, and improving Digital and Data Skills. It can also include activities supporting other business units, including regularly sitting on appointment panels and serving as an appeal manager or investigator.

## Agreeing stretching objectives - departmental guidance

38. Departments may want to use the following guidance to help them tailor the above requirement, **for each member of the SCS to set stretching objectives with their line manager for each performance year**, to their specific departmental needs. The below is not mandatory, but is intended to help departments implement the framework effectively.
39. A stretching objective is a target that is intentionally designed to be challenging, but ultimately possible and necessary for an SCS to achieve. Stretching objectives should be tailored to the intricacies of each individual SCS role. An example of a stretching objective within MOD would be to 'set and maintain the MOD GMPP Digital programme on course to meet its objectives, deliver the projected outcomes and realise the required benefits (directly supports PO above)'.
40. To be accomplished, stretching objectives **should be SMART:**
- a. **Specific:** Be clear about *what* the objective should achieve, *who* should achieve it and *when* it should be achieved by. To modernise and integrate defence capabilities by increasing the use of technology and innovation, the MOD Digital team would be responsible for this objective, which would cascade down to the members of the SCS responsible for that directorate. A clear time frame is given for the completion of this task.
  - b. **Measurable:** Define which metrics should be used to determine if the goal has been met. If this objective will take a few months to complete, then set some key milestones by considering specific tasks to accomplish. Internal metrics would be used to evaluate the percentage of defence projects in the Government Major Projects Portfolio that are on course for delivery and key monthly milestones should be set to determine whether this objective is on track.
  - c. **Achievable:** Ensure that the objective can be accomplished and consider the necessary tools/skills required to do so. For this digital innovation example, extensive knowledge and reporting standards are required to fulfil this objective.
  - d. **Relevant:** Consider how the objective contributes to the performance of the department and how it aligns to overall business priorities. Delivering the MOD Digital programme would contribute to MOD's strategic objective to 'modernise and integrate defence capabilities by taking a whole force approach to our people and increasing the use of technology and innovation' as outlined in their Outcome Delivery Plan.



- e. **Timed:** Provide a target date to demonstrate the delivery of key objectives. The delivery of the MOD Digital programme should meet 90% of the milestone commitments within a defined timeframe.
41. For each objective, job holders should record the main actions to be carried out with deadlines wherever possible, and the measures or targets which will be used to assess whether the objective has been successfully delivered.
42. The **onus is on the job holder** to take responsibility for drafting their objectives, which should then be agreed with their manager. We recommend that departments provide members of the SCS with a toolkit to formulate their objectives, which can be based on the information outlined in this guidance and tailored to suit their workforce context.
43. Should they wish, departments can also take teams-based approaches to objectives, providing they fulfil the mandatory criteria set out in this framework.
44. Objectives should be recorded in an objective setting form. An example objective setting form can be found in [Annex A](#); however, departments have the flexibility to use their own form if they wish.
45. Once finalised and agreed, it is good practice to cascade objectives to members of staff in the responsibility chain below the relevant member of the SCS. This helps ensure a chain of accountability from the ODP down throughout the whole organisation.
46. Objectives should be reviewed regularly (at least at each quarterly conversation) by job holders with their managers, to ensure continuing relevance and stretch. The objective form should be updated as necessary.



## Regular performance conversations

47. Members of the SCS and their line managers must hold regular performance conversations throughout the performance year. **As a minimum, the frequency of these conversations must be quarterly.**
48. As part of these quarterly conversations, line managers should evaluate whether the member of the SCS they manage, is **on track**, based on the work they have completed that quarter, **to be rated as 'Exceeding', 'High Performing', 'Achieving' or 'Partially Met' for their end of year discussion.** The rating should reflect the performance as a whole based on the objectives, rather than on each objective individually. This provisional rating can be recorded following each quarterly performance conversation, but a formal write-up of these discussions is only required at the mid- and end-year points.
49. All members of the SCS are eligible for in-year non-consolidated performance-related payments provided they are not on formal poor performance measures. We encourage departments to make greater use of their non-consolidated pay pots to recognise and reward SCS in-year for real-time performance.

## Regular performance conversations - departmental guidance

50. Departments may want to use the following guidance to help them tailor the above requirement, **for line managers and the members of the SCS they manage to hold at a minimum quarterly performance conversation**, to their specific departmental needs. The following guidance is not mandatory, but is intended to help departments implement the framework effectively.
51. Performance conversations should form part of any on-going performance process and provide an opportunity to discuss the continued relevance of the job-holder's objectives, how the job holder is doing and any short-term or long-term development needs. It is imperative to the success of any organisation's performance management policy that these take place frequently.
52. As part of performance conversations, managers should take account of how the job holder is progressing, and the degree to which individuals are demonstrating the standards of behaviour set out in the Success Profiles, the Civil Service Code and Leadership in Action attributes. During these conversations, it is recommended that the assignment duration length and expectations of the outcomes of the role are clearly communicated on a regular basis.
53. During performance conversations:
- managers and job holders should discuss objectives originally agreed and whether they should be revised in light of changing priorities.** Objectives should be **revised** to ensure an individual has an appropriate level of stretch and to reflect any amendments to the Outcome Delivery Plan or organisational business plan. If this is the case, the original objectives should not be changed; the revised objectives should be recorded alongside them. This ensures that end-year performance assessment (in Quarter 4) can take matters fully into account;
  - managers may want to give and record **feedback and follow-up action** by both parties may be agreed as a result;
  - Managers and job holders should make time to discuss development needs, longer-term career aspirations and options.** This discussion may require more time to be available and so could take place outside of the performance review discussions.



54. Within the parameters set out by this framework, departments are encouraged to tailor the frequency and recording of performance conversations, in addition to rewarding performance, to suit their departmental context. A good example of this would be:

- a. monthly performance check-ins accompanied by more formal quarterly conversations;
- b. regular collection of performance ratings on a central database which can be tracked across the department; and,
- c. all SCS are eligible for an in-year award up to £5000, with the decision-making process for this delegated to Directors General.



## Underperformance

55. It is critical that underperformance is dealt with promptly and effectively, as soon as it arises. Although the '*Managing Poor Performance Policy Procedures for the Senior Civil Service*' should be treated as a separate policy to this, an effective performance management process should identify those who are performing to the expected level in the SCS and include provisions that act as a bridge to poor performance procedures.
56. Where the performance of the job holder is not up to the standards of the role, in terms of either the achievement of objectives, or the behaviours being demonstrated, this must be brought to the attention of the job holder immediately. A single 'Partially Met' rating should not be a trigger for formal poor performance procedures, but rather for intensive support, training and coaching. This might include:
- coaching to enhance performance further;
  - setting more stretching goals;
  - tailoring development to build confidence and experience;
  - plugging competency gaps; and
  - looking at ways to re-energise in the current role, considering whether they have been in the role too long.
57. If a member of the SCS is rated as '**Partially Met**' for two consecutive quarters, their line manager should draw up a **performance development plan**, provide the individual with the necessary support to improve their performance and **schedule a review meeting** to evaluate improvement. If the SCS **continues to be rated as 'Partially Met'** after this, including as part of their end of year discussion, there will be an expectation that they are **placed on formal poor performance measures** as part of the SCS poor performance policy. However, managers should consider the impact of exceptional circumstances that could affect individual performance before they operate the poor performance policy.

## Underperformance - departmental guidance

58. It is important to recognise that many things, inside and outside of the work environment, can affect an individual's performance. **A good manager will identify underperformance and work with the individual to understand what is happening and what can be done to resolve it.**
59. It is important to understand whether the issue is a one-off dip in performance (maybe at a particular time or in a particular discipline) or an on-going performance problem where the individual is clearly not operating at the required level. A one-off dip in performance may be caused by a particular event or situation, such as bereavement, ill-health, relationship problems and financial worries, or other workforce barriers. Whilst the manager cannot always resolve these issues, support to bring performance back to an acceptable level should be given. This may include helping the job holder access support services such as Employee Assistance Programmes or allowing time off/adjusting working patterns to assist the individual to resolve the issue. A good practice guide to improving performance and handling difficult conversations is at [Annex C](#).
60. There are a variety of reasons for an ongoing dip in performance. A selection of these are listed below, alongside suggestions for improving these.



Reasons for ongoing dips in performance	Suggestions for addressing these
Skills or knowledge gaps	Training, coaching or mentoring
Misunderstanding of performance expectations between the job holder and their manager	Clarify expectations
Impact of management style	Consider how you will communicate, set directions and clarify expectations
Workplace relationships, including manager/job holder	Consider mediation
Will or motivation of the job holder	Explore career aspirations

61. The longer that underperformance is allowed to linger, the greater the problem for the individual and organisation when it is finally tackled. The impact of on-going poor performance is high. Poor performers:

- a. do not deliver required business outcomes or value for money;
- b. impair the standard, reputation and professionalism of the Civil Service;
- c. disrupt the flow of work and increase the workloads of their colleagues;
- d. cause resentment and lower morale; and
- e. set a bad example to those they manage

62. It is particularly important that members of the Senior Civil Service tackle poor performance to demonstrate the expected behaviours and to help promote a rigorous performance management culture within the Civil Service. **When dips in performance have been identified, managers should talk to the job holder as soon as possible** to explore the reasons for this and discuss how best to restore performance to the required level.

63. If performance continues to remain below the required standard, then managers must move to formal poor performance procedures set out in [Managing Poor Performance Policy Procedures for the Senior Civil Service](#).

64. Sometimes, the root cause of performance problems is ineffective recruitment. Managers should therefore **recruit with care**, being clear about why recruitment is taking place, what is sought, and searching for this from a wide, diverse pool of talent, with selection on merit as the core principle.



## Performance assessment

65. The **final quarterly conversation** in March should be used to carry out the end of year performance assessment for members of the SCS and is the point where a **formal box rating recommendation** (Exceeding, High Performing, Achieving, Partially Met) should be agreed between the individual and their line manager.
66. Job holders and managers must agree a written record of the discussion and this should be recorded on the Performance Agreement form. A copy of the Performance Agreement form can be found at [Annex B](#), however departments are free to use another form to align with their delegated grades should they wish.
67. Job holders must have been employed by the Civil Service since on or before 31 December to be eligible for moderation in that particular performance year.
68. If a job holder leaves their post on or after 1 January, then they are still eligible for moderation in their old department. If they move to a new department on or before 31 December then they should be moderated in their new department.
69. **The performance of job holders must be assessed by taking account of both ‘what’ they have achieved and ‘how’ they have achieved it.** Managers should make a judgement over to what extent objectives have been fulfilled using the following criteria:
- ‘What’ they have achieved** - whether objectives have been met or not, and to what degree;
  - ‘How’ they achieved it** - the degree to which they have demonstrated the behaviours in the Leadership in Action attributes, Success Profiles and their departmental or profession’s diversity and inclusion strategy, including how they have managed the resources for which they are responsible (people and financial);
  - Demonstration of Civil Service values** - individuals have a contractual duty to observe the Civil Service Code, and leaders are expected to exemplify these values; and
  - Additional consideration should also be given to the **degree of difficulty or ease** of meeting the objectives in light of actual events.
70. When assessing these objectives, equal weight will be given both to what and how these objectives were achieved to ensure a balanced focus on delivery and behaviours. Rather than assigning a rating to each individual objective, managers will instead evaluate performance as a whole.
71. **Those SCS who receive an Exceeding box rating are eligible to receive an end-year non-consolidated performance-related payment, although departments have the flexibility to also award ‘High Performing’ individuals if they see fit.** The pay practitioner’s guidance sets out that an *“element of the reward system must be tied to long term performance in some way”*. It is expected that all those in the 'Exceeding' rating are awarded with a non-consolidated performance-related bonus as a priority, but this principle gives departments the flexibility to choose to award some 'High Performing' individuals, if they decide this is appropriate. Departments also have discretion to decide how any award is distributed between these boxes, if they do decide to pay beyond the 'Exceeding' rating.



## Performance assessment - departmental guidance

72. Departments may want to use the following guidance to help them tailor the above requirement, **for the final quarterly conversation to include the formal end of year performance assessment**, to their specific departmental needs. The following guidance is not mandatory, but is intended to help departments implement the framework effectively.
73. This assessment will reflect individual performance throughout the year and can be supported by the 360-feedback tool, annual People Survey results and successful delivery against the ODP.
74. Feedback on the job holder should be collected as part of the end-year appraisal process. Departments are able to use the centrally procured Government Skills & Curriculum Unit (GSCU) Civil Service Learning 360 feedback tool, but can also choose to develop their own, so long as there is a mechanism to allow the acquisition of stakeholder feedback to help inform performance conversations.
75. Regardless of how collected, 360-degree feedback should cover a variety of relevant stakeholders, including staff, peers, customers, and **Ministers**, where staff frequently work with them. Staff feedback is particularly important for measuring leadership, performance management and capability building skills. **Peers** in other business units and departments are also in a position to give useful feedback on leadership, particularly corporate leadership. Where SCS have objectives linked to delivering a cross-cutting Priority Outcome, as set out in the organisation's ODP, and/or a joint project or programme, SCS should seek feedback from peers in relevant partner organisations. **Other stakeholders** should also be involved where possible, and could provide insight about the individual's customer service skills. SCS have to take a proportionate approach to requesting feedback by carefully considering how many respondents they will approach. The job holder must agree who the respondents they will seek feedback from with their line manager. The feedback should be collected throughout the year so that it can be discussed with the job holder at quarterly performance conversations.
76. A great deal of effective work is already being done in departments to ensure that the performance management system is operated in an equitable and consistent manner. As a key part of this, SCS are responsible for focussing on improving the quality of performance management overall by strengthening the capability of managers.
77. When completing the Performance Agreement Form, it is important to be aware of the need to set aside any personal bias, conscious or unconscious, to ensure an objective appraisal of the person you are reporting on.



## Performance differentiation and moderation

78. Departments should assess SCS' members performance absolutely against their objectives, assigning individuals to one of the four performance groups: Exceeding, High Performing, Achieving and Partially Met. Since 2018/19, forced distribution has been removed for the SCS. However, as with any normal large organisation, we continue to recommend to departments that performance differentiation is expected to take the shape of a curve, with the highest proportion of SCS falling in **Achieving** and roughly 5% in the lowest rating (**Partially Met**). When adjudicating performance ratings, managers must refer to the criteria in the table on pp.8-10 to assign an accurate performance rating.
79. End-year performance ratings must first be moderated at the local level in each business unit. Moderation is a checkpoint to appropriately evaluate the given performance rating and ensure consistency across a cohort of SCS, not to meet any particular performance distribution across the department. Therefore, if managers share their recommendations with individuals, they must make clear that it is an initial recommendation and could be subject to change at moderation. However, managerial recommendations are based on a thorough and holistic assessment of an individual's performance so should be considered as the best indicator of an individual's actual performance, and should not be unduly changed to fit departmental expectations of what performance is expected to look like.
80. Following the final quarterly performance conversation and localised moderation panels, departments must also conduct overall moderation meetings. In these overall moderation meetings, DGs, Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Profession who participated in the start-year performance expectation setting meeting should reconvene **to moderate the scores of the SCS in their department as a whole by evaluating the distribution curve.**
81. The overall moderation meeting should also **evaluate whether the performance standards set at the beginning of the year were robust enough** in light of their distribution curve and whether their departmental performance management system is having a detrimental impact on a particular group of individuals.
82. If the overall moderation meeting shows that the **curve is disproportionate** or that there is an adverse impact for a particular group, then these **issues should be addressed in the performance expectation setting meeting for the next performance year** (as outlined in the objective setting process). Departments should consider the expectation that 5% SCS would be in the 'partially met' rating, and are free to adopt further guided distribution, but it is important to assess performance absolutely against the criteria set out for ratings at the start of the performance year.
83. To enhance the effectiveness of moderation and to reduce the impact of bias, at least one 'consistency check' mid-year is recommended to evaluate the distribution of indicative ratings across protected characteristics, but is not mandated as this is contingent on departmental capacity.

## Performance Differentiation and Moderation - departmental guidance

84. Localised moderation arrangements will vary according to the circumstances of particular departments/agencies and the number of SCS. Where feasible, moderation should be done grade by grade. Small departments/agencies that do not have sufficient numbers of SCS to moderate effectively should make arrangements with others to moderate across departments. Guidance on how to conduct localised moderation panels can be found at [Annex D](#).



85. Departments are free to hold overall moderation meetings as they see fit, but we recommend that those who participated in the performance expectation setting meeting at the start of the year reconvene to moderate the scores of the SCS in their department as a whole by evaluating the distribution curve.
86. Following the removal of forced distribution, we continue to recommend to departments that performance differentiation is expected to take the shape of a curve, with the highest proportion of SCS falling into achieving. However, it is important that departments ensure that their processes properly identify those who are not performing at the expected standard and as such we have made it clear in this document that departments would expect to see around 5% of their overall SCS rated as 'Partially Met' at the end of year assessment process. Departments are able to build on this if they wish, and we will continue to encourage the use of appropriate methods (e.g., objective identification and discussion of 'borderline' cases) to support a reliable and evidence-based process.
87. The setting of robust performance standards at the outset of the performance year should mitigate the need to alter the curve at the end of the performance year, and department finds they have fallen well short of these expectations following the conclusion of their annual performance management cycle, then they should take action at the beginning of the next performance year to ensure that their processes are as robust as possible.
88. A mid-year consistency check is recommended to evaluate the distribution of indicative ratings across the SCS cadre within a department and particularly to evaluate its impact across protected characteristics. Departments are free to conduct these meetings as they see fit, but we recommend that some, if not all, of the participants from the performance expectation setting meeting reconvene to discuss the distribution of indicative ratings as a result of the performance standards set at the outset of the performance year. It is recommended that a record is kept of this meeting so that comparisons can be made between the distribution of indicative ratings during, and at the end, of the performance year.



## SCS Performance Management Reporting Requirements

89. In order to ensure that the SCS performance management system meets the vision of a high-performing senior Civil Service, and that there is appropriate central oversight of performance across departments, the Cabinet Office conducts an annual data collection exercise in the autumn.
90. This exercise requires data on:
- a. number and percentage of performers rated 'Exceeding' & 'High Performing' in the department.
  - b. number and percentage of SCS rated 'Partially Met' in the department (will likely be 5% SCS population).
  - c. The number of non-consolidated performance related payments paid out, both in year and at end of year.
91. For any queries relating to this data collection, please contact [scsdatabase@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:scsdatabase@cabinetoffice.gov.uk).
92. In addition to the above, as a result of the launch of the new framework, we are also intending to capture departmental feedback on how the new framework is working to help us iterate if necessary. As such we will be in touch with departments through the SCS Performance Management Network Group on a regular basis to seek relevant feedback. This will also include collecting information on the number of SCS subject to poor performance measures.



## SCS Performance Management Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently asked questions for the SCS performance management policy are outlined below. If your question is not covered and it is not included elsewhere in the framework, this is an area that the policy is not prescriptive on and departments should use their discretion to formulate their own arrangements. For localised queries, including those regarding long-term absence, unpaid leave, and job share arrangements, please refer to your internal departmental policies or consult your legal team.

For further information on the framework, please contact the Cabinet Office Reward, TUPE and Employment Framework team at [csemploymentframework@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:csemploymentframework@cabinetoffice.gov.uk).

### If a member of the Civil Service has left the department during the performance year, do they still need to be assessed?

If a job holder moves to another government department during the performance year, then they should still be subject to performance assessment and moderation. Job holders who move departments before the 1st January each year should be moderated in their new department. If the individual has left the Civil Service entirely, they will not be entitled to any bonus or performance reward if they were eligible for one.

### If an individual is on a temporary promotion to SCS, how should their performance be assessed?

Departments have discretion to determine how an individual's performance should be assessed in this scenario. However, our recommended approach would be that the individual is assessed at the grade they have spent the majority of their performance year at. A consistent approach must be taken within the department. If an individual is assessed against the criteria for SCS, even if they are not substantive in that grade and they meet the criteria for an in-year award, our recommendation is that they should receive an SCS level award.

### Which department should assess the performance and undertake moderation for a member of the SCS who moved to a new department at the same grade?

If an individual has joined a new department on or after the 1st January, they should be moderated in their old department as this considers a larger proportion of the performance year. The new department is encouraged to feed into this process to ensure a more holistic appraisal of an individual's performance, but the final performance assessment and moderation process should remain with the old department.

### How is non-consolidated award distributed?

Funding for all awards will come from the 3.3% non-consolidated pay pot. All members of the SCS are eligible for in-year non-consolidated awards, up to the value of £5,000 per award, provided they are not on formal poor performance measures. Individuals can receive multiple in-year awards provided the maximum value of award received in one performance year does not exceed £17,500 (which would require approval from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury). Only those individuals rated as 'Exceeding' and 'High Performing' are eligible for end-year performance bonuses.



## How does an SCS job holder appeal the decision on their end-year performance rating?

If a job holder wishes to appeal their performance rating following the end-year conversation, then they will need to follow their departmental grievance procedures or any other measures in place in their department to allow for the review of a management decision regarding performance ratings.

## How should performance be managed when an individual is on secondment?

For inward and outward secondments individuals remain subject to their employers (home) performance management processes. The host should be encouraged to input into this process, and may choose to include them within their own processes if they see fit. Therefore, it is important for policies and processes to be communicated between employer and host, as per the arrangements set out in the individuals' secondment agreement.



## Annex A: SCS Objective Setting

As a member of the SCS it is essential to have agreed objectives in place, so you can be clear about what you are expected to achieve, and what you are accountable for, by when. You should record these in the form of a performance agreement to help you track and measure your progress. The number of objectives you have will depend on your role but these should cover your main responsibilities and, where possible, be restricted to no more than 8 key live objectives at any one time.

Performance objectives identified at the beginning of the year will set out “what” you need to achieve over the year, while Civil Service Behaviours and Leadership Statement will set out “how” these will be achieved. The Leadership Statement describes the behaviours that the Civil Service can expect of their leaders at all grades, and was launched with its own set of implementation resources including a 360-feedback tool.

### How to write your objectives:

You are responsible for drafting your objectives, and agreeing them with your manager. Objectives should be SMART, and cover:

- **Business delivery:** These should directly reflect commitments made in Outcome Delivery Plans, including where you are responsible for your department’s contribution to a cross-cutting outcome led by another department;
  - **Finance / efficiency:** objectives should cover what you will do to control costs or drive efficiencies. You should also record budgets for which you are responsible on the form. Again, these should directly reflect commitments made in the Single Departmental Plan;
  - **People/capability:** Objectives should consider how you will inspire, motivate and empower your teams to deliver. As part of this, you may consider addressing workplace culture, increasing the capability, and improving ways of working, alongside committing to delivering an element of your department or professions diversity and inclusion plan, to support better delivery and outputs.
- Corporate contribution:** As a member of the SCS your objectives should reflect your wider corporate role. Describe what significant personal impact/influence you have had on wider performance, delivery and/or Civil Service success and how this has created/added value.

Objectives should be reviewed at least every quarter to ensure continued relevance.

### How you will be assessed:

- At all times you have a contractual duty to observe the Civil Service Code and its values.
- Your performance will be formally assessed by both “what” you achieve (whether your objectives are met/not met/exceeded) and “how” you achieved it, by demonstrating the leadership behaviours expected of the SCS (the Leadership Statement and CS Behaviours).
- You should seek informal feedback on your performance on a continuous basis. If this isn’t forthcoming, tell your countersigning officer.
- At the mid-year point you should have a more structured conversation and record the main points.
- At the end of year your performance will be measured by a number of key stakeholders as part of a robust 360-degree feedback process.
- Your manager will formally assess your performance absolutely against your objectives, and assign a rating, which a moderation panel will discuss and challenge appropriately, if necessary.
- You are responsible for building up a portfolio of evidence during the year on how you have performed against objectives and behaviours.



## What a good objective looks like – an example:

<b>Objective Type</b> <b>(What you are accountable to deliver) - eg. Business delivery etc.</b>	<b>Include how you will achieve it and by when, what good looks like and how you'll know you've been successful. This includes 'what' (expectations, measures, outcomes/deliverables, timeframes and 'how', achieved by skills, knowledge, competencies, behaviours, values applied, measured against feedback from stakeholders.</b>
<p><u>Business delivery:</u></p> <p>To publish a White Paper on the future of widgets by November 2024.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Agree terms of reference with Ministers (May) – White paper delivered on time and within budget</li> <li>● Ensure resource arrangements for project team are signed off (June) – Positive feedback from staff and stakeholders on demonstration of leadership behaviours</li> <li>● Meet with key stakeholders (July) – Examples of issues resolved due to my intervention.</li> <li>● Provide my team with clear strategic direction and support through fortnightly programme meetings – Findings of peer review of project.</li> <li>● Agree approach on shared priorities within the White Paper with relevant other government departments, including strategic direction, roles and responsibilities, a delivery plan and performance metrics – Feedback from OGD stakeholders, delivery against performance metrics.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Business delivery:</u></p> <p>Publish and deliver the Government Strategy on Widget Reform 2024-2027.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Agree scope and level of ambition with Executive Board (June)</li> <li>● Present paper to Ministers setting out clear outcomes which will be delivered across a three year period (July) - Positive feedback from Ministers</li> <li>● Prioritisation exercise of work within team to ensure appropriate resource available for project work, and alignment with new set of prioritise (July)</li> <li>● Manage series of workshops to bring Trade Unions and other Government Departments on board with the project (August)</li> <li>● Delivery of year one ambitions set out in the plan by March.</li> </ul>
<p><u>People and Capability:</u></p> <p>Continue to take a zero tolerance approach to bullying, harassment and discrimination within my Department, to ensure all staff can best deliver the Government's priorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Double the number of individuals within the Department trained as mediators to improve efficiency by enabling them to swiftly carry out mediations.</li> <li>● Raise awareness within my part of the business and beyond on the importance of mediation, how it works and the positive impact it can have.</li> <li>● Implement a more efficient process to decrease time for investigations and mediations to reach completion.</li> <li>● Measured by monitoring the reporting of BHD and frequency of Employment Tribunals (which are costly for the Department).</li> </ul>
<p><u>Finance:</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Effective management of the Workforce teams budgets to ensure value for money and within the budget envelope for the team.</li> <li>● Engage with Finance Business Partners on a regular basis (monthly meetings) to ensure spend is on track and being monitored.</li> </ul>



<p>Manage budget (primarily admin, funding staff salaries (c.£2.7m)), and secure additional grant funding (£150,000) for digital transformation project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take outline business case to ExCo to secure additional funding (£150,000) for digital transformation. Feedback from ExCo on leadership behaviours demonstrated.</li><li>• Set up and chair a reward and recognition panel to ensure the team is properly recognised for their achievements by ensuring that the Reward and Recognition budget is spent appropriately. Empower team to contribute to this initiative.</li></ul>
--	---



## Annex B - SCS Performance Agreement Form

Name:

Job title:

Line Manager:

Period of Report:

### Relevant context about the role:

*Please include: Budgetary responsibilities: type (e.g. admin/capital/programme), value and description (what the budget is for), staffing responsibilities: number of staff and grade distribution, last People Engagement score, any additional relevant context*

### Development and career planning:

*Record of development activity in the reporting period, including utilisation of 5 days learning and development.*

### Mid-year performance:

Job holder assessment of performance:

*Record performance to date, citing evidence against the 'what' and 'how' from objectives set. Include strategies to meet agreed objectives by year-end.*

Reporting manager assessment of performance:

*Discuss performance to date, citing evidence against the 'what' and 'how' from objectives set. Include progress against development.*

Mid-year rating: **Exceeding, High Performing, Achieving, Partially Met**

Agreed by: **Job holder | Line manager**

### End-of-year performance:

Job holder assessment of performance:

*Record performance for reporting year citing evidence against the 'what' and 'how' from objectives set, measured against stakeholder and 360° feedback.*

Have you undertaken 360° feedback? **Yes / No**

Reporting manager assessment of performance:

*In making this end of year assessment, it is important to acknowledge and set aside any personal bias, conscious or unconscious, to ensure an objective appraisal of the person you are reporting on. By checking this box I confirm acknowledgement of this statement.*

End-of-year rating: **Exceeding, High Performing, Achieving, Partially Met**

Agreed by: **Job holder | Line manager | Countersigning Officer**



## Annex C - Good Practice Guides:

### Improving Performance

#### 1. Tackle performance every day – on the day

**You should make time to address performance every day – good and bad. Hold regular and constructive discussions and coaching conversations.** Make sure you tackle poor performance on the day it occurs and in more detail in the first one to one that follows – do not wait for a six monthly or annual review. Talking to people about issues when they occur is vital, backing this up when needed with a file note you share with them enables and supports any formal process. Filing a note you haven't shared with the person undermines any formal process rather than assisting it.

#### 2. In tackling extremes don't miss the majority

While you can sometimes find you concentrate your time and effort on the excellent and problem performers, the majority are usually in between. **There is real performance improvement here which is within your grasp.** Identifying those whose performance is improving or declining and managing accordingly can make a real difference to individual and team performance. Most people genuinely welcome feedback that helps them to improve and want to do well.

#### 3. How people get things done is important as well as getting them done

**Attitude and behaviour are part of performance – you can and should manage them.** As communicators how we present ourselves, handle situations and represent our profession are part of getting the job done well. You need to address attitude and behavioural problems even if 'technical' performance or delivery is good. This isn't about deeming a specific leadership style better or worse than any other, but about demonstrating both the corporate and organisational behavioural expectations. Corporate expectations are set out in frameworks like the Leadership Model. They also form part of our Civil Service values set out in the Civil Service Code. Departments should set out clearly any organisational expectations so that objectives can be linked to the business aims. In both cases job holders and managers need to be clear about what is expected of them and how this will be measured.

#### 4. You need a different approach to managing behaviour and attitudes than managing capability

Capability problems are best tackled by clear task-based objectives; behavioural and attitude problems by being very clear with people on the behaviour you want and don't want. For capability issues a reasonable timeframe for improvement can be put in place to take account of any training/coaching requirements. Behaviour and attitude can be transformed very quickly if you actually tackle it with people and then keep tackling it.

#### 5. What individuals can do to engender good performance management

- **Set clear objectives** - It may be self-evident but the start of good performance management is clarity about the objectives that are expected to be achieved, both in business outputs and the way business is conducted. The need for specific performance measures and criteria will vary from



circumstance to circumstance but the key requirement is that both parties are clear about what has to be done and how they will assess how well it has been done.

- **Establish the right relationship** – It is very important to establish and maintain the authority to engage in performance management. That comes from being very clear from the start about the standards that matter to your business and the organisation. It is also helpful to separate the individual from their performance. You are not reviewing the individual's intrinsic worth. You are reviewing what they have done. This is particularly important when challenging poor performance.

- **Be generous** – Good performance managers are generous with their time, with their support and coaching and, above all, with their aspiration that the individuals they manage should have the opportunity and support to grow and improve. They do not separate development from performance management. Their goal is for performance to improve and their skill is in helping their people to do that. This is nearly always accompanied by a style of leadership and management which is empowering – by being clear about outputs and helping their staff to learn and grow as they discover the best ways to deliver them – rather than specific and detailed checking and intervention.

- **Be tough when necessary** – These characteristics enable good performance managers to be extremely tough when they need to be. They have established the moral authority to be as robust and vigorous as necessary.

## Handling Difficult Conversations

### Preparing

- What is the issue? Is this a one-off situation and what impact has it had, for example on achievement of objectives or on others?
- Identify a specific example that illustrates the behaviour or situation that must change.
- What is your contribution to the problem? Should you recognise shared responsibility?
- Consider your emotional response to the situation and be aware of any unconscious bias.
- Consider if there is anything you could do differently to help resolve the issue.
- Prepare the points to cover and be clear about the outcome you wish to achieve.
- Arrange a suitable time for the discussion and think about the location.

### During the Conversation

- Be clear about why the conversation is necessary. Be specific and give examples.
- Clarify why it is important.
- Be mindful of your body language and tone of voice.
- Let them know that you want to resolve the problem.



- Use open questioning and ask the other person's perspective, for example:
  - How do you feel things have been going? / How do you see the job developing
  - How do you feel about that?
  - Tell me, why do you think that happened?
  - What do you think you could do differently next time?
- Check your understanding and paraphrase:
  - Have I got the right impression?
  - Do you mean that...?
- Invite the other person to respond and do not interrupt them.
- Ensure the other person knows you understand their views, feelings, position etc.
- Be ready for reactions – these could be any number of emotions from upset to anger or the individual may become quiet and withdrawn. It may be useful to take a break in the conversation to give individuals time to calm down or reflect.
- Keep it professional – don't let the conversation become like one between a parent and a child.

## Moving On

- Where are we now?
- What do we need to do to resolve this?
- What is our new understanding and how do we go forward from here?
- What happens next?

## Reviewing

- Set a SMART target for change in behaviour or situation.
- Review regularly until there is evidence of change in performance and/or behaviour.



## Annex D – Guidance for conducting a localised moderation panel

Once a performance rating has been provisionally agreed by the job holder and the line manager, it is then taken to moderation. The objective of the localised moderation panel is to discuss and appropriately challenge the job holder's performance rating and ensure consistency across a cohort of staff.

This guidance note outlines the key principles and best practices recommended to deliver the moderation process effectively and consistently.

### Performance Differentiation

1. Departments should assess the performance of their SCS absolutely against their own objectives, and assign each individual an 'Exceeding', 'High Performing', 'Achieving' or 'Partially Met' rate.
2. There is no forced distribution but as with any normal large organisation, we would expect there to be a normal curve of performance differentiation, with the largest proportion of SCS in each department falling in the middle box ('achieving') and roughly 5% in the bottom box ('Partially Met').

### Performance Assessment

1. It is recommended best practice that:
  - a. an employee's performance assessment is entirely evidence based; and
  - b. this evidence base is the sole determinant of the individual's assigned performance rating.
2. The purpose of the localised moderation panel is to allow managers to review performance evidence, check for consistency across the peer group, and challenge performance ratings where necessary.
3. Moderation panels must use the following criteria to come to judgements on performance groups:
  - a. Assessment of performance against objectives, including:
    - i. the leadership behaviours exhibited in the achievement of objectives, reference to the Leadership in Action Attributes to support evidence will be key;
    - ii. an assessment of the management of resources. Wherever possible finance professionals should attend moderation panels to provide professional insight on the degree to which job holders have demonstrated sound financial management;
    - iii. job weight. All other things being equal, individuals who perform well in bigger jobs should be ranked ahead of individuals who perform well in smaller jobs; and
  - b. the degree to which the job holder has contributed to the Civil Service as part of the wider corporate community, including contributing to the running, performance and reputation of the Civil Service, leadership communication and fostering an ethos of volunteering.
4. In addition, the following conditions will apply for performance group distributions:
  - a. if an individual does not meet their finance/efficiency objective then they cannot be ranked higher than in the 'achieving' performance group.
5. The importance of procedural justice should be considered for those subject to the process. This includes respecting distributive justice (considering the equity of contribution), equality (same



treatment for same circumstances) and interpersonal considerations of respect and propriety of treatment, in addition to how adequate information is conveyed on the decision; particularly timely, truthful, specific explanations.

## Further Guidance

6. Guidance on how to conduct localised moderation panels for SCS is very similar to that provided for the delegated grades. For further information you may wish to approach your HR Director or HR Business Partner who will be supporting you with your senior performance discussions.