

# A Guide to Using North Hertfordshire District Council Behavioural and Knowledge Competencies

for Staff and Managers





# Introduction

NHDC has used a competency framework for many years primarily as an assessment tool used in appraisal. Whilst this provided a basis for discussion and development changes in the Local Government environment meant that the competencies no longer reflected the requirements of the organisation. In addition, the appraisal process was changed to Regular Performance Review (RPR) in 2016 which no longer requires assessment against each competence.

The new competency framework is designed to be applied flexibly and in a wider range of situations. It is primarily intended to promote objective discussion and review.

This simple guide will help you understand the competencies and how they can be applied by managers and other staff.

This framework represents organisational competencies and recognises the role that professional bodies have in establishing competencies which are specific to the role.

## What are Competencies?

Competencies are just that, they describe (usually in behavioural terms) the expectations of the organisation, in effect what competent means. Competencies go hand in hand with Person Specifications which give the specific skills, knowledge and behaviours required of each role. In addition, Professional bodies such as Lawyers in Local Government and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health have developed competencies and expectations required of a practising professional. The NHDC competency framework is designed to work flexibly in conjunction with these.

# The NHDC Competencies

Because of the different nature of roles the NHDC competencies are divided into staff competencies, which apply to everybody and management competencies which are additional competencies that apply to anybody with management responsibilities.

## Management Competencies

- A. External awareness and relationship management
- B. Internal awareness and relationship management
- C. Personal impact and communication behaviours
- D. Technical and knowledge base
- E. Individual and team leadership and motivational behaviour
- F. Managing change and transition

Each of the competency groups has a range of positive indicators. These are more specific behaviours that are indicative of a particular competence being met.

These are provided in more detail at appendix 1.





## Staff Competencies

- A. Teamwork
- B. Problem solving / shows Initiative
- C. Personal organisation
- D. Change and resilience
- E. Customer focus
- F. Effective communication
- G. IT skills and knowledge
- H. Aware of and works within framework of organisational requirements
- I. Delivers results
- J. Constant improvement

## Summary of How Competencies Can Be Used

The framework provided by the competencies allows their flexible use in a number of ways. These are explained in more detail in the following paragraphs but in summary are:

- To support discussion and feedback in RPR meetings
- To help shape person specifications and questions in recruitment
- As an aid to personal development
- For career progression and talent management
- To help ensure objective performance management
- As a basis for coaching

## The NHDC Approach to Using Competencies

The fundamental principle is that the competencies are a tool for individuals and the organisation to use to understand performance and development. They are not intended as a once a year reference point for the RPR but something that is regularly referenced and used in flexible ways. Feedback about the competencies is welcome as they will evolve with the organisation and the context in which it operates.

The graphic representations of the competencies shown in appendix 2 can be used to plot progress or achievement against competencies and create a 'heat map' showing areas needing discussion or action. These are available on the intranet under competencies.

## Using Competencies to Support Discussion in the RPR

The RPR process contains a section that allows selective review and discussion against competencies. This means that you don't have to go through each competency in detail but you can focus on those that are most relevant and helpful to the discussion.

When you get to this point in the RPR simply review the competencies (staff, manager or both as needed) and highlight any that are significant in relation to the performance or development of the person. These can then be discussed. It is also helpful to encourage the person to do the same when they are preparing for the RPR.

Remember it is as important to use the competencies to highlight areas of good performance or development need as well as those where there may be issues.

## Using Competencies to Help Shape Person Specifications and Questions in Recruitment

The competencies are highlighted as generic requirements for all jobs advertised. In addition certain aspects of the competencies may be particularly important for a role and used more explicitly in the Person Specification. In addition interview questions and other selection methods should always be developed with assessment against the person specification and the organisational competencies in mind.

Managers should always reference the competencies when developing Person Specifications and designing a selection process. Competencies are the foundation of objective behavioural selection.

## Using Competencies as an Aid to Personal Development

When considering their own development staff and managers can use the competencies (and the heat maps) as a tool to identify specific areas they wish to develop in. Managers can facilitate the discussions during RPR and one to one meetings but staff can use them at any time to consider their development.

Whilst the competencies are specific to NHDC they reflect the current needs within Local Government and many other organisations as well. So considering development against these areas will be helpful to an individual what ever their career path.



## Using Competencies for Career Progression and Talent Management

The constrained resources within Local Government presents challenges in terms of the recruitment and retention of staff. Whilst external recruitment may prove difficult we should ensure that we use the competencies as an objective way of identifying talent and developing people to be capable of meeting selection criteria for new roles and opportunities. This will particularly be the case for staff wishing to move into management roles. Fairness is paramount and selection will always be on 'best fit' to the Person Specification. In addition there will be equal access to development opportunities and a flexible approach based on individual needs. Overall the use of competencies in this process stops people being identified and developed on the basis of a subjective judgement.

## Using Competencies to Help Ensure Objective Performance Management

Situations where an employee is not meeting the organisations objectives are difficult and often emotionally charged. It is vital for managers to use all of the tools available to them to identify and address issues at an early stage. Even if an issue does move on to becoming a formal case under the Council's capability or conduct procedures the foundation of comparing performance against expectations is paramount. In practice this means:

- Clearly establishing expectations generally through the job description and competencies and more specifically by setting objectives in the RPR
- Using the RPR process including regular one to ones to provide ongoing feedback
- Using the competencies as a reference to give timely and objective feedback when an individual is not meeting expectations either relating to specific objectives or the competencies. This is particularly the case when behavioural or interpersonal issues are a factor
- Using competencies as a tool in the investigation and decision making process of formal cases

## Using Competencies as a Basis for Coaching

Some coaching discussions can be helped by either or both parties referencing the competencies if this is relevant and helpful to achieving the agreed coaching goals.

## In Conclusion

Used flexibly but rigorously by managers and staff the competencies provide a great basis for understanding and developing both individuals and the organisation and their performance. They reflect the need to be resilient and be skilled at working through change, as well as the requirement for Local Authorities to become even more commercially aware.

If you have any questions about the competencies or their use please contact

**Keith Crampton** – Learning and Employee Engagement Manager on **4435**

Or

**Helen Bylett** – Learning and Development Officer on **4619**

# APPENDIX 1

## Positive Indicators of Competence

These are indicative of the behaviours an individual would demonstrate if they were working at a high level of the competence. It is not an exhaustive list and other indicators could be added depending on the circumstances. In addition they should be used with regard to the requirements and level of a particular role. Some indicators may also be relevant to more than 1 competency.

### Management

#### **A. External awareness and relationship management**

1. Demonstrates a focus on and a commitment to, meeting the needs of customers
2. Acts with commercial awareness and recognises opportunities to improve financial effectiveness
3. Maintains current knowledge on the impact of Government policy on the local agenda
4. Engages with the community and customers
5. Builds effective working relationships with partner organisations
6. Maintains up to date knowledge as a professional and as a manager

#### **B. Internal awareness and relationship management**

1. Builds strong relationships with other managers and teams
2. Works constructively to support wider organisational goals
3. Is aware of the political environment and operates with integrity within it
4. Demonstrates respect for other people through behaviour
5. Addresses issues and disagreements constructively
6. Is highly focussed on the needs of internal customers

#### **C. Personal impact and communication behaviours**

1. Creates a positive personal impact with a wide range of people
2. Demonstrates emotional intelligence in dealing with others
3. Can present information verbally in an engaging and effective way
4. Demonstrates awareness of self and strives for continuous development
5. Has a pleasant and positive approach
6. Behaves in a consistent way

#### **D. Technical and knowledge base**

1. Aware of and proactive in seeking digital solutions
2. Demonstrates an understanding of good financial management practice
3. Works within organisational policy and protocol
4. Demonstrates personal organisation and good time management
5. Employs a range of problem solving techniques and strategies
6. Has a good understanding and application of project management techniques

## **E. Individual and team leadership and motivational behaviour**

1. Actively develops team members
2. Takes action to develop the overall cohesion and effectiveness of the team
3. Manages performance issues and exercises appropriate authority
4. Considers the well being of team members and takes measures to develop own well being and resilience
5. Consciously chooses behaviour that motivates
6. Communicates effectively particularly in relation to expectations

## **F. Managing change and transition**

1. Initiates or implements change when required
2. Is bold in championing new ways of operating
3. Communicates the implications of change
4. Engages others about the need for change
5. Can be creative or use creative colleagues to find radical solutions
6. Demonstrates a thorough approach and attention to detail in the implementation of change

# Staff

## **A. Teamwork**

1. Demonstrates behaviours that promote a positive working relationship with colleagues
2. Considers what is needed to achieve team as well as individual goals
3. Keeps colleagues informed about issues affecting the team
4. Supports others in the team as required
5. Maintains a healthy and safe working environment
6. Flexible in response to the needs of the team

## **B. Problem solving / shows Initiative**

1. Makes effective decisions within their own level of authority
2. Prepared to be innovative, creative and flexible in problem solving
3. Uses initiative and where appropriate initiates action
4. Maintains a positive enthusiastic approach when faced with challenging situations
5. Asks questions and probes to clarify instructions and develop ideas
6. Can employ a rational and logical approach when required

## **C. Personal organisation**

1. Organises own workload and keeps workspace organised and tidy
2. Demonstrates prioritisation of work
3. Meets deadlines producing the agreed quality and quantity of work
4. Demonstrates initiative and carries out tasks without constant checking back
5. Able to work in a structured way
6. Maintains required standards of attendance, timekeeping and punctuality



#### **D. Change and resilience**

1. Able to bounce back from setbacks affecting their work
2. Recognises the impact of change on themselves and colleagues and seeks to move on in a positive way
3. Uses behaviours and strategies that support personal resilience
4. Seek to understand the reasons for organisational change
5. Can challenge organisational change in a constructive way without becoming personal about others
6. Suggests changes

#### **E. Customer focus**

1. Is positive and helpful when dealing with customers internal or external
2. Recognises and responds to the needs of customers who may have special requirements
3. Answers queries and solves problems confidently and effectively and keeps the customer informed of progress
4. Empathises with the circumstances of the customer
5. Seeks and listens to feedback from the customer in order to improve services
6. Presents a positive image to everyone they come into contact with.

#### **F. Effective communication**

1. Communicates clearly, and fluently using good spoken English and avoiding jargon
2. Shows an ability to listen and consider what others have to say
3. Expresses personal views where appropriate but without aggression or putting the other person down
4. Is sensitive to the thoughts, concerns and feelings of others
5. As appropriate to the job produces clear and concise written communication
6. Chooses the best form of communication dependant on the circumstances.

#### **G. IT skills and knowledge**

1. Demonstrates an ability to work with the corporate systems and any that are particular to the service area or department
2. Continues to develop their skills and knowledge
3. Recognises and takes action on issues that need help from IT
4. Addresses skill and knowledge gaps proactively
5. Questions system functionality that adds cost and not value

#### **H. Aware of and works within framework of organisational requirements**

1. Takes time to understand the organisation, the way it operates and corporate goals
2. Operates within the boundaries of policy and procedure
3. Reads communications and intranet postings
4. Engages in and contributes effectively to RPR process

#### **I. Delivers results**

1. Completes work or achieves objectives within agreed timescales
2. Monitors workload and highlights where there may be difficulty achieving deadlines
3. Completes work to the agreed standards
4. Seeks to understand the impact of their work on others
5. Maintains up to date knowledge in professional area of work as required

#### **J. Constant improvement**

1. Looks for and constructively suggests more effective or efficient ways of doing things
2. Concerned with own performance and seeks to develop where possible

# APPENDIX 2

## Competency 'Heat maps'

These 'heat maps' are graphic representations of the competencies which can be used to visually show an individuals development or simply as an easy way of recognising strengths and development areas relative to each other.

They are not intended as a way of scoring people but as a way of informing development. However they can be useful in managing performance as a means of objectively showing and giving feedback on how somebody is not meeting expectations.

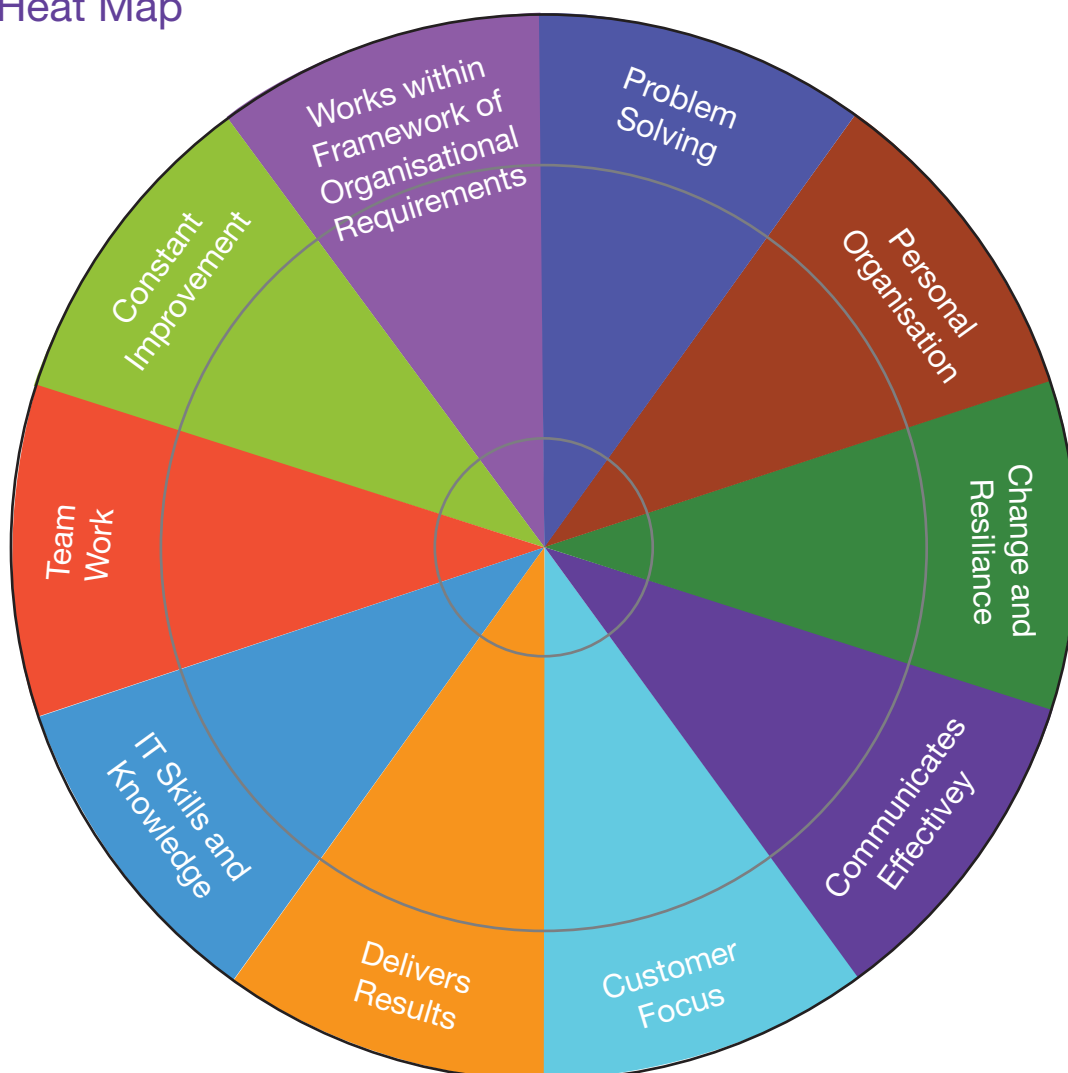
The idea is to mark or shade the map against each competence to the level you agree is being achieved:

Level 1 (the circle nearest the centre) Rarely demonstrates positive indicators of the competence

Level 2 (The middle circle) Often demonstrates positive indicators of the competence

Level 3 (The outer circle) Always demonstrates positive indicators of the competence

## Staff Heat Map



# Management Heat Map





