Te Kawa Mataaho
Public Service Commission

Performance Improvement Review Programme

Agency Input Guide

October 2025

Purpose of this document

This document describes the agency resources and actions needed when participating in a Performance Improvement Review (review). It outlines the stages of a review and what the agency needs to do at each stage. It also describes how the agency can gain the most value from the process.

This document should be read alongside the *Guide to the Performance Improvement Model* which describes the model underpinning the review and how it is applied.

Resources required for a Performance Improvement Review

Agency resources

The agency will need to establish a team to support the review (Agency Review Team). The work of the team includes engagement on the setup for the review, undertaking the Self-Assessment, organising the logistics of the interviews, facilitating feedback on the Lead Reviewers' draft report, and developing the agency response for inclusion in the final report.

The agency needs to decide who are the right people for this team, and it should include individuals to cover at least the following key roles:

- a Tier 2 sponsor
- a project lead
- a coordinator.

Responsibilities and tasks

The Tier 2 sponsor provides the necessary authority and support for the review, facilitating decision-making and resource allocation.

The project lead supports the agency's preparation (including the Self-Assessment) and response and should be someone who has the trust and confidence of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), as well as a good understanding of, and connections across, the agency's business. Often the project lead will be responsible for drafting the agency response to the review that is included in the report.

The role of the coordinator is to manage logistics to support the Self-Assessment and interview processes. This includes collating documents, organising the interview schedule and booking interviews, providing information to interviewees and coordinating site visits, as required. It also includes taking care of details such as security access, meeting room bookings, IT access and travel arrangements for site visits.

Central agency resources

The Public Service Commission (the Commission) will assemble a Performance Improvement Review Team (PIR Team) consisting of:

- two independent Lead Reviewers engaged by the Commission who lead the review, and
- the Performance Review Manager (PRM) to work with the Lead Reviewers and the agency's nominated sponsor and project manager to ensure the success of the review.

The Manager, Public Sector Performance and Deputy Public Service Commissioner will engage with the review at key points throughout the process.

Throughout the process, the PIR Team will engage with both the relevant Policy Advisory Group (PAG) Advisor from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), and the relevant Vote Team from the Treasury. Together with the Commission's relevant Assistant Commissioner they will review the draft report and are responsible for providing a joint central agency response that is included in the report.

Stages of a Performance Improvement Review

This section describes the review process and the agency's input and involvement in each stage.

Overview of the review process

Reviews progress through six stages. These stages are summarised below.

1. Initiation	2. Scoping	3. Interviews	4. Report drafting	5. Report finalisation	6. Close out
Commission confirms Lead Reviewers, timeline, and budget for the review.	Agency undertakes a self-assessment. Preparations for interviews are underway.	Lead Reviewers interview key internal and external stakeholders. Lead Reviewers develop and present preliminary findings to the agency Chief Executive.	Commission and Lead Reviewers draft report based on the preliminary findings. Peer reviewers and central agencies review draft report to ensure a consistent standard across reviews.	Agency provides feedback on the draft report and a response to the review to include in the report. Central agencies provide a response to the review to include in the report. Minister reviews draft report and meets the Lead Reviewers to discuss it if desired. Report is finalised.	Report is published on the Commission's website.
2+ weeks	3 weeks	3 weeks	4 weeks	5 weeks	2+ weeks

1. Initiation – setting a strong foundation

Initiation is about setting up and agreeing key aspects of the review. This stage may vary in length and can involve several ongoing engagements and discussions.

The start of this stage involves the agency and the Commission discussing the possibility of a review. These discussions will occur at both a senior level (e.g. the relevant Assistant Commissioner and the Chief Executive) and at an operational level (between the PIR Team and the potential Agency Review Team). These early discussions will help determine:

- timing
- resourcing and budget
- selection of Lead Reviewers
- potential focus areas of the review, and
- agreement of the agency's core functions.

Reviews are led by two independent Lead Reviewers. Lead Reviewers are drawn from a panel of Lead Reviewers maintained by the Commission. Agency senior leadership and the Commission agree on the Lead Reviewers for a review. The selection of Lead Reviewers will consider their experience, expertise, ability to work with the agency SLT and the complementarity of the two Lead Reviewers.

Once all the key aspects of the review have been discussed and agreed, the Commission will send an initiation letter to the Chief Executive. This letter formally kicks off the review, and confirms the budget, timeline, Lead Reviewers, agency's core functions, and any other details discussed in the initiation phase.

There is usually an informal meet-and-greet between the Lead Reviewers and agency's Chief Executive, which can also cover what the Chief Executive is looking to achieve through the Review.

Key actions undertaken by the agency during this stage:

- Participate in discussions with the Commission on the Review.
- Work with the Commission to agree the Lead Reviewers, timing of the review, costs for the Review[1] and the agency's core functions.
- Identify and confirm the Tier 2 sponsor, the agency's project lead, and coordinator.
- Arrange a meet-and-greet between the agency's Chief Executive and the Lead Reviewers.

[1] Reviews are run on a cost-recovered basis. This cost is outlined in the initiation letter at the start of the Review. The Commission will keep track of Lead Reviewer costs throughout the review.

2. Scoping – Focusing the Review on the critical elements

After the initiation letter is sent, the agency should stand up their review team, as described in section one of this guide. The agency can also look to communicate with its staff that the review is going to be carried out and provide some key messages.

The PRM will work with the Agency Review Team to guide them through the review process, provide training and guidance for the Self-Assessment, and prepare for the next phase (Interviews).

Self-Assessment

A Self-Assessment is expected to take approximately two weeks to complete. This process will involve the agency's SLT working through the elements of the Performance Improvement Model (contained in the *Guide to the Performance Improvement Model*) and confirming their reflections in a succinct, written Self-Assessment.

The Self-Assessment is a key input into the Review. It helps:

- SLT organise their thoughts on the agency currently as well as out into the future,
- Lead Reviewers focus their efforts in the Review process, and
- Central Agencies position their support for the agency throughout, and after a Review.

To encourage open and honest reflections, the Self-Assessment will only be shared with the Lead Reviewers and members of the PIR Team.

If it wishes, the reviewed agency can decide to share its Self-Assessment more broadly, for example with its Minister(s), agency staff and other key stakeholders.

Preparation for Interviews

There are important logistics for the agency to organise ahead of the next phase of the Review (Interviews), with the support of the PRM. This includes document requests, developing contact lists, and confirming stakeholder/interviewee lists.

The coordinator plays a key role in preparing for the on-site interviews by arranging a work area, rooms, meetings, interview times, IT resources/access, and travel arrangements (if required). Note interviewees should be offered as either in-person or via MS Teams, depending on their preference and location.

Key actions undertaken by the agency during this stage:

- Receive Self-Assessment training from the PIR Team.
- Complete the agency's Self-Assessment.
- Agree stakeholder/interviewee list with the PRM – including internal and external interviewees and staff focus groups and (where relevant) site visits for the interview phase (see **Appendix A** for further details).
- Provide key documents to the PIR Team (see suggestions in **Appendix B**).
- Develop a contact list for the PRM.
- Communicate to agency staff about the review.
- Prepare for the on-site interviews, which can include:
  - arranging a work area and supporting IT resources for the Lead Reviewers and PIR team while on site
  - organising a meeting with Ministers (as agreed)
  - arranging field visits by the PIR team
  - booking interview times and sending information (provided by the PRM) to interviewees
  - booking catch-ups with the Chief Executive, the agency's SLT, and the Lead Reviewers throughout the on-site period.

3. Interviews – Generating insights to help agencies

During the interviews stage, the Lead Reviewers form the agency's Future Excellence Horizon, their view of the agency's challenges and opportunities, and their insights on how the agency can prepare itself for the future.

Carrying out the on-site interviews

The agency will host the Lead Reviewers and the PRM on-site for approximately two to three weeks while they interview internal and external participants, staff focus groups and (where relevant) hold site visits. The interviews are led by the Lead Reviewers and are designed to be open-ended discussions, that are tailored to the role and insights of the person being interviewed. Interviews will cover relevant elements in the Performance Improvement Model, and Lead Reviewers may focus conversations towards the focus areas identified in the initiation phase. Early interviews will focus on developing and defining the agency's Future Excellence Horizon.

Interviewees are encouraged to be open and honest with their contributions. The interviews are confidential and no particular preparation is expected, although generic background material is provided to interviewees on the review process.

Sharing preliminary findings and insights

The Lead Reviewers should meet with the Chief Executive throughout the on-site interview period to share their insights as they are developed. At the end of this phase, Lead Reviewers will share the key themes and insights from the interviews and their preliminary findings with the Chief Executive, who may also want them to be shared with their SLT. This provides visibility around the themes that will be expanded in the final report. The Lead Reviewers, in agreement with the CE, may also discuss their preliminary findings with the responsible Minister(s).

Key actions undertaken by the agency during this stage:

- Provide a workroom for at least three people and appropriate interview room(s).
- Manage changes to the interview schedule, from interviewee and PIR team requests.
- Nominated staff provide open and honest views at interviews.
- Arrange a meeting for the Lead Reviewers to discuss their preliminary findings with the Chief Executive, and if required their SLT.

4. Report drafting

Informed by the preliminary findings, the Lead Reviewers will draft a report covering all elements of the Performance Improvement Model. This will draw on the agency's Self-Assessment, documents provided by the agency, insights from interviews, and the Lead Reviewers' own experience and insights.

Central agency feedback and peer review

The draft report is peer-reviewed by a panel (which will normally be two others from the Commission's Lead Reviewer panel). The peer review ensures that a fair and consistent approach is taken across the Performance Improvement Review programme.

The Central Agencies also engage with this first draft and provide their feedback to the Lead Reviewers.

The Lead Reviewers incorporate the feedback from peer review and Central Agency review into their report and then send it to the reviewed agency for their comment.

5.Report finalisation

Agency feedback

The agency now has the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft report and discuss any queries or concerns with the PRM and Lead Reviewers. The Lead Reviewers consider these comments and look to incorporate them into a near final draft.

Agency Response and Central Agency Response statements

As the draft report is being considered, the agency develops a response to be included in the final report. This response publicly acknowledges the findings of the report and includes commitments on how the agency carries forward the findings of the review. It should also align with the agency achieving the Future Excellence Horizon. The agency is encouraged to engage with Central Agency officials and the Lead Reviewers on the Agency Response.

Central Agency representatives will also draft a joint response statement to, similarly, acknowledge the report and how they will respond to and support the findings of the review.

Final feedback on the report

The final draft of the report, incorporating the agency's feedback and including the agency and central agency responses, is then sent to the agency and Central Agencies for their second (and final) round of comments. This final draft is also sent to the responsible Minister(s) for their comments, and Ministers can discuss the report with the Lead Reviewers if they wish.

Final comments are considered by the Lead Reviewers, and the report is finalised.

Key actions undertaken by the agency during this stage:

- Consider the draft report and provide written feedback.
- Develop the Agency Response to the report, engaging with the Lead Reviewers and Central Agency representatives during this process.
- If required, liaise with the PRM to arrange a briefing meeting with the responsible Minister(s) and the Lead Reviewers.

6. Close out

During the close out phase, the final report goes through a design and publication process and is published on the Commission's website.

The Commission will work with the agency to develop a communications plan ahead of the report's publication. This plan is prepared to support the agency, Lead Reviewers, Central Agencies, and Ministers through the release process. As part of this, the agency should determine its key messages, how it will brief staff of the findings and agency response, and which key stakeholders they will send the report to.

Once published, the review is complete. The Commission will also work with the agency to shape the review findings into an implementation plan relevant to that agency (there is no set template for this). The actions agreed following on from the review will be considered and reflected in the Commission's chief executive and agency performance management, and Treasury and DPMC will also build the findings of the review in their processes.

The Commission and agency will meet for a debrief on the review process, inviting the agency to provide feedback on its Review experience. This can be done between the PRM and Agency Review Team and/or between the Chief Executive and Commission senior leaders.

The Commission will also invoice the agency for the cost of the review, as agreed through the initiation phase.

Key actions undertaken by the agency during this stage:

- Liaise with the Commission's Communications Team and responsible Ministers' office on the communications plan for the publication of the report on the Commission's website.
- Consider how to use insights from the review in engagements with staff and stakeholders and in future strategic planning.
- Brief agency staff on the review and the agency's response.
- Consider how the commitments in the Agency Response will be implemented and work with the Commission on an implementation plan.
- Provide feedback to the Commission on the review through a debrief.

Appendices

Appendix A – Proposed interviewees

Early in the planning stage the PRM will discuss with the agency's Tier 2 sponsor and project lead the types of groups/individuals who should be nominated for the on-site interviews. Typically, 40 – 50 interviews are held during a review, depending on the size of the agency. The aim is to compile a list of people who will be able to offer insights about the agency and its work. The list of interviewees also needs to be able to provide insights across all elements of the Performance Improvement Model.

The agency will provide a draft list for the Lead Reviewers to consider and the PRM will confirm the final list to the agency.

Interviewees

1. Ministers (note that these would be held in the Minister's office or on-line)
    - Responsible Minister
    - Other Ministers, as appropriate (to discuss)
2. Internal
    - Chief Executive and senior leadership
    - Key tier 3/Principals/Specialists, e.g. CIO, CFO, Head of HR
    - Focus groups (6 – 8 people) from across the agency
    - Union representative(s)
3. External:
    - customers or customer representatives
    - key external and sector stakeholders (including iwi, and other relevant community or advisory groups)
    - relevant Public Service chief executives and System/Functional Leads
    - Chief executives of relevant professional associations
    - Central Agencies (Vote Teams, DPMC Policy Advisor, Assistant Commissioner)
    - where relevant, authors of recent strategic reviews, which may relate to the agency and/or system.

Note: During the on-site phase, the Lead Reviewers may ask for changes to the interview schedule if matters come up that require further enquiry. To enable wider insights, the Lead Reviewers may also request visiting some regional sites for a broader range of stakeholders.

Appendix B – Evidence Sources

The following list sets out some of the key documents that would be useful in a review, although not all documents will be available or relevant for every agency.

General - Results

- Government Targets – quarterly reports and Delivery Plans
- Priorities – letters from Minister(s)
- Most recent Briefing to the Incoming Minister(s)
- Relevant legislation, in particular roles or functions
- Regulatory stewardship reporting e.g., strategy
- Statement of Intent/Strategic Intentions
- Annual Report
- Statement of Performance Expectations (Crown entities)
- Estimates appropriations information/data
- Reports and assessments of the quality of policy advice
- Strategies and plans relating to functional leadership roles (if relevant)
- Long-Term Insights Briefing

General – Organisational Management

- Reports/benchmarking from Functional Leads/ System Leads

Leadership and direction

- Senior leadership team and other leadership committees' terms of reference or charters
- Agenda and minutes from recent senior leadership team meetings
- Organisational chart – Tier 3 level (with indicative size of Tier 2 business units)
- Strategy and Accountability Documents (including Strategic Intentions, Annual Reports)
- Organisation strategy/key papers
- Business model/strategy description
- Agency level business plan, if relevant
- Values/culture/behaviour description and any reporting
- Recent 'quarterly' reports to the Minister(s)
- Recent Board reports (where relevant, including key advisory boards, Risk and Assurance Committee)
- Recent agency performance reports for senior leadership

Delivery

- Customer and stakeholder insights
- Continuous improvement programmes
- Research and evaluation programme/plans
- Papers from significant reviews on core business areas/role of agency
- Agency Communication and Engagement plan

Engagement

- Reports and assessments of the quality of policy advice
- Ministerial surveys and reporting
- Treaty settlement-based and other relationship agreements with iwi and Māori
- Sector strategy/key papers
- Stakeholder engagement strategy
- Stakeholder insights
- Agency Communication and Engagement plan

Workforce

- Views of staff/staff engagement survey, including the Public Service Census
- Workforce strategy and/or People strategy
- Workforce reports and statistical information
- Public Service workforce comparative data
- Bargaining and remuneration strategy
- Union relationship agreement(s)

Financial management data and risk

- Output plan
- Performance Plan
- Asset management strategy/plans/reports
- Recent Gateway reviews or other independent quality reviews
- Investment Management strategy/plans/reporting
- Finance Strategy/reports
- Information on business and financial planning processes
- Information management strategy/plan
- Digital strategy/Information Systems Strategic Plan
- Privacy Maturity Assessment Framework report (if available)
- Audit management letter
- Internal audit and assurance programme, including list of internal audit and assurance reports for last two years
- Risk management strategy/policies
- Privacy Maturity Assessment Framework Self-assessment
- Protective Security Requirements Self-assessment
- Risk register or reports

External reviews

- Any recent reviews or evaluations
- Any recent Office of the Auditor-General performance audits

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