

North East Derbyshire District Council

Services Scrutiny Committee

17 September 2024

4 Day Working Week

Report of the Assistant Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer

Classification: This report is public

Report By: Sarah Sternberg, Assistant Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer.

Contact Officer: Sarah Sternberg, Assistant Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer.

PURPOSE / SUMMARY

Members have previously had information on the pilot at South Cambridgeshire Council of a 4 day week. Since then there has been Government guidance and an evaluation by an external body. This report is an update.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the position be noted.

IMPLICATIONS

Finance and Risk: Yes No

Details:

On Behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Legal (including Data Protection): Yes No

Details:

As in the report

Staffing: Yes No

Details:

This is an update only.

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

DECISION INFORMATION

Decision Information	
<p>Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:</p> <p>NEDDC: Revenue - £125,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £310,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i></p>	No
<p>Is the decision subject to Call-In? (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</p>	No
<p>District Wards Significantly Affected</p>	None
<p>Consultation: Leader / Deputy Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Cabinet <input type="checkbox"/> SMT <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Members <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/></p>	No

Links to Council Plan objectives
A great place to work.

REPORT DETAILS

1 Background (reasons for bringing the report)

1.1 A report was presented in 19th September 2023 on the pilot project by South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) of a 4 day week. This involves

employees doing 100% of their work in 4 days or 80% of the time. A full week's work is undertaken but in 4 days not 5. Therefore the aim of the pilot is to ascertain whether service delivery is maintained and/or improved. There is no reduction in salary for employees. There is no change to the Council's offices and they remain open for the full 5 days.

- 1.2 The pilot was first trialled between January 2023 and March 2024. This included a trial with Cambridge City Council of the shared services of Waste and the Planning Service.
- 1.3 The then Government responded to the pilot by instructing SCDC to stop the pilot. Their argument was that councils using the 4 day week were not providing value for taxpayers.
- 1.4 In May 2024 DLUHC issued a second best value notice over the trial. Both the first and second notices required the Council to demonstrate how it was delivering its best value duty.
- 1.5 New statutory guidance on the Best Value duty was issued on 8th May 2024. This made it clear that the then Government didn't want public authorities to pursue the 4 day week. It states:

“Existing guidance on 4 day working weeks makes it clear that local authorities should not be practicing such arrangements. This is part-time work for full-time pay and it is government's view that these practices are unlikely to adhere to the Best Value Duty. This guidance demonstrates that we will take action where an authority is not using its resources effectively and does not have a credible workforce strategy.”
- 1.6 SCDC has now received an independent analysis of the results from the Universities of Cambridge and Salford.
- 1.7 The position of the new Labour Government is unknown at this stage, but believed to be more sympathetic to the idea. Unison is supportive and further trials are proposed but not limited to councils.
- 1.8 For the avoidance of doubt, a 4 day week has never been considered by Cabinet or Senior Management Team at NEDDC

2. Details of Proposal or Information

- 2.1 The independent evaluation of the results of the pilot was undertaken by Cambridge and Salford Universities.
- 2.2 The independent reported noted that there were a number of improvements including:
 - Increase in percentage of calls answered by the contact centre.
 - A reduction in the number of days taken to process Housing Benefit and Council Tax support changes.

- A reduction in the number of weeks taken to determine householder planning applications.
 - Major planning applications decisions made in time.
 - Staff turnover dropped by almost 40%.
 - 53% increased in the average number of applications for jobs advertised externally.
- 2.3 In terms of the areas involved in the pilot, 22 out of 24 improved or remained the same during the four day week trial. There were some areas affected adversely – housing rent collection and the number of days taken to re-let housing stock. The affect of the cost of living crisis was considered a factor in the outcome in relation to the collection of rent. For the relets, it was considered that the extent of the works required had increased.
- 2.4 there was an annual financial saving of £371,500 was estimated from the pilot outcomes. This is mainly due to filling 10 posts which had been hard to fill. There has also been a 53% increase in the number of applicants for externally advertised jobs. 76% of new starters were said to have been influenced by the 4 day week pilot when deciding to apply.
- 2.4 The link to the independent report is <https://www.scams.gov.uk/media/2fqhjqi5/report-final.pdf> and accompanying papers can be found at <https://www.scams.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/independent-analysis-of-the-trial/>
- 2.5 Some feedback from staff and residents was obtained and these comments are on the following link <https://scams.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s136109/Appendix%20C%20-%20what%20people%20say.pdf> . These comments are not all in favour of the 4 day week.
- 2.6 SCDC's report (dated 8th July 2024) reported that the previous Government consulted on the potential of using financial levers to discourage councils from adopting 4 day weeks. Until more is known of the new Government's approach, SCDC didn't consider it feasible to consider next steps.
- 2.6 The two Councils emphasised in their responses that their approach had been to improve the consistency of services to residents and businesses by attracting and retaining talented staff. As is known recruitment and retention of staff is very difficult for local authorities (and has been for some years) and councils cannot rely on salaries alone to attract suitable staff. Therefore the councils have sought a new way to deal with the challenge.

3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 Members have requested an update on the latest position.

4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 None as this is a request from Members for an update

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Appendix No	Title
<p>Background Papers (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Cabinet you must provide copies of the background papers)</p>	