

**STRATEGY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

11 May 2023  
6.02 - 7.32 pm

**Present:** Councillors Robertson (Chair), S. Smith (Vice-Chair), Bennett, Bick, Payne, Smart, Gawthrope Wood, Davey (Executive Councillor), A. Smith (Executive Councillor), Swift and Todd-Jones

**Officers:**

Chief Executive: Robert Pollock

Assistant Chief Executive: Andrew Limb

Director of Enterprise and Sustainable Development: Fiona Bryant

Director of Neighbourhoods and Communities: Jane Wilson

Joint Director, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning and Building Control:  
Stephen Kelly

Deputy Director Planning and Building Quality: Heather Jones

Committee Manager: Chris Connor

Producer: Boris Herzog

**Others Present:**

South Cambridgeshire District Council Chief Executive: Liz Watts

**FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**

**23/77/SR Apologies for Absence**

No apologies were received.

**23/78/SR Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

**23/79/SR Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**23/80/SR Public Questions**

A member of the public asked a question, as set out below.

- i. With the Romsey Labour Club on the market for £2.5 million was there any chance that the Council under its new leadership could reconsider the possibility of establishing a permanent capital fund to raise money from the great and the good to help pay for large civic projects including building and land acquisition for historic town buildings given the growing awareness and concern as a result of the Flying Pig Pub and Hobson Street Cinema proposals?
- ii. In both the Flying Pig Pub and surrounding site, and the Romsey Labour Club, both sites were put up for sale shortly after gaining planning permission, the former being sold onto RailPen shortly after the Planning Inspector overturned the refusal from the Council's Planning Committee - leaving the latter to pick up the bill while the former was able to bank the profit. Is there any chance the City Council could use some of its HRA funding to help purchase the site if it were to enable the construction of even a small amount of council houses as an alternative to the rabbit-hutch-style short-term apart-hotel-style units the site currently has permission for?

The Executive Councillor for Finance, Resources, Transformation and Non-Statutory Deputy Leader, and the Leader of the Council responded:

- i. Regarding Romsey Labour Club have looked at that in the past but balances at the time did not stack up appropriately. In the future this could change, and the council will continue to keep that under review.
- ii. Councillors were recently involved in an arts and culture bid around the use of the Mill Road Library. Those involved spoke to potential investors across the city. While there was general interest they were not able to secure the funds needed. There was further work that could be done working with potential funders to see what can be done about future opportunities.
- iii. The most exciting potential project are those involving social impact. Work was being undertaken by officers at a senior level to try and ensure that the council could look at exactly the sort of things that the member of the public has enquired about. Would of course be beneficial to have

further support from central government but in lieu of that were exploring other means of funding, including the voluntary sector.

- iv. Stated that the Cambridge Labour Club was not owned by the City Council or the Labour Party and never had been and was at present owned by a private developer.

Supplementary question:

- i. Would like Cambridge MP Daniel Zeichner to write to Minister of Planning to ask what legal powers were available to local councils to protect local and historic buildings. Victoria House and Victoria Tower are on the at-risk list with Historic England.
- ii. Asked what penalties there were for not complying with Historic England.
- iii. Consider the recommendations of the House of Commons public administration and Constitutional Affairs select committee which has called for a radical overhaul of local government and the governance of England by the establishment of a royal commission.

The Executive Councillor for Finance, Resources, Transformation and Non-Statutory Deputy Leader responded:

- i. Would need to speak to the Leader of the Council to see how and if they could take forward enquiry to MP for Cambridge.

## **23/81/SR Update on the Four Day Week (4DW) trial in the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service**

### **Matter for Decision**

- i. The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service undertook a three-month trial of a four-day week (4DW) for all desk-based colleagues between January and March 2023. Data collected regarding the success of the trial has been collated and analysed and is set out in this report. Overall, the trial was deemed to be a success and an extension of a further year is recommended, to test whether a 4DW can positively impact recruitment and retention issues faced by the Council.
- ii. The service has been undergoing significant transformation over the last 18 months, with intensive involvement of members and officers, and it is

therefore likely that some of the improvements in performance and health and wellbeing described below are attributable not just to the four-day week, but a combination of factors.

### **Decision of the Executive Councillor for Finance, Resources, Transformation and Non-Statutory Deputy Leader:**

Approve an extension of the trial up until March 2024, to assess the impact on recruitment and retention, with reports on progress during 23/24 and a final report at the end of the extended trial period being submitted to Strategy and Resources Committee.

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

The Chief Executive of South Cambridgeshire District Council introduced the report.

The Chief Executive of South Cambridgeshire District Council, the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development, Deputy Director Planning and Building Quality and the Chief Executive of Cambridge City Council said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Trial found that many other organisations reducing work to 4 workdays had settled on 32 hours over 4 days.
- ii. The purpose of the trial was to see if it were possible to get staff to work 80% of their contracted hours whilst maintaining productivity and improving wellbeing. The longer trial would enable South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) to test the impact of the 4 day week on recruitment and retention, and address any residual issue from those colleagues who struggled to reduce their hours in the first trial.

- iii. Regarding part-time hours, some colleagues in this cohort of employees had seen fewer benefits, whilst still seeing an improvement in health and wellbeing.
- iv. Older female workers had reported satisfaction with working a 4-day week.
- v. If someone was currently working 37.5 hours over 4 days they were not considered part time, that was considered compressed hours.
- vi. About 27% of the Shared Planning Service were already not working standard 37.5-hour, 5-day weeks. If staff worked more hours during a day, they could take time off in lieu another day, moving from a formal flexi-time system to a flexible working approach.
- vii. There was a route back if the trial was unsuccessful. If performance dropped, they would not continue it. They would need to have a conversation at the time how this would be carried out.
- viii. Regarding recruitment, although the three-month trial had not been expected to have any impact, due to it being too short to have an impact, there had been improvements seen in recruiting to some roles and an increase in the number of applicants for roles that had previously not received applications.
- ix. Though it had been difficult to quantify, they were finding that the non-working day for staff was valuable for work/life balance. That should be taken into consideration alongside measuring performance.
- x. Officers were being scrutinised every day by constituents based on their performance.
- xi. Complaints were being tracked. Complaints had fallen by 60% during the period of the trial, compared to the same period last year and the service had an ongoing programme of engagement with users of the service to obtain feedback on performance. The service had also engaged with planning agents and residents' groups.
- xii. The role of the Bennett Institute was to undertake independent analysis of the data, but if members had suggestions of other organisations that could scrutinise results of the trial, SCDC would welcome these suggestions.
- xiii. The Waste Service/Waste Trial were bringing a report to S&R Scrutiny Committee in July.

- xiv. The trial was continuing without disruption prior to approval from this Committee and SCDC Cabinet as stopping it and then starting again if approval given would be disruptive to staff.
- xv. It was possible that by the end of the trial after getting all data that what SCDC would do going forward could look different regarding working hours. They would not know that unless the trial was extended/completed.
- xvi. There had been a great improvement in reducing the number of planning cases and the backlog. Shared planning service was on a continuous improvement programme. There had been many changes made already. The improvement plan was ongoing which would make comparing statistics from previous years to statistics going forward difficult. It would be difficult to isolate impact in some areas to see if the 4-day work or the continuing improvement programme was affecting statistics.
- xvii. The process of the 4-day week trial had been a powerful tool in stimulating discussions from a transformation perspective around effectiveness of the effort rather than efficiency of the process.
- xviii. The trial had given staff a reason to engage in the process on improvement and to increase effectiveness.
- xix. Regarding ICT improvements they were trialling tablets. Enforcement compliance team had been using them effectively thus far.
- xx. Transformation team at SCDC were working on a programme reviewing all three planning committees. They were attempting to make that process more efficient and effective.
- xxi. Regarding the waste trial, the purpose of the trial was to understand how a 4-day week could work in the service. At the point when all trials had completed, there would need to be an alignment of working hours across all employees.
- xxii. The Chief Executive of Cambridge City Council stated that he had not experienced any issues working with SCDC staff who were working a 4-day week. When a member of staff was on their non-working day there were always cover arrangements in place.
- xxiii. Regarding operational staff, would need to wait and see what the result of the trial was, if approved when brought to S&R committee in July.
- xxiv. Chief Executive of Cambridge City Council stated that at some point Cambridge City Council may need to consider doing something different, be it a 4-day work week or perhaps something completely different.

- xxv. SCDC had surveyed colleagues not currently participating in the 4-day work week trial. The feeling was that it was a change but once accustomed to the change it was fine.

The scrutiny committee unanimously approved the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor for Finance, Resources and Transformation and Non-Statutory Deputy Leader approved the recommendations.

**Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)**

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

The meeting ended at 7.32 pm

**CHAIR**