

Update on the Four Day Week (4DW) trial in the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service



To: Cllr Mike Davey, Executive Councillor for Finance, Resources and Transformation, 11 May 2023

Report by:

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Wards affected:

All

Non-Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 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.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

- 2.1 **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.

3. Background

The Challenge – why did we undertake the trial?

- 3.1 Our success in delivering excellent services to residents and businesses depends on our people. The recruitment and retention challenges facing councils (and the private sector) across the country are well known^{1,2} and the Shared Planning Service has suffered from significant recruitment issues which have affected the service's ability to operate efficiently and effectively.
- 3.2 Recruitment costs are not limited to filling a role. When taking into account the time spent inducting/training new employees to reach full productivity in the role, estimates by Oxford Economics are that filling a role costs on average £30,614³ - making the case for addressing the recruitment challenge very clearly.
- 3.3 Last Autumn we invited all colleagues in the Shared Planning Service to take part in an independent and externally run Health and Wellbeing survey, immediately before the 4DW trial was announced. We were aware – anecdotally – that some colleagues felt stressed and were struggling at work. The survey provided us with baseline data which confirmed the anecdotal evidence (more detail below).

¹ [Changing trends and recent shortages in the labour market, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peopleinwork/employmentandearnings/articles/changingtrendsandrecentshortagesinthelabourmarketuk)

² [Labour Market Outlook: Autumn 2022 \(cipd.co.uk\)](https://www.cipd.co.uk)

³ [How much does staff turnover really cost you? | HRZone](https://www.hrzone.com)

- 3.4 Across the whole of the service, colleagues reported physical health at a level rated as 'caution' and mental health at a level rated as 'risk'⁴.
- 3.5 The survey also rated people's intention to leave as slightly higher when compared to other organisations.
- 3.6 In August 2022, a total of 23 agency staff across SCDC were employed to cover vacancies at an annual cost of £2,065,000. 16 of these posts were in the Shared Planning Service. The wage bill for permanent employees in the 23 roles would have been approximately 50% less, resulting in potential savings of close to £1,000,000 if the 4-day week improved recruitment to the extent that these roles could be replaced by permanent employees. It was noted, however, that a 3-month trial might not be long enough to see a significant change in this area.
- 3.7 Noting these challenges, it was agreed to undertake a three-month trial to assess whether a 4DW could provide a solution. The trial itself was *not expected* to address recruitment and retention issues (as the time frame was too short) but *was* designed to see whether performance could be maintained and whether health and wellbeing improved. If both outcomes were positive, this would indicate that a longer trial could be considered viable, at which point recruitment and retention could be properly measured.
- 3.11 From a management perspective, it is important to understand that value for money can be achieved in several ways: effectiveness (maximising the outcomes by producing the right outputs), organisational productivity (optimising a combination of inputs – labour, capital, technology – to generate the required outputs) and budget efficiency (obtaining inputs in a cost-efficient manner). As will be seen throughout this report, and in the appendices, the 4DW has the potential to contribute across all of these areas.

What was the experience of the trial and what was the key learning?

- 3.12 There were two parts to the trial: the three-month planning period (October – December 2022) and the trial itself (January – March 2023). Over this period a significant amount of transformation took place in the organisation, which was almost exclusively led by employees within

⁴ (when compared to the general population of employees from across the public and private sector who had completed the survey over the last five years – 90,000 employees. See Appendix D for explanation of the dashboard scoring).

their teams. There has been considerable learning to date, both in terms of the implementation of the trial and the ways by which colleagues increased their productivity. These are set out in detail at **Appendix 1**.

What was the outcome of the trial?

Performance

- 3.13 Key performance indicators were the first measure used to assess whether the trial had been successful or not. A successful trial would show that performance across the KPIs had been broadly maintained. The Council enlisted the support of the Bennett Institute for Public Policy at the University of Cambridge to ensure robust and independent analysis of the data.
- 3.14 For the Shared Planning Service, the relevant indicators analysed by the Bennett Institute are the Planning KPIs (majors and non-majors). As has been explained previously, because of the way that Planning KPIs are reported on a two-year basis, the analysis of the data for a single quarter has limited the comparative analysis that can be undertaken (and so there is no time-series, SPC or Regression analysis).
- 3.15 Therefore, to provide more detailed data for this committee, further KPI data is presented below, which refers only to Cambridge City performance. The overall Shared Planning Service performance (given the relatively small number of applications determined each month of the trial) and the effects of a dedicated backlog team are also referred to below.

Additional Planning KPI Data

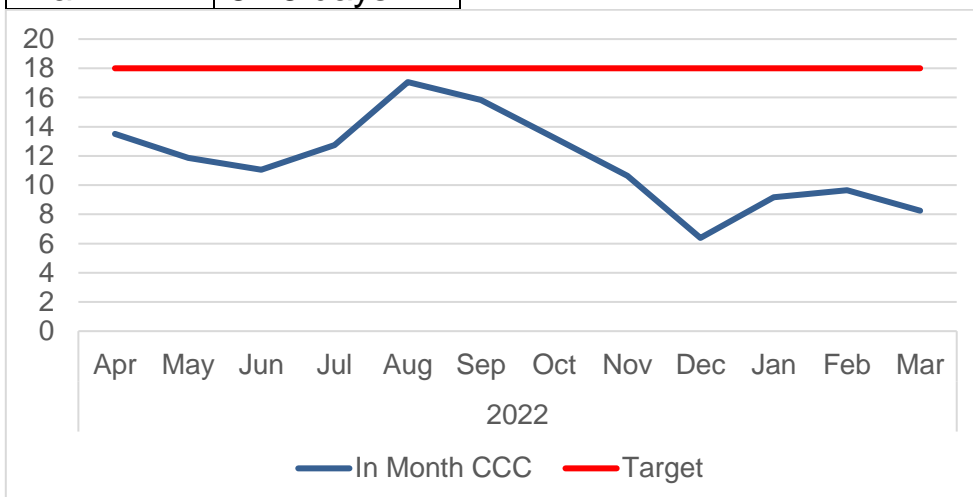
% Registration and Validation in 5 days (Cambridge City only)

Month	Result
Jan	74.21%
Feb	81.13%
Mar	82.21%



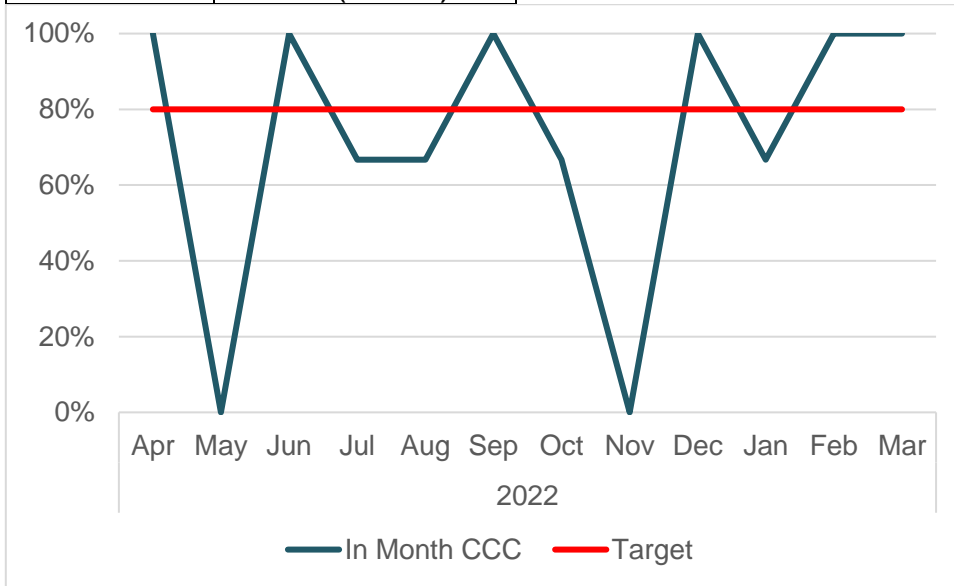
Average Land Charges processing time (Cambridge City only)

Month	Result
Jan	9.16 days
Feb	9.66 days
Mar	8.25 days



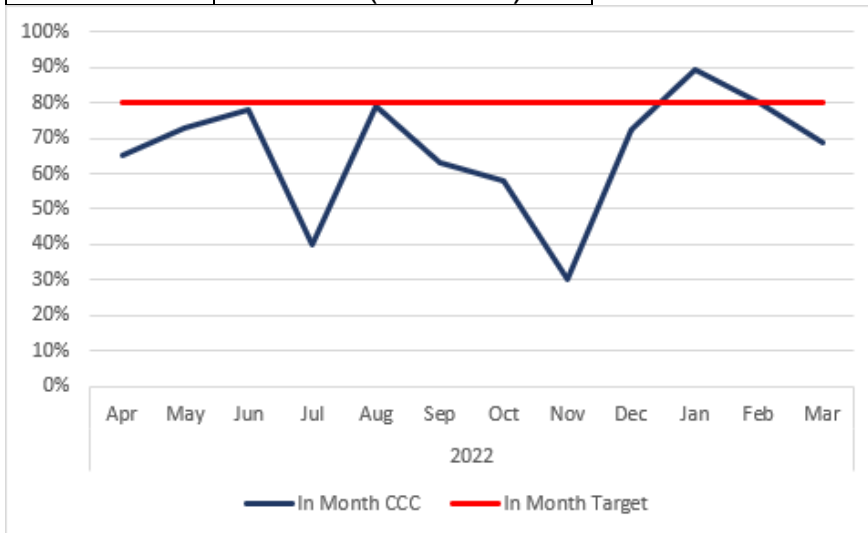
% Major Decisions within statutory or agreed timescales (Cambridge City only)

Month	Result
Jan	66.66% (2 of 3)
Feb	100% (4 of 4)
Mar	100% (1 of 1)



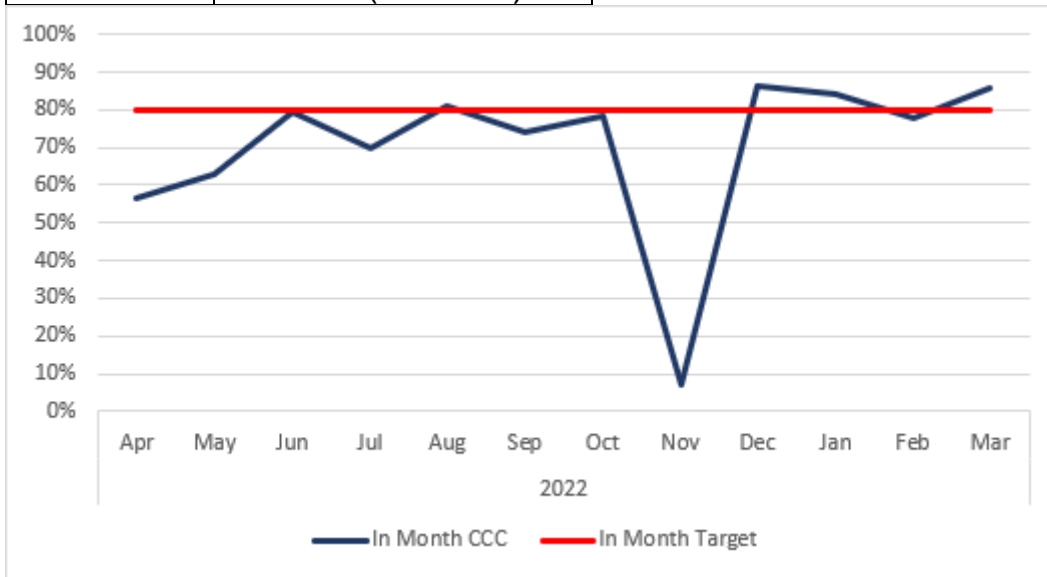
% Minor Decisions within statutory or agreed timescales (Cambridge City only)

Month	Result
Jan	89.47% (34 of 38)
Feb	80.00% (16 of 20)
Mar	68.80% (11 of 16)



% Other decisions within statutory or agreed timescales (Cambridge City only)

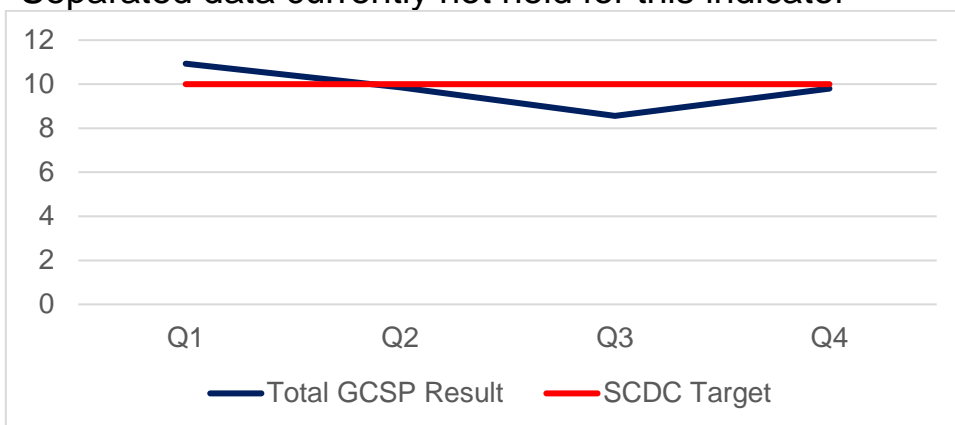
Month	Result
Jan	84.42% (65 of 77)
Feb	77.61% (52 of 67)
Mar	85.70% (48 of 56)



Average number of weeks to determine validated householder planning applications (total for GCSPS*)

Quarter	Result
1	10.93 weeks
2	9.86 weeks
3	8.56 weeks
4	9.8 weeks

*Separated data currently not held for this indicator



The March data in the table above (9.8 weeks) is based on decisions issued in March 2023 and includes four applications which were validated during 2021 and 2022. This therefore skews the overall

performance figure, which is based on the average number of weeks to determine applications, fairly significantly. We will identify a way of illustrating the performance data that discounts such outliers in future reports.

- 3.16 Following a question raised at the March Strategy & Resources meeting, further analysis was undertaken regarding appeals against non-determination, as it was queried whether these had increased during the trial. Data shows there has actually been a decrease (to zero):

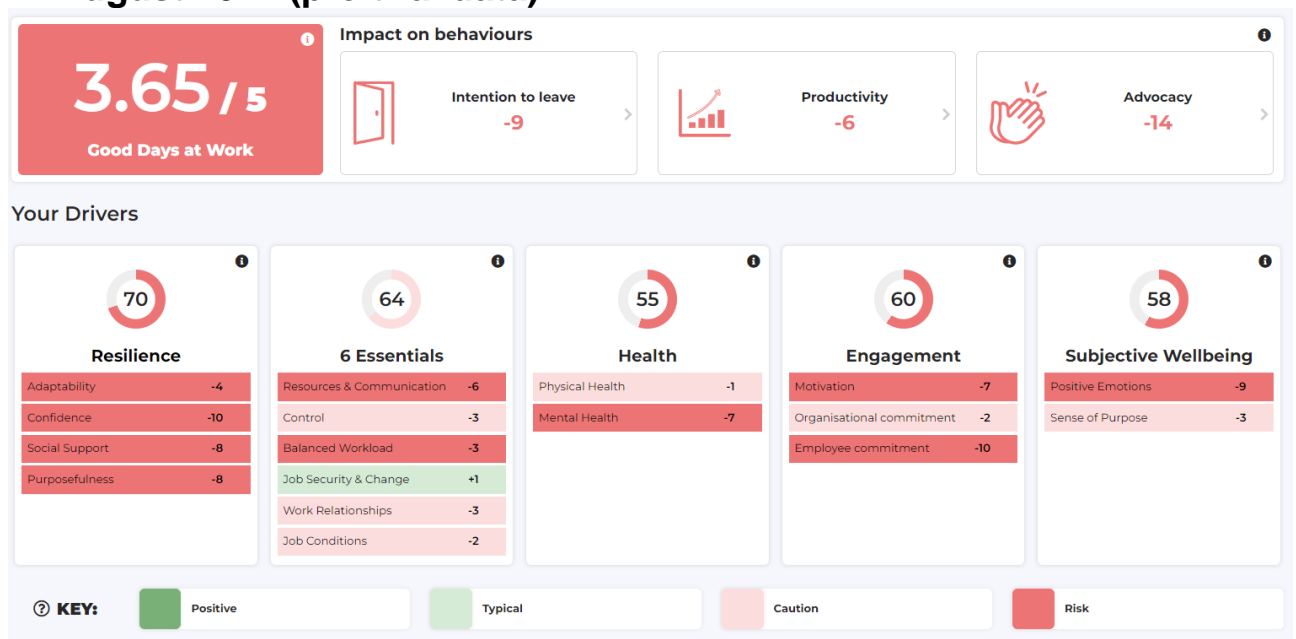
	2022		2023	
	CCC		CCC	
	Received	Started	Received	Started
Jan	0	0	0	0
Feb	0	1	0	0
Mar	1	0	0	0
Total	1	1	0	0

- 3.17 Overall, the above data shows that during a period complicated by the end of the annual leave year, performance across the service has been broadly maintained (or improved) across the relevant indicators. Only one indicator (minors) saw a reduction in performance, which the Planning Service Managers attribute to the winding up of the dedicated “backlog clearance team”, which resulted in a particular emphasis around the clearance of out of time cases (impacting the data negatively).
- 3.18 Noting that some performance is not captured by the KPIs, the research team at the Bennett Institute carried out qualitative interviews with a range of stakeholders, including councillors and managers, to understand in more detail how the trial had impacted performance, and whether there were any issues that should be addressed. These are set out at Appendix 2.

Health and Wellbeing

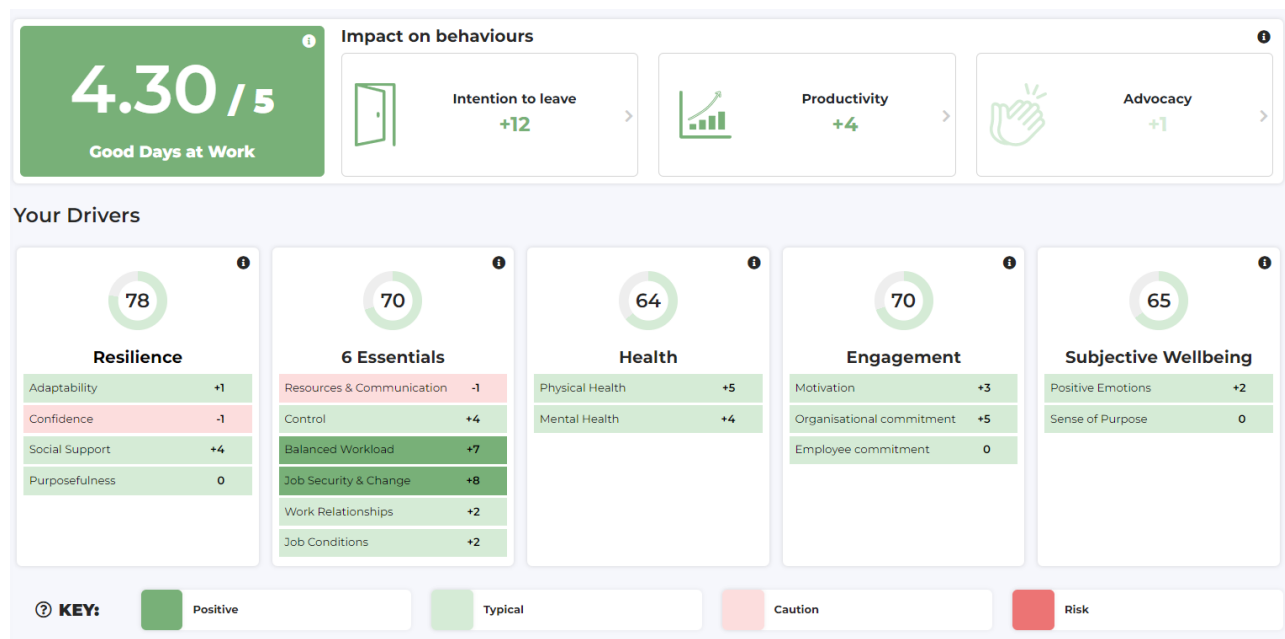
- 3.20 The Health and Wellbeing survey was undertaken by Robertson Cooper, an industry leader in collecting and analysing comprehensive data about employee experiences and comparing an organisation's employees against benchmarked data from 90,000 employees in other organisations (in the public and private sectors).
- 3.21 The response rate to the survey in August 2022 was 45% and in April was 67%.
- 3.22 When comparing the outcome of the survey in April 2023 compared to the outcome of the survey in August 2022, the results of the 4DW are overwhelmingly positive, as can be seen by a simple snapshot of the two dashboards⁵ below (pre-trial and post-trial). It should be noted that **this is data for the Shared Planning service only:**

August 2022 (pre-trial data):



⁵ The scoring on these dashboards is explained at Appendix 4

April 2023 (post-trial data):



3.23 A detailed report by Robertson Cooper is set out at Appendix 3.

3.24 The April 2023 survey asked several 4DW specific questions which were not asked in the August survey. These have provided some interesting insight into colleague's experience of the trial, set out below.

3.25 88.5% of respondents said they would like to move permanently to a 4DW, 10% didn't know and 1.5% said they wouldn't support this. During the last few weeks, the project team has run a number of workshops for colleagues who have struggled with the 4DW, to ensure that those who want to continue are fully supported to do so. However, it is entirely acceptable that some colleagues have personal reasons why they no longer wish to be in the trial, and these colleagues will have the option to simply revert to their previous working pattern.

3.26 28% of respondents reported that they regularly worked more than 80% of their hours during the trial, with the majority of these respondents reporting that they worked 0-3 hours extra per week. For many officers, workload varies across the year, so there will inevitably be times when officers need to work slightly more hours (in the same way that they did pre-trial). While a 4DW in its 'purest' form expects hours to reduce to 80%, several companies in the private sector trials have adopted different approaches, following their trials. Some have reduced hours but not by the whole 20%. At the end of the initial trials across all Council functions, the Council will need to align hours across all

employees, once it is clear from the trial data what is achievable and best in terms of service delivery.

- 3.27 More consistent negative feedback on the trial has come from some, but not all part-time workers. Even though their health & wellbeing scores improved between August 2022 and April 2023, they did not improve as much as those of full-time workers. A longer trial would certainly provide more time to investigate the issues (which are not single or straightforward) and attempt to resolve them.
- 3.28 The data from the survey will be analysed in further depth over the next few weeks to ensure that any issues can be addressed systematically. Some very broad conclusions are:
- females seem to benefit more from the 4DW than males. This may be related to caring responsibilities (and having more time to undertake them). The scores for those who claim to have childcare or caring responsibilities have improved dramatically at all levels.
 - older employees (50+) benefit over-proportionally from the 4DW, especially in terms of mental health, intention to leave (it reduces significantly), and productivity.
 - the 4DW seems to create one issue for younger workers (under 25) and for people who have been employed for less than one year. Both groups show a decrease in "Confidence with difficulties" as measured by the statement: *Right now at work I feel confident that I can deal with difficulties when they arise*. This may be related to reduced opportunities for on-the-job training, informal interaction and the transfer of tacit knowledge and it will be important to build in mitigations for this concern should the trial be extended.
 - there is a general feeling that the organisation is not using software efficiently, and that there are issues related to slow laptops and system reducing productivity that, again, need to be analysed as part of the way forward. There is certainly an opportunity for more ICT training to make sure colleagues are using IT to be as productive as possible.

Recruitment and agency staff finance implications

- 3.29 It is expected that improved recruitment because of the adoption of a 4-day week would be able to deliver savings by reducing the Shared Planning Service's reliance on agency staff. During the trial we have seen some progress towards achieving these potential savings. A 12-month extrapolation of the agency worker reduction in the Shared Planning Service would save nearly £300k annually. Although it would not be possible to definitively attribute all these savings to the 4-day week trial, it is noticeable that during the trial we have had success in recruiting into previously hard to fill posts, including in the Shared Planning Service.
- 3.30 During the trial, we have seen an increase in the number of applications received per post across SCDC; on average we have had 4.8 applications per post, compared with 3.4 in the same period last year. These candidates have also been of a higher standard, and we have been able to successfully appoint to roles we have previously been unable to. Specifically in the Shared Planning Service, we advertised a Planning officer post last summer and received only 1 applicant, who was not suitable for the role. We have recently readvertised and received 9 strong applications with 5 selected for interview all of whom are potentially appointable.
- 3.31 An extension of the desk-based trial for a further year will allow the Council to fully understand the implications of the 4DW on the recruitment and retention of staff.

Customer Data

- 3.32 An online customer survey was introduced at the beginning of October 2022 to help to track satisfaction with SCDC services over an extended period of time. This has provided 3 months of customer satisfaction data prior to the start of the 4DW trial, and 3 months of results during the trial. At this stage, these results provide no conclusive evidence of a change in customer satisfaction since the beginning of the 4DW trial. Similarly, complaint numbers during the trial period were consistent with the median quarterly number of complaints since the start of the 2018-19 financial year, and a slight reduction from the previous quarter. This will be important data to monitor during the extended trial, should it be agreed.

What are the proposed next steps?

3.33 As set out in the recommendation, it is proposed that a one-year extension to the current desk-based trial is approved.

4. Implications

a) Financial Implications

The trial so far, and the proposed extended trial, will incur no additional cost. It is anticipated that savings will be delivered through reducing agency staff further and reducing the need to spend time and resources on recruitment.

b) Staffing Implications

As set out in the report.

c) Equality and Poverty Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken by the 4DW project team and commented on by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group. The summary is as follows: there are no direct concerns arising from the 4DW trial with respect to those employees who have protected characteristics. The Robertson Cooper survey data indicates that in general all of these employee groups saw an increase in their general health and wellbeing as a result of the trial.

d) Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental Implications

Due to the increased level of home-working, it is unlikely that the trial will reduce commuting significantly, since that reduction has already taken place to the extent that it is likely to. However, the provision of additional non-working time could lead to more sustainable lifestyle choices and reduction on convenience consumption choices which are more carbon intensive. This has not been measured in the three-month trial and so there is no data.

e) Procurement Implications

There are no procurement implications arising from this report which is for information.

f) Community Safety Implications

There are no community safety implications arising from this report which is for information.

5. Consultation and communication considerations

The Chief Executive of Cambridge City Council and the Head of HR have been consulted on this report.

Consultation has taken place with members from Cambridge City Council, and extensive focus groups have been held with managers and colleagues who asked to join drop-in sessions. Responses are set out in **Appendix 2b**.

Unison have been involved throughout the trial, and their comments on the trial are set out below:

“Our approach was to listen to our members and be responsive to both their hopes and concerns for the trial to try to resolve these positively with the aim for no-one to be left behind in the 4 Day week. We engaged staff and our members by:

- *Member’s meetings when the scheme was announced (pre-trial)*
- *Surveys and In-depth interviews pre, during (and after trial planned) – over 25% of our membership, reflective of the demographics within SCDC.*
- *One to one conversation via stalls/email/ Teams meetings at South Cambs Hall and Waterbeach Depot*

Future issues to explore if the trial is to continue:

- *Some staff have worried that they are not coping with the 4-day week and will be blamed for ‘poor performance’.*
- *We are keen that all staff have a working pattern that works for them.*
- *The Equality Impact Assessment should be able to highlight any differential impacts on staff with protected characteristics that need to be resolved*
- *There needs to be agreement and clarity sought with the unions on the process to change contractual rights – while staff have been willing to trial changes there needs to be a definite time when agreement is sought for changes to be made permanently.*

Conclusion:

Our members highlighted the benefits of the day off for a better work life balance, managing care responsibilities and finding time for leisure. In majority of our conversations and the survey we undertook the trial has been welcomed. We will need time to see the Equality Impact Assessment and have time to work through the issues that have arisen in the desk-based trial.

6. Background papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1: How we ran the trial and what we learned

Appendix 2: Performance data - qualitative

Appendix 3: Health and Wellbeing data

Appendix 4: Dashboards Explained

8. Inspection of papers

If you have a query on the report please contact:

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Appendix 4 Dashboards Explained

General Working Population (GWP) Benchmark

How is my score on the dashboard calculated?

Everyone's answers to the survey are converted to a 0-100 scale, where a higher score is always better. The mean of your questionnaire scores is shown on the dashboard.

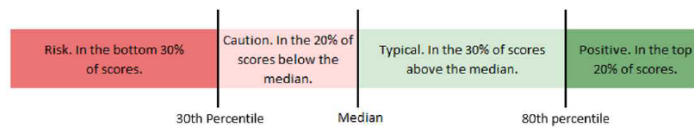
How is the benchmark calculated?

For all the core questions, the benchmark is created by taking the median of the scores in our general working population norm group, taken from the surveys we have run in the last five years. The benchmark is, therefore, the score where 50% of those in the norm group have a result below it and 50% have a result above it. The benchmark is the boundary between **pink** and **light green**. If your score is below it, we colour it **pink** or **red** and if your score is above it, we colour it **light green** or **dark green**.

How are the other colour boundaries calculated?

The boundary between **red** and **pink** is the 30th percentile of the scores of our previous surveys, i.e. it is the score where 30% of our surveys have a result below it and 70% have a result above it.

The boundary between **light green** and **dark green** is the 80th percentile of the dashboard scores of our previous surveys, i.e. it is the score where 80% of our surveys have a result below it and 20% have a result above it.



GWP norm group is made up of ~90,000 employees from a wide range of organisations (across the private and public section)