

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Monday, 15 May 2023 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Bridget Smith (Leader of Council)
Councillor Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader & Lead Cabinet Member for Environment)

Councillors:	Henry Batchelor	Lead Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Licensing
	John Batchelor	Lead Cabinet Member for Housing
	Bill Handley	Lead Cabinet Member for Communities
	Dr. Tumi Hawkins	Lead Cabinet Member for Planning
	Peter McDonald	Lead Cabinet Member for Economic Development
	John Williams	Lead Cabinet Member for Resources

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Anne Ainsworth	Chief Operating Officer
Peter Campbell	Head of Housing
Bode Esan	Head of Climate, Environment & Waste
Andrew Francis	Elections and Democratic Services Manager
Peter Maddock	Head of Finance
Jeff Membery	Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services
Liz Watts	Chief Executive

Officers in attendance remotely for all or part of the meeting:

Helen Cornwell	HR Business Partner
Lee Hillam	Principal Operations Manager
Heather Jones	Deputy Director of Planning & Building Quality
Nancy Kimberley	Principal Planning Policy Officer
Marco De Luca	Principle Operations Manager
Dee Wood	Waste Policy Officer

Councillors Anna Bradnam, Heather Williams, Dr Richard Williams were in attendance.

Councillors Sally Ann Hart, Dr Lisa Redrup were in attendance remotely.

Nina Jörden was in attendance remotely.

1. Announcements

There were no announcements.

2. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Cabinet authorised the Leader to sign, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 20 March 2023.

Councillor Anna Bradnam, Scrutiny and Overview Committee member asked for confirmation that the Investment training for members requested by Scrutiny and Overview Committee, item 12, page 9 was to be actioned.

Liz Watts, Chief Executive confirmed the training but was unable to give an exact date, at the time of the meeting.

5. Public Questions

It was noted that Mr Daniel Fulton did not wish to give a statement and would return to next full Council.

6. Issues arising from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee

Councillor Anna Bradnam thanked the Scrutiny and Governance advisor for their precise notes. The Committee congratulated the Homes for Ukraine team and Moving on team for their work and stated their reassurance that Ukrainian families had the same access to Home Link as South Cambridgeshire residents.

It was recognised that staff had done an excellent job and were urged to keep record of what actions were taken and any lessons learned so best practice was recorded and stored. There was gratitude for the necessary funding from Government.

Councillor John Batchelor, Lead Cabinet Member for Housing clarified that Ukrainian residents went through the same process in accessing social housing but told the committee that there would be funding from the government to purchase 40 houses to home Ukrainian and Afghanistan guests who were going through difficulty. Those houses would eventually be made available to residents.

7. Street Naming and Numbering Policy

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins, Lead Cabinet Member for Planning presented the report and stressed the importance of clear numbering and naming of buildings.

The review included combining the existing policies of Cambridge City Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council into one unified policy for 3C Building Control that worked effectively and efficiently for communities and the public.

Heather Jones, Head of 3C Building Control Consultancy, advised the Committee that the policy was like the one already in place at South Cambridgeshire District Council and there were no major changes.

Councillor Brian Milnes, Deputy Leader, thanked the officers for their work and acknowledged the improvement of the service there had been over the last few years. It was felt the combined policy would further enhance the service.

Councillor Heather Williams, Opposition Group Leader, asked for the Waste Service to be updated with changes quicker to enable missed bins to be logged.

Heather Jones confirmed that there had been a meeting with the Waste Service regarding the migration of data from one system to another to improve efficiency and to update systems quicker.

Councillor Anna Bradnam referred to 14.1, page 16 of the report, regarding boundaries and noted previous member Douglas De Lacey expressed concern where sites crossed them and how residents would know whether they were in a district or city council area.

Heather Jones confirmed that site signage was dealt with separately to Cambridge City but would discuss the matter with them.

Heather Jones stated that it was a personal preference as to whether residents displayed numbers on houses and that no action had ever been taken for those who did not.

Cabinet agreed to **Adopt** the unified 3C Building Control Street Naming and Numbering policy.

8. Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership

Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of Council introduced the report and confirmed it was not a decision-making body but was led by District and County Councils, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Universities.

Chief Executive, Liz Watts, clarified that funding from Pan Regional Partnership was to fund projects that could be approved by the board, but decisions that were fundamental to councils would be decided by them.

Councillor Brian Milnes noted that due to recent elections and changes in local government there could be changes to the report.

Councillor Bridget Smith clarified that it would have been correct at time of print, but item 14 would have very likely changed.

Cabinet agreed to **confirm** the Council's membership of the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership as it became formally recognised and funded by Government as a Pan-Regional Partnership (PRP) and the appointment of the Leader as the Council's representative on the PRP.

9. Results of Four-Day Week Trial and Next Steps

Before agenda item nine was introduced by the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources, the Leader, Councillor Bridget Smith, spoke about the Council's four-day week trial. Councillor Smith said that last year, she was asked at a Local Government Association conference about the challenge of recruiting and retaining people in Local Government; particularly in very expensive areas like South Cambridgeshire where it was very expensive for people to live and where the private sector could afford to pay them more. Councillor Smith said that, at that conference, she was asked if a four-day week would solve some of those recruitment issues. Councillor Smith said that her response was that it might well do.

Councillor Smith said that, recently, there had been some commentary relating to studies concerning the four-day week which our Chief Executive was undertaking. Councillor Smith said that the Chief Executive chose not only to pay for the studies herself, but to spend weekends and annual leave working on them. Councillor Smith said that it's perfectly normal for senior Local Government staff to do similar studies.

Councillor Smith said that the Chief Executive's studies were never dependent on the Council trialling a four-day week. Councillor Smith said that the Chief Executive had always been completely open about her studies. She added that verbal advice, sought from the previous Monitoring Officer and reaffirmed more recently, said that there was nothing to declare when it came to those studies. They were self-funded and done in her own time.

Councillor Smith said that, however, with the benefit of hindsight, she accepted the Chief Executive's studies should have been reflected in the original report which went before Councillors when a trial of a four-day week was first considered. Councillor Smith said that doing so would have made no difference to the trial – but would have ensured the Chief Executive's studies were stated for everyone in the clearest terms.

Councillor Smith said that in any other walk of life, where you had an experienced leader who had gained further knowledge about something that's very relevant to their work, it would be considered a benefit.

Councillor Smith handed over to the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources who formally introduced agenda item nine.

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced the report and referred to page 65 of the report pack, specifically to the 'What we've done and why' section, reminding members of the reason why the trial was introduced. It was confirmed that a £300,000 annualised saving had been identified during the three-month trial and that a £1m saving was expected over the full year.

Councillor John Williams emphasised that although Health and Wellbeing of staff was important the four-day week would also improve the quality of services to residents and provide savings that could be put back into services to ensure they were maintained against a backdrop of high inflation rates.

Councillor John Williams explained that the three-month trial had maintained performance, as confirmed independently by the Bennett Institute. It was recognised that performance must be maintained, and a 12-month trial extension would enable performance to be closely monitored as well as give staff certainty on their ways of working. The Council would then make a decision at the end of the 12-month extension.

Councillor Sally Ann Hart, Vice-Chair of Employment and Staffing Committee, presented the views expressed by the Committee. It was noted that there had previously been concerns regarding the challenge of recruitment and that due to high housing and living costs in the area, the four-day-week offered an attractive incentive. Councillor Hart requested that regular reports be provided to the Committee during the 12-month extension period.

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins, emphasised that since the trial began, the Planning service has been enabled to work in better ways, simplifying templates and reports. Councillor Hawkins noted that applications were being processed in 6.3 weeks, within the statutory target.

Councillor Hawkins emphasised that the output had improved, and complaints had reduced. Cabinet was told the four-day-week was an incentive and would help attract experienced planners to apply for roles.

Councillor John Batchelor thanked Councillor Mark Howell for his statement of support for officers at Employment and Staffing Committee.

Cabinet was reminded that there were challenging areas before the trial had begun and it would take time to correct but the data from the trial was encouraging.

Councillor Brian Milnes informed Cabinet of a promising mystery shopper exercise recently completed which would indicate improving response rates.

Councillor Bill Handley, Lead Cabinet Member for Communities, expressed his support for the four-day week.

Councillor Henry Batchelor, Lead Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Licensing told Cabinet he would shortly be asking for support for the four-

day week trial for the refuse collection service, noting, they did not have a full roster of permanent staff which was draining on resources.

Councillor Anna Bradnam explained how the data presented was reassuring with both quality and in-depth analysis received. There had been regular feedback from staff with honesty from the beginning, noting where there had been some uncertainty it gradually became positive.

Councillor Heather Williams asked for the disclosure of the number of, and name of councils who had shown interest in the trial as stated in the Leader's interview with BBC Radio Cambridgeshire earlier that day.

Councillor Bridget Smith stated that it would not be appropriate to name other councils and suggested Councillor Heather Williams might contact their group's office at the Local Government Association.

Councillor Heather Williams queried data related to agency staff, as they were still working and being paid for a five-day week. Councillor Heather Williams questioned whether they and permanent employees, still working a five-day week, were included accurately in the performance statistics.

Councillor Heather Williams further queried data related to stress levels among staff and asked whether Cabinet was comfortable with the figures in the report.

Councillor Bridget Smith stated that a short three-month trial was not going to be long enough to iron out all the issues. Some staff needed time to adapt to the new working arrangements and adopt new ways of working, some staff's workload was already unmanageable on a five-day week.

Chief Executive Liz Watts explained that there had been an improvement within the Planning Service where a number of agency staff were used. Not all of that performance improvement was related to the four-day week but much of it was, as it has enabled people to radically think about how they worked.

Councillor Heather Williams asked if the Leader and members of Cabinet thought the four-day week was good value for the Taxpayers at a time when costs were rising and many residents were taking on second jobs.

Councillor Bridget Smith explained that most responses to her appearance on radio were positive about the trial. It was stated that most councils in the last six months had increased their council tax by the maximum. The rent increase represented a reduction in income to continue the improvement programme as it did not represent the increased cost of managing housing stock.

It was emphasised by Councillor Smith that South Cambridgeshire District Council had one of the lowest council tax rates in the country and offered 100% council tax exemption for those in greatest need. The Council had also increased the number of residents who received discounts in acknowledgement of the rising costs. In 2018, South Cambridgeshire District Council pledged it would be a modern and caring council, which included modern ways of working and caring

for the residents and colleagues, who would be serving them.

Councillor Smith confirmed that members of Cabinet would decide whether the trial would be extended, and full Council would decide whether they would become a four-day week employer at the end of the trial.

Councillor Dr. Richard Williams stated that residents who were applying for Housing benefit, and Creditors who were owed money having to wait twice as long were not 'minor' issues, as described in the aforementioned BBC Radio Cambridgeshire interview.

The Committee was told by Councillor Dr. Richard Williams that Conservative members had only two weeks' notice of the introduction of the four-day-week trial, with no mention of a PhD.

Councillor Dr. Richard Williams questioned why the last two Planning Committees had only two applications, noting that the first quarter of 2023 had eight planning decisions, 2022 had 29 and 2021 had 21. It was thought that maybe officers were unable to process them as quickly as they used to.

Dr Nina Jörden, Research Associate at the Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge, explained that the data could be viewed differently depending on the analysis run. It was explained that not all targets had been met but that four kinds of analysis were run, for a comprehensive picture and when combined there was no data that raised specific concerns. It was made clear that some service areas that would need further attention if the trial was to be extended. It was emphasised that KPIs were examined back to 2016 to create an average and no changes were seen in the data.

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins explained that only challenging or potentially sensitive planning applications went to Committee, and 94% of applications were dealt with by officers. Councillor Bridget Smith told Councillor Dr. Richard Williams that a further written response would be provided regarding his query on Planning applications.

Cabinet

a) **Approved** an extension of the trial up until March 2024, in order to assess the impact on recruitment and retention, with regular reports on progress being submitted to Employment & Staffing Committee during 2023/24 and a final report to Cabinet and Council at the end of the extended trial period.

b) **Noted** the position of Cambridge City Council regarding the Shared Planning Service trial extension (to be provided on 11 May, but not available at the time this report was published) and, should the City Council agree to proceed with the trial extension, Cabinet ensure equivalent reporting arrangements were established in order to provide Cambridge City Council with appropriate oversight arrangements regarding the Shared Planning Service.

c) **Approved** a three-month trial for Facilities Management colleagues at South

Cambs Hall, with a report being presented to Employment & Staffing Committee at the end of the trial.

10. Collection Changes - The future of waste collections

Councillor Henry Batchelor introduced the report.

Councillor Batchelor noted that it was good practice to review bin collection rounds every two to three years, noting that the last review was in 2017. Due to housing development collection rounds had expanded at a significant rate since they were last reviewed in 2017 and therefore the routes were not operated at their best capacity.

Councillor Batchelor repeated the benefits of the four-day-week trial, noting that the improvement of recruitment and retention would enhance the quality of services provided to residents, as permanent staff would be more familiar with routes.

It was clarified by Councillor Batchelor that the four-day week trial did not happen at the same time as office-based staff due to the length of time it took for the external consultant that was used to run the route optimisation process.

Cabinet was informed that Service operatives and their Union had been consulted, and they had received positive feedback regarding the trial. It was clarified if Cambridge City Council did not agree, the trial would not go ahead. Councillor Batchelor noted that since the report went to Scrutiny, changes had been made resulting in further data being available.

Councillor Batchelor confirmed that the cost of the trial would be around 0.3% of the Waste Service entire budget for the current year and 1% if it was to be made permanent.

Councillor Bill Handley expressed his support for the trial being extended to Shared Services.

Councillor Anna Bradnam confirmed Scrutiny and Overview's support, noting the requirement for close monitoring of musculoskeletal injuries, as this was more prevalent in the Waste Service area than any other department.

Councillor Bradnam reported that the feedback received from the service and staff was positive, many had reported looking forward to spending their day off with families.

It was agreed that there would be a reduction in disruption on bank holiday weekends, and savings from not needing to employ agency staff for weekend collections.

It was recognised that commercial waste would still need to be collected seven days a week.

Councillor Henry Batchelor confirmed that prior to the trial, additional vehicles had been purchased and were accounted for in the costing if the trial was to be made permanent.

Councillor Batchelor explained to Cabinet that the refuse collectors were on task and finish contracts, which incentivised staff to be more productive, noting, part of the agreement of the four-day week trial was to ask staff to work an extra 30 minutes in lieu of having the fifth day off.

In reply to Councillor Heather Williams, it was explained by Councillor Batchelor, that there would be an extra day in the week for missed bin collections and due to use of more permanent staff, there would likely be a reduction in the number of missed bins.

Councillor Heather Williams stated it would be useful for all councillors to be provided with upfront costs and officer hours, including Waste Services and office-based staff, to gain a reflection on what time was spent on the trial at the cost of the taxpayer.

In response to Councillor Heather Williams, Jeff Membery, Head of Transformation, explained it would be difficult to gather the requested data as the Waste Service was already going through a round optimisation exercise and looking at ways to respond to government changes to waste legislation and therefore would be difficult to disaggregate part of the work related specifically to the four-day week.

Councillor Heather Williams stated that officer time should have been recorded to provide transparency and requested that it was going forward.

Councillor Heather Williams asked that close attention be paid to assisted deliveries as a change of routine would likely impact residents.

Councillor Bridget Smith stated that South Cambridgeshire District Council provided a high performing service and agreed it was important to continue delivering one.

Bode Esan, Head of Climate, Environment and Waste, confirmed that the review would have been needed regardless of the four-day-week.

Cabinet

a) **Noted** the round optimisation process and revised number of routes as set out at paragraph 33.

b) **Noted** the impact that past and future growth and legislative changes would have on the collection service.

c) **Approved** the trial of a four-day week waste collection service for three months from Summer 2023 to be funded by existing operational budgets within

the service, with a report on the outcome of the trial presented to Cabinet in the Autumn of 2023.

d) **Noted** that any agreement to trial a four-day week would need to be approved by Cambridge City Council (part of the Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service.)

11. Cambridge Water Draft Water Resources Management Plan 2024 - Consultation Response

Councillor Peter McDonald, Lead Cabinet Member for Economic Development introduced the report.

It was noted that the draft plan set out the significant challenges faced in meeting demand for water; including population growth, changes in water use due to Covid-19, climate change which caused an increased likelihood of drought and the need to reduce abstractions to protect the environment. The plan considered the challenges and set out the options to best meet them.

The Water Resources Management Plan covered the period between 2025 and 2050.

It was stated by Councillor McDonald, that it was important Cambridge Water worked with the authority in developing the water resources plan.

Nancy Kimberley, Principal Planning Policy Officer explained there had been negotiations with Cambridge Water and it was agreed that the pipeline would go through Cambridge water area and could be used by them in the short term.

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins thanked officers and members for their work adding that there was a need to provide for the growing population of Greater Cambridge and was pleased it had been identified.

Cabinet

a) **Agreed** the consultation response to be sent jointly with Cambridge City Council set out in Appendix 1 and that it should be sent to Defra.

b) **Agreed** that any subsequent material amendments be delegated to the Lead Cabinet Member for Economic Development in consultation with the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development.

c) **Agreed** that any subsequent minor amendments and editing changes that did not materially affect the content be delegated to the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development in consultation with the Lead Member for Economic Development.

12. Response to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Technical Consultation on the Infrastructure Levy

Councillor Peter McDonald introduced the report, noting the concerns raised from South Cambridgeshire and Greater Cambridge planning service regarding the replacement of the S106 arrangements within the Infrastructure Levy.

Councillor McDonald expressed concerns around the timing of revenues, due to the Government proposals that the council borrowed to fund the gap between development and Levy payments.

Councillor McDonald noted that the bill was going through parliament and changes would be seen between the test and trial period of 2024 and 2025.

Councillor McDonald thanked officers involved for their comprehensive and thoughtful submission of responses to questions.

Cabinet

a) **Agreed** the joint response to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities' technical consultation on the Infrastructure Levy included in Appendix 1.

b) **Agreed** that any subsequent material amendments be delegated to the Lead Cabinet Member for Planning in consultation with the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development.

c) **Agreed** that any subsequent minor amendments and editing changes that did not materially affect the content be delegated to the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development in consultation with the Lead Member for Planning.

**The Meeting ended at
12.06 p.m.**
